Will Burtin - Timeline

1908. Born Cologne, Germany, to August and Gertrud Burtin (17 January)

1922. Studied typography at Handwerkskammer Köln (1922-26), and graphic and industrial design at the Kölner Werkschulen (from 1926) with Richard Riemerschmied and Jacob Erbar.

1922-26. Apprenticed in typesetting studio of Dr. Philippe Knöll, Cologne, while studying typography and art.

1926. Worked for Philippe Knöll on exhibitions for Gesolei in Dusseldorf.

1927-38. Opened design studio in Cologne, creating booklets, posters, type books, exhibitions, displays, advertising and movies for German, French and other clients.

c. 1931. Met art student Hilde Munk from Osteröde, East Prussia, while teaching in Berlin.

1932. Married Hilde Munk (1910-1960).

1937. Required by Josef Goebbels to become director of graphics at the Propaganda Ministry. Burtin stalled for time. Hilde Munk Burtin wrote to her cousin, (wind-tunnel inventor) Max Munk, requesting sponsorship to the United States.

1938. Hitler repeated Goebbels' demand that Burtin become Propaganda Ministry's design director. Pressure to accept this post triggered hasty escape to United States. Entry to U.S. sponsored by Max Munk, aeronautics pioneer and inventor of the wind tunnel.

1938. Designed FlexOprop logo, trademark of Munk Aeronautical Laboratory. Won contract to design Federal Works Agency Exhibition for U.S. Pavilion at New York World's Fair.

1939. Supervised 80 people to create the Federal Works Agency Exhibition. Designed cover for New York World's Fair issue of The Architectural Forum magazine. Established design practice in New York; created advertisements, booklets, magazines, covers and exhibits. Awarded New York Art Directors Club medal for cover design.

1940. Designed booklet Vesalius, perhaps his first project for The Upjohn Company. Assignments for Architectural Forum led to work for other Time-Life titles.

1939-43. Taught communication design at Pratt Institute, New York.

1941. Medal from New York Art Directors' Club. Designed cover for Upjohn's first Scope magazine. Cover featured a "test-tube baby" decades before the concept became reality.

1942. A-D magazine issue printed a supplement featuring Burtin's work from 1930-40. Publication featured first work for The Upjohn Company and Fortune magazine. The Burtins' only child, Carol, was born on October 10.

1943-45. Drafted into U.S. Army and assigned to Office of Strategic Services (OSS);

designed visual presentations of “strategic subjects” classified. at OSS. Family moved to Washington, D.C., living with Max Munk and twin sister, Thekla. Designed gunnery manuals for U.S. Air Forces aerial gunners.

1945-49. Fortune magazine asked the Army to discharge Burtin; recruited him as art director. His contract permitted freelance work, and assignments for Upjohn and other clients grew in number. He resumed teaching at Pratt. Several awards from the New York Art Directors Club.

1948. Burtin’s exhibition, “Integration: The New Discipline in Design” ran at The Composing Room, New York. Continued major work for The Upjohn Company, Kalamazoo MI. Burtin began working on a never-completed The Will Burtin Book.

1949. Will Burtin Inc. opened offices for business at 11 West 42 Street. Burtin left Fortune in November. Burtin gave lectures about “Integration: The New Discipline in Design” in several cities, Chicago (the Bundscho Library) and Los Angeles among them. Graphis printed “Integration” as a short article. Burtin teamed with writer Lawrence Lessing to describe the seminal wartime gunnery manuals project for the OSS.

1949-71. As design consultant for Upjohn Company, Burtin and a growing team created the new Upjohn text-only logo; replaced Lester Beall as Scope magazine designer and occasional editor; unified design of all Upjohn packaging and printed materials. As one of the first American designers to propose a unified design concept, Burtin is known as the father of “corporate identity.”

c.1949. Appointed a director, American Institute of Graphic Arts.

1949-. Worked as designer and consultant in advertising, industrial and editorial projects for major clients: Eastman Kodak, IBM, the Smithsonian Institution, Mead Paper, Union Carbide, Herman Miller Furniture, George Nelson Design, the U.S. Information Agency, several publishers…

1950. Was member of founding group for the International Design Conference at Aspen, Colorado.

1950s. Lectured at Parsons School of Design, New York, as well as at Pratt. Editor of the Architectural Forum, James Marston Fitch, appointed Burtin design consultant to the magazine.

