

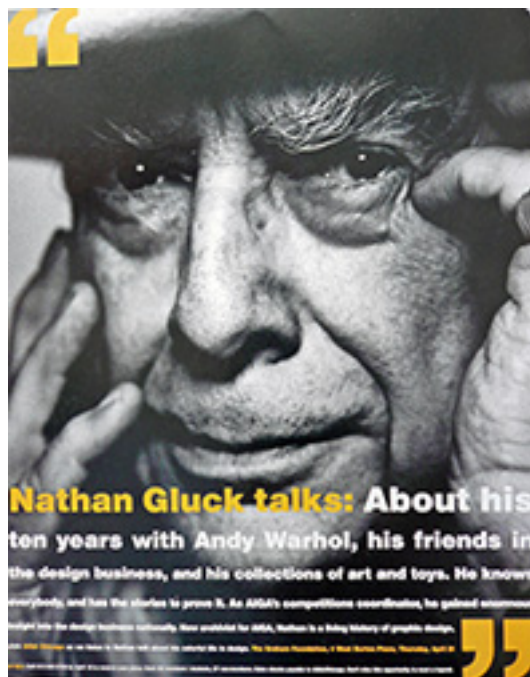


# In Remembrance of Nathan Gluck: The Smile on AIGA’s Institutional Face

Article by [Steven Heller](#) October 07, 2008

## Who was Nathan Gluck?

“Nathan Gluck was a classic cosmopolitan New Yorker,” says designer Art Chantry. “He was a graphic designer/artist in the old school traditions and a mentor to dozens associated with the design and advertising fields.”



“It’s hard for me to separate Nathan, the person, from the Nathan, the artist—the two were inextricably bound,” says Luis De Jesus, director of Luis De Jesus Seminal Projects, San Diego, who was Nathan’s best friend and was with him when he died. “Anyone who knew him personally can see his quirky, yet elegant sense of style, sharp wit, all-encompassing knowledge, refined appreciation of the classics and, above all, his oddball sense of humor reflected throughout his work. This is most apparent in the collages that he created beginning in 1995, in his retirement period. It is in these works that Nathan finally found his unique voice, as if everything that he had ever collected over the years—all of the thoughts and ideas, competing influences and styles, tidbits of trivia and nonsense, recipes and scraps of ephemera—could no longer be contained and compartmentalized and simply exploded in a remarkable output of creativity. He flattened the field and everything became equal. It says so much about him as a person and an artist—honest, warm, down to earth—and a true original.”

## His vital statistics

Nathan Gluck died at sunset on Saturday, September 27, 2008, in San Diego, where he had been living since relocating there from New York City last February. He was 90.

He was born Nathan Joseph Gluck on June 24, 1918, in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. His mother was Julia Margaretten, a housewife, then secretary, and member of the Horowitz-Margaretten family, famous for matzohs and other Passover products. His father was Morris Gluck, a prominent businessman at a real estate company owned by his brother-in-law, who lost the business during the Great Depression.

Image: *Promotional poster for Nathan Gluck’s speaking tour, AIGA Chicago, 1993 (art director: Nancy Denny*

## LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES

2685 S La Cienega Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90034  
T 310 838 6000 | F 310 838 6001  
gallery@luisdejesus.com | luisdejesus.com

Essex).



*(from left): Nathan Gluck (at left) with Andy Warhol in the early 1950s (photo: Edward Wallowitch); and in 2005, in front of the building where Warhol shot the movie Sleep (photo: Gerard Malanga).*

He graduated in 1935 from Perth Amboy High School, then attended Cooper Union (1935–'36) and Pratt Institute (1936–'39), taking courses in industrial and textiles design, advertising and fine art. In 1941, he studied at the Arts Students League in New York, under the modernist Vaclav Vytlacil.

After college Nathan served in Europe and the Pacific during World War II. It wasn't until his return in 1945 that Nathan began his career in advertising.

### **His role in the Warhol universe**

Nathan worked for Andy Warhol as his in-house graphic designer, illustrator and studio assistant when Warhol was still a “commercial artist.” They met through mutual friends in 1950—both had been employed in the world of window design that also fueled Warhol's early reputation—and Nathan began assisting Warhol with freelance projects. Nathan introduced Warhol to many traditional design crafts and assisted in the creation of Warhol's distinctive design work for I. Miller—encouraging Warhol to try his hand at shoe illustrations, which resulted in a famous series of ads—as well as for other clients. Together they designed wrapping paper, posters and promotional pieces.

Nathan became his full-time assistant in 1955. As Warhol evolved from designer/illustrator to artist—in fact, both men showed their work at the Loft Gallery during that time—Nathan took charge of the design studio while Warhol made art at his storied Factory, beginning in 1962. Eventually, the design studio was dissolved and Nathan left the Warholian universe in 1965.



“Nathan was too conservative a voice to fit into the Factory crowd,” explains Chantry. “He felt strongly adverse to active drug use and didn’t want Andy to be associated with ‘that crowd.’” Still, he continued to be friends with Warhol.

### **His commercial art**

Nathan followed a conventional trajectory into the commercial art-hood of his day. He had a string of freelance assignments starting with L. Bamberger department store in New Jersey, which included designing a poster that’s now in the Museum of Modern Art Poster Collection. He worked as art director and illustrator for the George N. Kahn Agency, New York. He also worked for a brief period at the Rockmore Company, an advertising agency where Warhol freelanced.

