# THE POWER OF PRINT— ON BEA FEITLER

Text
Marte Eknæs
Nicolau Vergueiro

Bea Feitler (1938–82) was a Brazilian-born designer and art director best known for her work for *Harper's Bazaar*, *Ms. Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, and the modern *Vanity Fair*. In the exhibition "Power of Print" at the Kölnischer Kunstverein (February 16–March 31, 2019), Marte Eknæs and Nicolau Vergueiro brought the vast scope of her practice and design strategies to public attention.

PROVENCE: How did you end up with the title "Power of Print?" Prima facie, the title seems rather generic. Is it a statement about printed media in general? Or would you consider it to be a specific reference?

Eknæs / Vergueiro: The title was taken from a *Harper's Bazaar* cover and spread titled "The Power of the Print", which featured boldly colorful, patterned clothing. We reinterpreted it to describe the powerful printed matter oeuvre of Bea Feitler. The title draws back to an era when most information—textual and visual—was communicated in print, and to the way in which Feitler was able to create an everlasting language in the editorial world as an art director and designer. Through her vibrant aesthetics, Feitler used the magazine as a mass vehicle to address and shape social issues; she had a profound understanding of how powerful images and layouts are in the process of disseminating progressive ideas.

PROVENCE: What would you consider as having been particular about Bea Feitler's approach and work during her time?

*Harper's Bazaar* cover, January 1965
Illustration by Katerina Denzinger

Eknæs / Vergueiro: Her expressive freedom is present in all her work and made her a much sought after professional at the time. She shifted the gaze from a male perspective—one that inevitably sexualized the female body—to one that focuses on exploring the potentials of the body as a form, both in identity and design, changing the commercial representation of the "modern woman". She also channeled and catalyzed the social changes of the times in her work. In January 1965, she famously featured the first African American supermodel on the cover of major fashion magazine *Harper's Bazaar*. Model Donyale Luna appeared as a racially ambiguous illustration by Katerina Denzinger. Later, in April 1965, Luna was once again featured in the iconic magazine, this time as the subject of an eight-page fashion spread, shot by Richard Avedon. This shoot was directly responsible for mass subscription loss as well as companies pulling their adverts from the magazine. Above all Feitler launched the seminal feminist magazine *Ms*.

Her work was the embodiment of the heterogeneity she's known for—her design combined gender, race, typography, methods, and style. She also elevated the juxtaposition of commercial and editorial images to an art form through her close collaboration and relation with artists, photographers et cetera. Her game-changing Calvin Klein campaigns from 1975 and 1976, for example, are still referred to as being the first to use art fashion photographers to shoot commercial advertisements. Feitler also featured the photography of Diane Arbus, a close friend of hers, in a 1969 editorial at *Harper's Bazaar*.

*Harper's Bazaar* April 1965
Photos by Richard Avedon

FEITLER HAD A PROFOUND UNDERSTANDING OF HOW POWERFUL IMAGES AND LAYOUTS ARE IN THE PROCESS OF DISSEMINATING PROGRESSIVE IDEAS.

Calvin Klein newspaper print ad, 1975
Photo by Chris von Wangenheim

PROVENCE: Are there any points you would like to specify as being crucial to the way you approached her material?

Eknæs / Vergueiro: Rather than viewing it chronologically, we understood the material through the thematic design principles Feitler employed. Her use of the human silhouette stands out and threads her oeuvre—abstracting the body whilst bringing it into focus. She transforms the body into a generic and genderless sign, bridging the gap between the individual woman and the female collective.

Her use of the magazine's gutter centerfold as compositional device, typography, playing with scale and collage reimagined the relationship between body, text, and graphic design in terms of both layout and the sensory magazine experience. This guided us as to how we should transpose her work into an exhibition setting through a strategy principle from our collaborative practice, of creating content-based environments.

FEITLER TRANSFORMS THE BODY INTO A GENERIC AND GENDERLESS SIGN, BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL WOMAN AND THE FEMALE COLLECTIVE.

PROVENCE: What made you decide to translate the archival material into a spatial setting, and show her work in an exhibition format?

