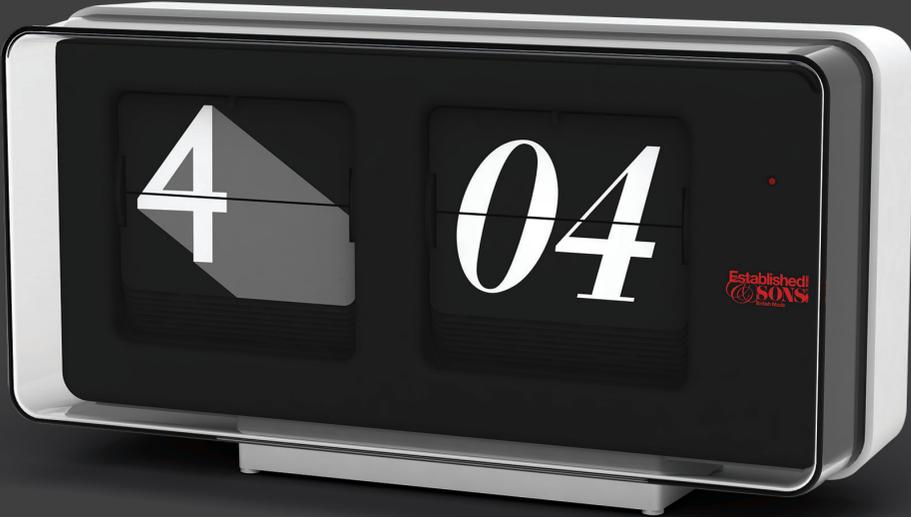


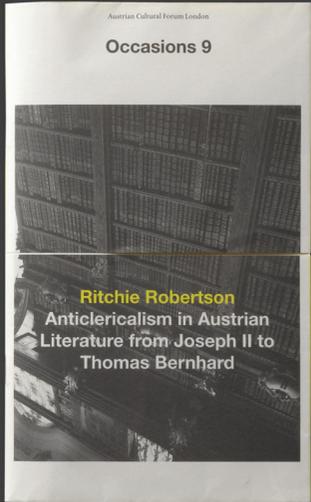


Profile: Polimekanos

Using graphics as a way to work in many different fields, this quirkily named studio is building its eclectic portfolio through an integrated approach and long-standing relationships with clients. *Anna Richardson* talks to its founders



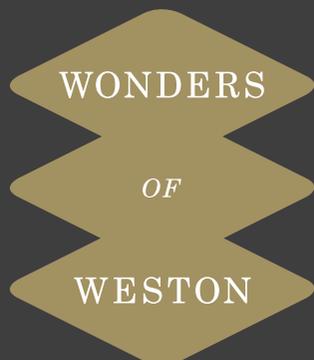
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The founders of graphic design consultancy Polimekanos like to combine the cerebral with the logical. Their quirky studio name, for example, is taken from one of the epithets used for Odysseus in classical literature, to denote his resourcefulness, but is also a contemporary Greek word to convey a certain craftiness.

Joseph Kohlmaier (pictured top right) and Stefan Kraus met in 2001, and won many of their clients in much the same way – through a series of serendipitous meetings, as is usual among small consultancies based in the East End of London.

Austrian Kohlmaier is from a fine arts background, and also studied architectural history and photography, while German Kraus studied graphic communication and fine art, and is an alumni of consultancies such as Nick Bell Design and multidisciplinary consultancy Imagination, as well as being an independent artist.

So why start a graphic design group together, after no more than three months? 'It was what we wanted to do. We maybe then had a more romantic idea of graphic design,' says Kohlmaier. 'It seemed to be a discipline that was skirting along many fields, such as arts, information and books. So being a graphic designer meant you could work for or with people who meant a lot to us, such as publishers, art galleries and educational institutions.' The world of graphic design is also completely connected to abstract art and Modernism, he adds.

Starting a small consultancy also gave the duo the freedom to work with clients they appreciated and allowed them to do a variety of work in their own time. Their portfolio includes the typeface for Established & Sons' Font clock (Sebastian Wrong is a close friend), identity and graphic design for commercial law firm RBB Economics, the Zoo Art Fair and the Austrian Cultural Forum in London, and numerous incarnations of Magma Books' website.

The thread running through all of Polimekanos' work is a long-standing relationship with respective clients, nurtured over many years. 'Ninety-eight per cent of our work is word-of-mouth,' says Kohlmaier. 'We never pursued traditional marketing strategies, which meant that sometimes we've had a lot of work and sometimes not that much – but overall, any business our size would say the same thing.'

There is also a subtle aesthetic that connects Polimekanos' projects, says Kraus. 'They all relate and are of the same family, although they do vary enough to cater for very different clients.' RBB Economics required a more substantial corporate identity, but as a client was just as satisfying to work with. 'We are interested in certain subjects such as architecture, culture and music,' says Kohlmaier, who is also director of Musarc, a research-based music, sound and architecture project at the London Met. 'RBB is not in this area, but it appreciates our work and trusts us completely, which is wonderful. I don't think there are many corporate clients that are like that,' he adds.

One of the latest projects – print, signage and a website for national museums project Museumaker – also represents an interest in working on a different scale, which Polimekanos is well-equipped to do. Kohlmaier has a long-running, self-taught interest in website



drove spun lamp

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1 Established & Sons' Font clock, featuring type by Polimekanos

2 Occasions 9, a book published by the Austrian Cultural Forum, designed by Polimekanos

3 Branding for national museums project Museumaker

4 Identity for a Weston-super-Mare Wonders of Weston public arts programme, commissioned by Situations and Field Art Projects

5 Identity and poster design for the Drove Spun lamp

programming. 'There was something interesting and satisfying in code,' he says. 'But I wasn't just a programmer. You need to have a logical ability and see structures so that you can mesh them together – it's just like learning to use a tool.' This expertise combines with their collective experience of 3D design – 3D work is 'totally part of our thinking,' says Kraus, enabling Polimekanos to 'offer a whole package'.

The consultancy – which has grown to include two more employees – is rolling out a new identity and website for Wonders of Weston, a programme that promotes artistic collaboration in Weston-super-Mare through six new public artworks. Both Kohlmaier and Kraus are pretty settled in their adopted London home. Kohlmaier maybe feels the tug of Vienna's influence a bit more, while Kraus, who also studied in Lyon, considers himself very much a European.

Their backgrounds, and a shared love of old books and other collectables, are bound to inform their work, but as Kohlmaier says, 'It's hard to quantify how things influence you, and the same goes for any creative process.' ■