1951. Commissioned new family home on South Mountain Road, New City, Rockland County, NY. James Marston Fitch, architect, designed it.

1952. Family moved from 13 West 106 Street to 475 South Mountain Road. Traveled with family to Ecuador on assignment for client Life Farmaceuticos. Family visited war-displaced Munk family members in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay.

1954. Print magazine featured Burtin and his work for Upjohn: “A Program in Print: Upjohn and Design.”

1955. Served (with Saul Bass) as program chair and speaker at International Design Conference, Aspen, Colorado. The New York Art Directors’ Club awarded him a medal.

c. 1955. Will Burtin Inc. moved offices to 132 East 58 Street. Was active in the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA).

1956. Program chairman (with Saul Bass again) of AIGA, Aspen.

1957. Began design of a walk-in Cell exhibit for The Upjohn Company. Designed traveling exhibit "Kalamazoo - Window on America" for the U.S. Information Agency. Exhibit was shown in several British cities. The USIA requested a version for Germany.

1958. The Cell exhibit opened at the annual convention of the American Medical Association. The Cell gained wide national and international attention. The AMA awarded Burtin its Gold Medal; the Art Directors' Club awarded a medal. Burtin chaired the First World Seminar on Typography at Silvermine. Designed the "Upjohn Pharmacy" exhibit for Disneyland. The German version of the Kalamazoo exhibit drew record crowds in Berlin. Will and Hilda Burtin saw samples of the new Helvetica font in Zurich, returning to New York with sample sheets.

1959. The Pratt Institute named Burtin professor and chair of Department of Visual Communications. He organized and chaired Typography USA conference, New York. The Cell exhibit arrived in London to become a television set for two BBC science specials, "What is Life?" Shell Oil's film unit filmed it in the BBS studio and dedicated the film to the Royal Society. The Cell model traveled to Edinburgh before returning to New York.

1960. Burtin's massive Brain exhibition for Upjohn opened, anticipating "multi-media" by thirty years. Created catalog Designed for Silver for exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts. Upjohn exhibited the Brain in its home town, Kalamazoo MI. Hilda Munk Burtin died on October 10, her daughter's birthday.

1961. Burtin's massive Uranium Atom exhibit opened in the lobby of the new Union Carbide building on Park Avenue. Burtin married art director and long-time family friend Cipe Pineles, the widow of CBS art director William Golden. Will and Carol Burtin moved to Pineles' home in Stony Point, New York. The Brain exhibit toured major cities in Europe, including the USA Pavilion of Italia 61 in Turin, where Carol Burtin accompanied the Brain as a guide. The U.S. Information Agency shipped elements of the Brain exhibit to Moscow for display,

1962. Burtin designed a spread in Comment 200 publication using Ezra Stoller's time-lapse photography from the Union Carbide Atom. Burtin's touring exhibit and booklet Visual Aspects of Science exhibit included work for four major clients: Kodak, IBM, Upjohn and Union Carbide. Burtin's friend Willem Sandberg enabled aspects of the Cell and Brain exhibits to visit Amsterdam. Presentations also reached London, Paris and Brussels. Burtin designed a proposal for Chrysler's exhibit at the upcoming New York World's Fair.

1963. Burtin designed a large-scale Metabolism exhibit for Upjohn. The Royal College of Art, London, hosted an exhibition of Burtin's works.

1964. Will Burtin Inc. designed the Eastman Kodak pavilion and exhibit at New York World's Fair, with a film and slide show by Saul Bass and Sy Wexler. Designed the Abraham Lincoln exhibit for the Fair's Illinois State Pavilion, with a film by Saul Bass.

The Brain exhibit moved into the New York State pavilion, and a multiple-projector slide show into the Hall of Sciences.

1965. Burtin organized and chaired his Vision 65 conference at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Futurist Buckminster Fuller served as consultant, inviting the conference to his SIU campus. Will Burtin, Inc. designed and fitted a large-scale Lobby Exhibit for Brunswick Corporation in Chicago. Burtin's essay, "Design and Communication," was published in Education of Vision, for the Vision and Value Series, Gyorgy Kepes (ed.). He proposed a pavilion for IBM at Montreal's Expo '67.