Eknæs / Vergueiro: Our collaborative practice was inspired by revealing the invisible systems that construct the public realm and experience. When we first encountered her work en masse, we realized that she was behind so many archetypal pop culture im-

Vitrine in "Power of Print—The Work and Life of Bea Feitler", Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, 2019 / Photo: Simon Vogel

ages that went on to typify an era. Be it the *Harper's Bazaar* "pink helmet" cover, John Lennon and Yoko Ono's *Rolling Stone* cover, or Helmut Newton's *White Women* book; it is really striking to conceive of her invisible hands at work in so many iconic and disparate publications. We didn't want a historicized installation, but rather to realize a space that allows you to physically enter her work. We wanted people to feel as if they were walking into a magazine. The exhibition space allowed for this experience in which the blown up, to-scale, interactive flip frames and wallpapers literally immerse the viewer in her work.

PROVENCE: Why Bea Feitler now? What connects her to magazines of our times?

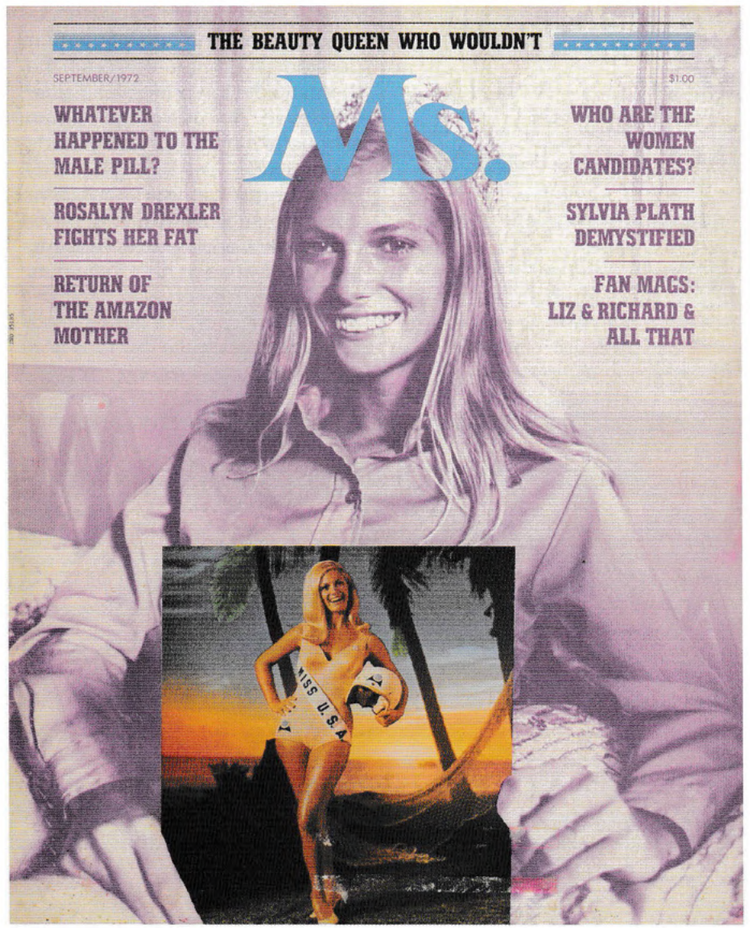
Eknæs / Vergueiro: It really is illuminating to look back at her work in the post-internet era. The process of hands-on graphic creation reveals the golden age of analogue artistry epitomized by Feitler. Another captivating aspect is to realize how progressive her work—and media in general—actually was in the 1960s and 1970s. She crafted an influential new language that became the foundation for contemporary concerns regarding diverse representation in the mainstream. It is important to acknowledge Feitler as an under-recognized precursor, and to reintroduce her vision and iconic imagery to the way we commit the issues of today to print.

Feitler played an important part in creating new standards in publication that are still upheld today. Her work for *Ms.* is indicative of "zine culture", which in turn points to blogs. In *Rolling Stone*, she really mastered the overlay of images to convey pictorial essays. She understood and stated that books and magazines should be 50/50 in terms of text and images—this is the case now more than ever.

IT IS REALLY STRIKING TO CONCEIVE OF HER INVISIBLE HANDS AT WORK IN SO MANY ICONIC AND DISPARATE PUBLICATIONS.

"ANY WOMAN WHO IS COMMITTED TO BEING AN INDIVIDUAL IS A FEMINIST. ANY WOMAN WHO IS INTELLIGENT IS FEMINIST. ANY WOMAN WHO VALUES HERSELF HAS TO BE FEMINIST. I WAS NEVER INVOLVED IN THE MOVEMENT. I THINK I WAS LIBERATED BEFORE ANY WOMEN'S LIBERATION."

