The extraordinary story of Traffic Signs

Traffic signs feature prominently in the new exhibition at the Design Museum celebrating designs that have shaped the modern world.

The largest item in the whole exhibition is a full-size motorway sign, created using SignPlot to Margaret Calvert’s specification. Alongside this is the fascinating story of how Margaret, and her colleague Jock Kinneir, created the typeface and the rules that governed the layout and spacing of signs, illustrated by material from 1960s, such as the original sign mock-ups or maquettes and copies of the Worboys Report.
Buchanan Computing’s SignPlot was also used to recreate for enlargement Margaret and Jock’s diagram showing how tile outlines and ‘stroke widths’ determine the optimum spacing of elements within a sign. These rules have stood the test of time, ensuring easy legibility and good aesthetic appearance.

Simon Morgan, chairman of Buchanan Computing commented, "Having strict rules for layout has ensured that traffic signs fulfil their purpose admirably without unduly disrupting the urban or rural environment, and in some cases enhancing it. The extraordinary vision of Jock Kinneir and Margaret Calvert when they created the fonts and design rules is shown by the fact that the British system is now widely copied all over the world. It was a great honour to have a part in giving greater recognition to this remarkable story."

The new exhibition Extraordinary Stories about Ordinary Things is open until 5 January 2015 at the Design Museum, Shad Thames, London SE1 2YD.

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Notes to Editors

Higher resolution and further photographs are available on request.

Margaret Calvert worked with the late Jock Kinneir for the Worboys Committee to produce the modern system of traffic signing introduced in UK in 1964. This system has been copied throughout the world and received much acclaim, being described as the “corporate identity of Britain”.

Margaret Calvert is a Royal Designer for Industry, along with such illustrious names as Thomas Heatherwick, Sir James Dyson, Eric Gill and Sir Terence Conran. She appeared on BBC’s Top Gear programme with James May on 3 January 2010.

Buchanan Computing is the developer of SignPlot, the sign design software used in this project, and a leading supplier of GIS and other traffic and highway computer applications and associated training. Route Signs Ltd is a leading manufacturer of traffic signs.

Web links:

Design Museum exhibition: http://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/2013/extraordinary-stories

Buchanan Computing: www.BuchananComputing.co.uk