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**Creating an impression: Master's in design student’s typography featured in international textbook**

**Graves’ design ‘Create’ celebrates beauty and power of art**

Written by ​Abbey Goers, University of Wisconsin–Stout

A class project to design a mural grew to something more for St. Paul-based graphic designer [**Melanie Graves**](https://www.mgdesigns.work/), who can now see her typography set among international artists in a newly released textbook.

Graves’ design “Create” was selected for the second edition of [“Mastering Type: The Essential Guide to Typography for Print and Digital Design,”](https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/mastering-type-9781350414136/) a unique guide for designers of all skill levels.

“‘Create’ is a digital illustration that celebrates creativity in all forms. This piece celebrates the beauty and power of art and design in both traditional and digital mediums,” said Graves, a [Master of Fine Arts in design](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/mfa-design) student at UW-Stout and senior graphic designer at [Explore Minnesota](https://www.exploreminnesota.com/).

More than 2,000 designers submitted works as part of a free, international competition to collect typography samples for the textbook. Graves’ design was one of 272 selected for the final book, which represents artists from 36 countries.

“I am really excited to have my work selected for ‘Mastering Type.’ I came across it as a call for art and decided to apply, but I didn’t really expect to be selected for it. I also didn’t know how competitive it was,” Graves said.

The textbook, by design Professor Denise Bosler at Kutztown University, was published in January by Bloomsbury Publishing.

Bosler, who had a hand in selecting the imagery used in the book, said, “So many great typographic design works were submitted during the open call that it made the decision-making process challenging. In choosing works, I strove to show a stylistic variety in each chapter. Melanie’s playful, colorful and expressive ‘Create’ type was the perfect complement to the Word chapter.”

Creating ‘Create’

Graves’ design was created as part of an exercise in illustrated typography in her Digital Illustration class, led by **Program Director Erik Evensen**.

The assignment was to create a proposal for a mural design for a dedicated space on the university’s Applied Arts Building. The design was to contain representations from the 10 undergraduate programs and five minors within the [School of Art and Design](https://www.uwstout.edu/academics/colleges-schools/college-arts-human-sciences/school-art-design/furlong-gallery).

“My background is in graphic design, so I love typography and how type can be very expressive depending on how it is used,” Graves said. “I wanted the typography to be the focus and represent art and design as a whole. From there, I focused on integrating the different majors and minors.”

Her design’s bold, rounded, offset letters each have a personality of their own, textured with stitched laces, paint splatter, wood grain and polka dots. The letters’ palette of pink, red, golden yellow and turquoise stands out against a di-chrome blue background embedded with icons representing various fine arts degrees – a needle and thread, silhouettes of pottery, a pen, a wrench, a filmstrip, theater masks and more.

Graves’ design process always begins with research. She wanted to learn more about mural design and see what other artists have done to spark ideas.

“I wanted to create something that was different from the first mural but still captured the spirit of the Applied Arts Building. I started researching and brainstorming ideas and kept returning to the idea of ‘create,’ it being something universal and fundamental to the arts,” she said.

Graves, who is specializing in graphic design and interactive media, created a rough sketch to see if what she imagined in her head would translate to paper. She then refined the design in Adobe Illustrator.

“There were quite a few drafts of the design. I changed a few things with the lettering over time and added or removed icons from the background. I also explored changing the colors but ended up sticking with my original idea there,” Graves said.

While her proposal was not selected as the final design of the Applied Arts Building’s mural, where three student-designed murals are currently installed, “Create” was showcased in the 2023 Art on Hennepin Avenue, a Minneapolis public art festival sponsored by [Hennepin Arts](https://hennepinarts.org/). Graves was one of 27 artists whose work was printed on a large scale and installed in windows at local businesses in an exhibit aimed at creating a more vibrant downtown.

“Melanie came to this program as a senior designer with a breadth of experience and high levels of craft, which make her a wonderful addition to any classroom,” Evensen said. “Melanie's piece was excellent, and I’m thrilled to see it represented in Professor Bosler’s book, alongside other grad students and faculty from some of the top programs in the country.”

**Building new skills in master's in design program**

Graves earned her bachelor’s in graphic design from UW-Eau Claire in 2013, focusing on branding, typography and print media. However, after working in the industry for close to 10 years, she realized she lacked some essential design skills, mainly in user experience and user interface.

“Stout stood out to me as a great program because of its reputation for being a strong art and design school. The master’s in design offers a hybrid model, which meant I could keep working my full-time job while I attended class,” she said.

“The program has helped me focus more on my career as an artist and designer outside of my day job by helping me learn new skills and connect more with my community.”

While earning her [Improving the User Experience Certificate](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/improving-user-experience-certificate) at UW-Stout, Graves conducted an email survey to help improve Explore Minnesota’s website. She is currently working on a redesign of the website, with an anticipated launch later this year.

She designs national ads for Explore Minnesota, creates content for its social media accounts, helps to produce the annual Minnesota Travel Guide, which is available for free at [exploreminnesota.com](http://www.exploreminnesota.com/) and helped to create the viral Bring Ya A\*\* campaign.

Graves often applies for local calls for art, including her “Dream Big” mural, which can be viewed along the Chippewa River State Trail as part of Eau Claire’s Color Block program. Her photo “Winter in Grand Marais” won first place in the lake and landscape category in Lake Superior Magazine and is currently on exhibit at the Hanifl Nature Center at the Minnesota Zoo through March 2.

Designers wishing to use “Create” may [contact Graves through her portfolio site](https://www.mgdesigns.work/).

The [M.F.A. in design](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/mfa-design) is part of UW-Stout’s School of Art and Design, the largest public art school in Wisconsin. It offers bachelor’s degrees in [animation and digital media](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/bfa-animation-digital-media); [game design and development-art](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/bfa-game-design-and-development); [graphic design and interactive media](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/bfa-graphic-design-and-interactive-media); [illustration](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/bfa-illustration); [industrial and product design](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/bfa-industrial-and-product-design); [interior design](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/bfa-interior-design); [studio art](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/bfa-studio-art); [arts administration and entrepreneurship](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/bs-arts-administration-and-entrepreneurship); [fashion design and development](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/bs-fashion-design-development); and [video production](https://www.uwstout.edu/programs/bs-video-production).