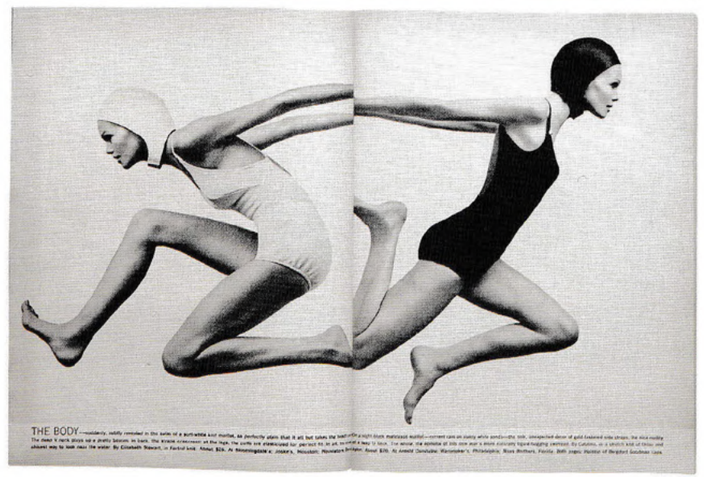
Quote: Bea Feitler in *O Design de Bea Feitler* by Bruno Feitler and André Storlarski (São Paolo: Cosac Naify, 2012), translated from Portuguese by Nicolau Vergueiro.




*Ms.* magazine cover, September 1972 / Photo by Mary Ellen Mark

Mock-up for *Rolling Stone*'s "Snap Judgments. A Rock & Roll Retrospective 1969–1977", 1977, with photos by Annie Leibovitz / New School Archives and Special Collections Digital Archive

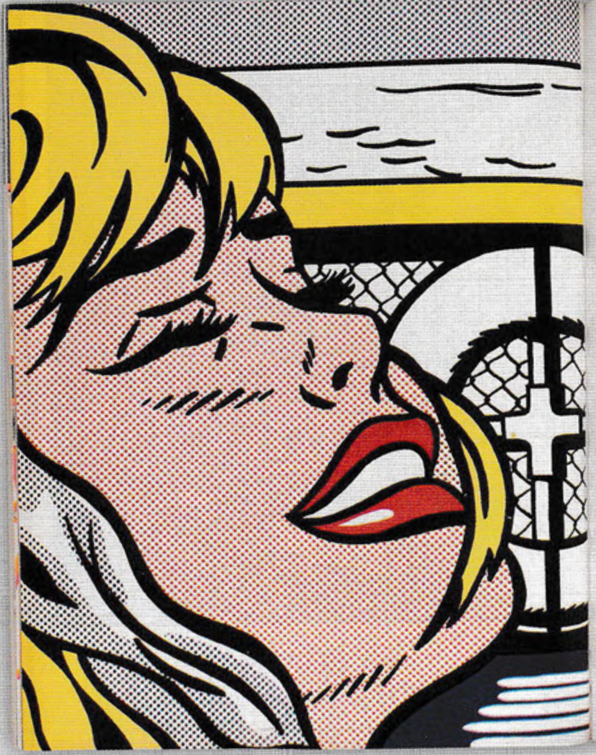
The Foot and Ferrari spread, *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1967
Photos by Bill Silano




The Body spread, *Harper's Bazaar*, January 1968
Photos by Hiro

"THE MOCK LAYOUTS, ENERGETICALLY AND WILLFULLY ANNOTATED AND MARKED, DEMONSTRATE WELL HOW METICULOUS BEA WAS WITH THE MONTAGE, RE-ELABORATION AND REFINEMENT IN THE PHOTO SELECTIONS AS WELL AS IN THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE IMAGES. [...] BEA CONSTRUCTS A SECOND-LAYER DISCOURSE."

Quote: André Storlarski in *O Design de Bea Feitler* by Bruno Feitler and André Storlarski (São Paolo: Cosac Naify, 2012).