In 1953, Nathan designed windows for Gene Moore at Bonwit Teller and Tiffany. He designed greeting cards for Tiffany, the Museum of Modern Art, Bergdorf Goodman, Georg Jensen and Nelson Rockefeller, among others. He designed the April 1954 cover for *Fortune* magazine. In 1965, he returned to advertising as art director at the Peter Mehlich Agency, New York, and directed ads for The

Cattleman, Steak and Brew, and other Longchamps restaurants.

*Andy Warhol, “Happy Flower Gathering Days,” promotional folder for Vanity Fair Lingerie, mid-1950s. Flower stamps created by Nathan Gluck.*

Nathan’s design was “classic” in the sense that it was European in inspiration—he had spent six months in 1952–’53 traveling around the continent and, in Spain, visited the artists Antoni Tapes and Joan Miro—yet it was totally functional to the point of near invisibility. The work he did with Warhol looked like Warhol’s—or, perhaps, Warhol’s looked like Nathan’s. According to Chantry, “Nathan’s work followed the mode. His best work spoke the language of the client.”

### **His love of collecting**

His small New York apartment was a veritable museum; walls were completely covered with tribal masks, badly faded doodles by Miro, early test prints he did with Warhol, a (poorly) framed cover of the April 1954 *Fortune* of his design. Chantry recalls, “It was difficult to converse because you kept getting distracted to some amazing artifact laying about somewhere. He’d notice your sight line and then excitedly tell all about the history of some peculiar object. It was marvelous. One Christmas he sent me a gift of one of Gene Federico’s old neckties; I had no idea what to do with it, but I never threw it away— it was GENE FEDERICO’S necktie!”



*Nathan Gluck, cover for Fortune magazine, April 1954*



## His role at AIGA

One day he answered an advertisement that would have him, among other duties, become the “front desk” person at the small, but busy AIGA national headquarters, then on Third Avenue. For over 30 years, he answered the phone, replied to mail and handled the competitions, as competitions coordinator under director Caroline Hightower. He invented the “lasagna” method of judging work whereby all submitted pieces were placed on long sheets of layered craft paper; when one layer was done it was removed, revealing the next layer. In 1990, he became AIGA's archivist, helping to document and order the organization's collection of design books and ephemera. “His was the first voice anyone heard when calling the AIGA,” notes Chantry. “As a result, he was the guy to give you assistance and answer questions. He helped everyone and was everybody's pal. He was a special friend to me because he actually communicated with me and encouraged me and my work, gave me contacts and suggested paths I could attempt to travel. He became a great friend.”

Nathan retired in 1995, at the age of 76.

*IMAGE: Nathan Gluck, Seconda Gratinata, collage on paper, 1997*

## His collages

During the past 70 years, Nathan produced hundreds of surreal collages—some while working at his AIGA desk—combining a wide assortment of techniques and materials. His earliest collages, created in the 1930s, pay homage to Max Ernst and Picasso, while those produced since the early 1990s display the finely honed sensibility, originality and confidence of an artist completely at ease with his skills and knowledge. A consummate collector, Nathan worked matchbook covers, beer labels, sheet music, ticket stubs and various clippings, from anyone and any place, into his collages, making unique visual connections.

Many were exhibited at the show titled “Ephemeral Musings” at Reinhold Brown Gallery, New York, in 1997. In 2001, “Nathan Gluck: Collages,” a solo exhibition, was mounted at The Warhol Museum, in Pittsburgh. (As one of the last “living links” to Warhol's pre-Pop studio, Nathan became a consultant who was often called upon by the Warhol Foundation to help identify and verify work from that time.)

Earlier this year, “Limited Time Offer,” a solo exhibition of 48 collages, was mounted at [La Jolla Athenaeum of Music and Arts Library](#), Rotunda Gallery, in La Jolla, California (it remains on view through November 8, 2008).



Collages by Nathan Gluck (from left): *Claim at Gate*, collage on paper, 2007; *Slibowitz Serenade*, collage on paper, 2003.

## His legacy

Nathan may not have influenced designers' styles or methods; he did not make the kind of inroads that earned him professional accolades. Nonetheless, he made innumerable art directors, designers, illustrators and photographers new to—and possibly lost in—New York feel at home. He was the AIGA docent and the smile on the institutional face.

*Our gratitude and sympathies go to Luis De Jesus, who also contributed to this article.*

**About the Author:** Steven Heller, co-chair of the Designer as Author MFA and co-founder of the MFA in Design Criticism at School of Visual Arts, is the author of *Merz to Emigre and Beyond: Avant Garde Magazine Design of the Twentieth Century* (Phaidon Press), *Iron Fists: Branding the Totalitarian State* (Phaidon Press) and most recently *Design Disasters: Great Designers, Fabulous Failure, and Lessons Learned* (Allworth Press). He is also the co-author of *New Vintage Type* (Thames & Hudson), *Becoming a Digital Designer* (John Wiley & Co.), *Teaching Motion Design* (Allworth Press) and more. [www.hellerbooks.com](http://www.hellerbooks.com)