1966. Will Burtin. Inc. designed the book, Story of Mathematics for Young People, for Pantheon, entirely in Helvetica. Upjohn released the exhibit Genes in Action (aka The Chromosome Puff) at the AMA convention; Life magazine featured an article, "Walk-in Portrait of a Gene at Work" about Burtin exhibits, including Genes in Action (July 8, 1966).

1967. Burtin organized and chaired his Vision 67 conference at New York University, New York. He transformed Genes in Action into Heredity and You for display to a lay audience in the lobby of the Time-Life building in New York.

1968. Will Burtin, Inc. developed signage for the University Circle Development Foundation, Cleveland, Ohio. The studio began work on his final major exhibition for Upjohn, Defense of Life.

1969. Will Burtin, Inc.'s massive model for The Upjohn Company, Defense of Life, opened at the AMA convention at the New York Coliseum, accompanied by a film produced by Sy Wexler. Burtin designed the Defense of Life publication and associated materials.

1970. The AIGA awarded Burtin a solo exhibit for the following year. He proposed, and won preliminary acceptance, for an exhibition called The Biosphere, for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (the Earth Summit), Stockholm, 1972. Former employee Yves Zimmermann asked Burtin to contribute the keynote article for the first edition of a Spanish-language periodical, Documentos de comunicación visual, in 1971.

1971. Burtin's article, *Basta ya*! was published in Spanish. Harvard University appointed him Research Fellow in Visual and Environmental Studies at its Carpenter Center; the Alliance Graphique Internationale elected him President, American Sector; the American Institute of Graphic Arts awarded him its medal; he spoke at The Roving Eye and The Constant Image conference, in Chicago. His one-man exhibition for the AIGA, The Communication of Knowledge, opened in New York. He continued teaching at Pratt. A change of client, combined with Burtin's failing health, effectively cancelled his project for the U.N.

1972. Will Burtin died on January 18, in Mount Sinai Hospital, New York. Saul Bass gave the eulogy at a memorial in New York. In September, the United States Embassy in London hosted a memorial exhibition which ran for two weeks. The Cleveland Health Museum and Education Center housed the Cell, Defense of Life, the Brain and the Chromosome Puff as permanent exhibits.

1973. Cipe Pineles adopted Carol Burtin Fripp.

1980. The Journal of Typographics (March, Vol 7, No. 1) published an illustrated profile of "'graphic innovator' Will Burtin."

1985. Burtin's work was placed on display as the "Fortune's America" exhibition, in the University of East Anglia Library.

1986. The exhibition was displayed in the Bevier Gallery at the Rochester Institute of Technology, with William Golden's work for CBS.

1989. R. Roger Remington and Dr. Barbara Hodik included a chapter about Burtin in their book, Nine Pioneers in American Graphic Design, MIT Press. Professor Chris Mullen developed a Fortune magazine database in the U.K. as a learning resource at the University of Brighton. Mullen also sponsored annual editorial design projects, many inspired by Burtin's work.

1991. The Rochester Institute of Technology received the Burtin Archive into the Wallace Library (along with the archives of Cipe Pineles and her first husband, William Golden).

1995-2005. Professor Mullen administered a Ph.D. program at University of Brighton. A notable graduate, Dr. Jackie Batey, wrote her thesis "The Safe Cigarette," inspired by Burtin's Fortune magazine piece "The American Bazaar."

1997. The Rochester Institute of Technology presented Burtin's life and work as a major case study in an on-line course, "20th Century Information Design."

1998. R. Roger Remington and Robert Fripp, Burtin's son-in-law, proposed a Burtin monograph, Design and Science: The life and work of Will Burtin.

2005. R. Roger Remington wrote a case study article on the Burtin Brain exhibit, published in Information Design Journal-Document Design.

2006. A grant from the Getty Foundation facilitated archival organization of Burtin collection at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). Chapbook "Will Burtin, and the Display of Knowledge" to be published by Cary Graphic Arts Press, Rochester Institute of Technology.

2007. Book, "Design and Science: The life and work of Will Burtin" by R. Roger Remington and Robert Fripp (Lund Humphries, London, September 2007). (ISBN-13: 978-0-85331-968-9).

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