## A CURSORY GLOSSARY (CONTINUED)



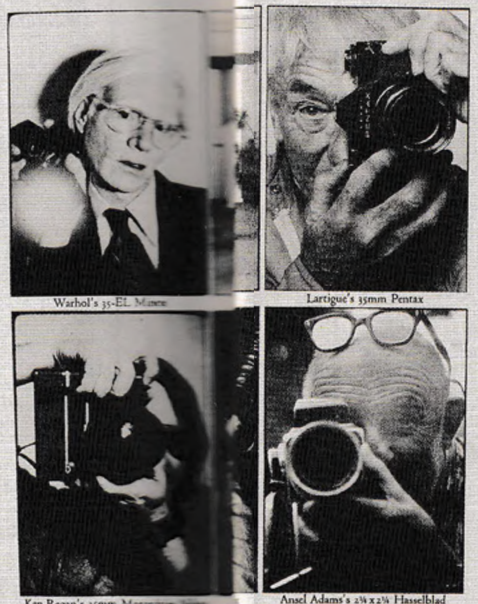
| | |
|---|---|
| LET'S SPLIT: | Let's go. |
| LIKE: | A prefix in any context. Like it's wiggy. |
| LOSER: | Self-defeatist. (There's no such thing as an accident.) |
| MAKE THE SCENE: | Be where what's happening's happening. Did you make the scene in Sardinia? |
| MISS FOX: | Sexy chick. |
| OUT OF SIGHT: | As far out as you can get. |
| PSEUDS: | Fakes, phonies. |
| PUT-ON: | Anyone who's sold himself on no quality. He's the biggest put-on since Murph the Surf. TO PUT ON (verb): To try to put something over on someone. Don't put me on! |
| SAM: | Sex appeal plus magnetism. New version of 'George.' |
| SHADES: | Sunglasses. |
| SHE'S EVIL: | She's an absolute bitch. |
| SHIRT: | Sam. Boss. That's a shirt skirt. |
| SOMETHING ELSE: | Very special. Dionne Warwick is something else! |
| SOUL: | Deep, authentic sensibility. That's my side of soul. |
| STOKE: | Boss. White stockings?—that's stoke. |
| TERRIBLE: | Beautiful. |
| THREADS: | Clothes. Threads make the bird ... or the cat. |
| TO COME ON: | To make a big play. Come on strong. She really came on. DON'T COME ON TO ME: Stop making that pitch. |
| TURNED ON: | Excited by, inspired by. Bach really turns me on. TURNED OFF: Humperdinck turns me off. |
| UNREAL: | Like great. She's real unreal. |
| WHAT'S HAPPENING: | The scene. |
| WIGGY: | Out of sight. |
| WIPED OUT: | Shot down. Out of it. |
| YOU'RE THE TRUTH: | You're the it of now. |
| ZERO COOL: | Cooler than cool. |

WHEN SHE (opposite) entered young Professor Loveluck's life, everything changed for him. "I want to kiss you!" the love-sick scientist kept thinking all day long, letting his kinetic-molecular hypothesis go hang. No wonder! She contoured her mouth ... with one of the new wild colors: Mauve, Red, Orange or Cocoa, applying a coat of clear yellow or white opal for highlight ... the lovery lip! Naturally, the doomed young scientist gave up his search for the ... wild Dorothy Gray!! To ... your own doomed young scientist, ask for Dorothy Wild at your favorite cosmetic counter.

ROY LICHTENSTEIN, creator of the heartthrobbing Pop Art Fantasy, opposite.

# CAPTURE THE SOUL
## SEVEN MASTER PHOTOGRAPHERS AND THE TOOLS OF THEIR MAGIC TRADE

By ... by Bea Feitler



Warhol's 35-EL Minox

Lartigue's 35mm Pentax

Ken Regan's 35mm Motorized Nikon

Ansel Adams's 2¼ x 2¼ Hasselblad

Photographs by ANNIE LEIBOVITZ



# VANITY FAIR

VANITY FAIR IS A MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF LITERATURE AND THE ARTS, POLITICS AND POPULAR CULTURE. IT WILL BEGIN PUBLICATION IN MARCH, 1983. THIS PROTOTYPE IS INTENDED TO SHOW THE DESIGN AND THE RANGE OF MATERIAL THAT WILL APPEAR IN A TYPICAL ISSUE.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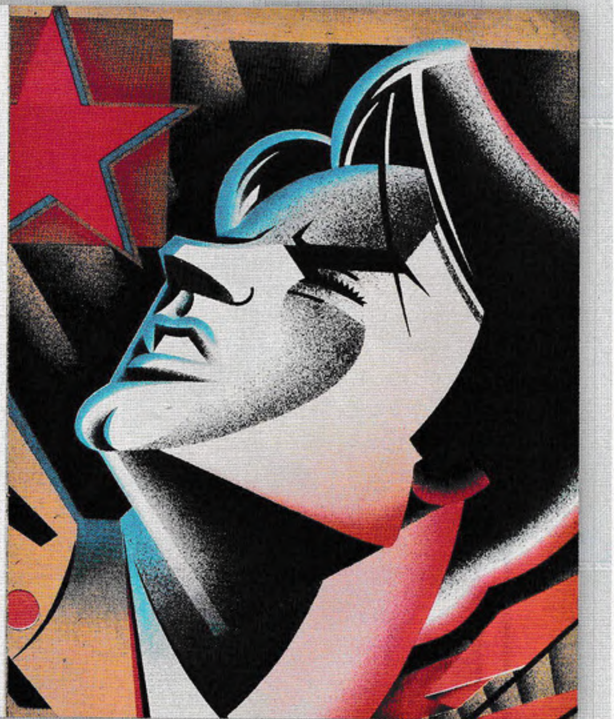

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ART DEPARTMENT: CARL BARILE, CHARLES CHURCHWARD, CYNTHIA NAGEL
RESEARCH: INGEBORG DAY, CURTIS INGHAM, JANET OLIVER, MARY THOM
CIRCULATION: RITA A. COOPER, AUDREY WILSON
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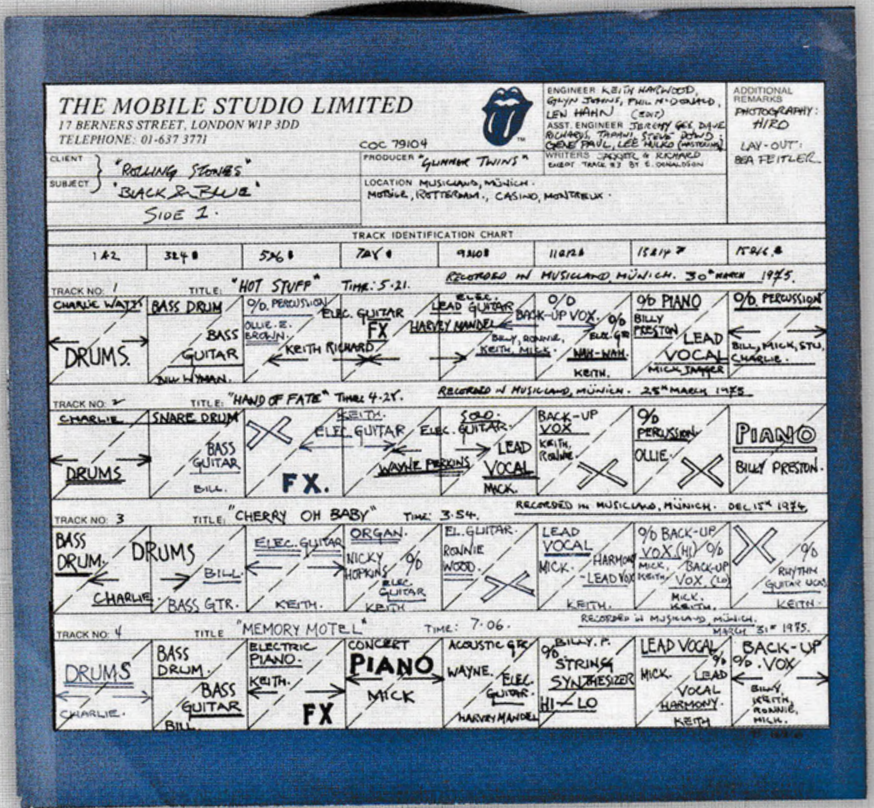


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THE EDITOR[S'] GUEST[S]

Previous spread: index poster for "Power of Print—The Work and Life of Bea Feitler", Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, 2019
Vitrine with silhouettes in "Power of Print—The Work and Life of Bea Feitler", Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, 2019

"MOST WRITERS AND EDITORS GENERALLY ARE NOT VISUAL PEOPLE, HOWEVER, MOST HUMAN BEINGS ARE NOT VISUAL. DESIGNERS WILL ALWAYS STRUGGLE BECAUSE EVERY WONDERFUL PAGE LAYOUT IS A STRUGGLE."

Vitrine on *Harper's Bazaar* in "Power of Print—The Work and Life of Bea Feitler", Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, 2019

Typography poster for "Power of Print—The Work and Life of Bea Feitler", Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, 2019

*Harper's Bazaar* cover, February 1967 / Photo by Hiro

# POWER OF PRINT— THE WORK AND LIFE OF BEA FEITLER

Kölnischer Kunstverein
February 16 – March 31, 2019
Organized by Marte Eknæs and Nicolau Vergueiro in collaboration with Kölnischer Kunstverein

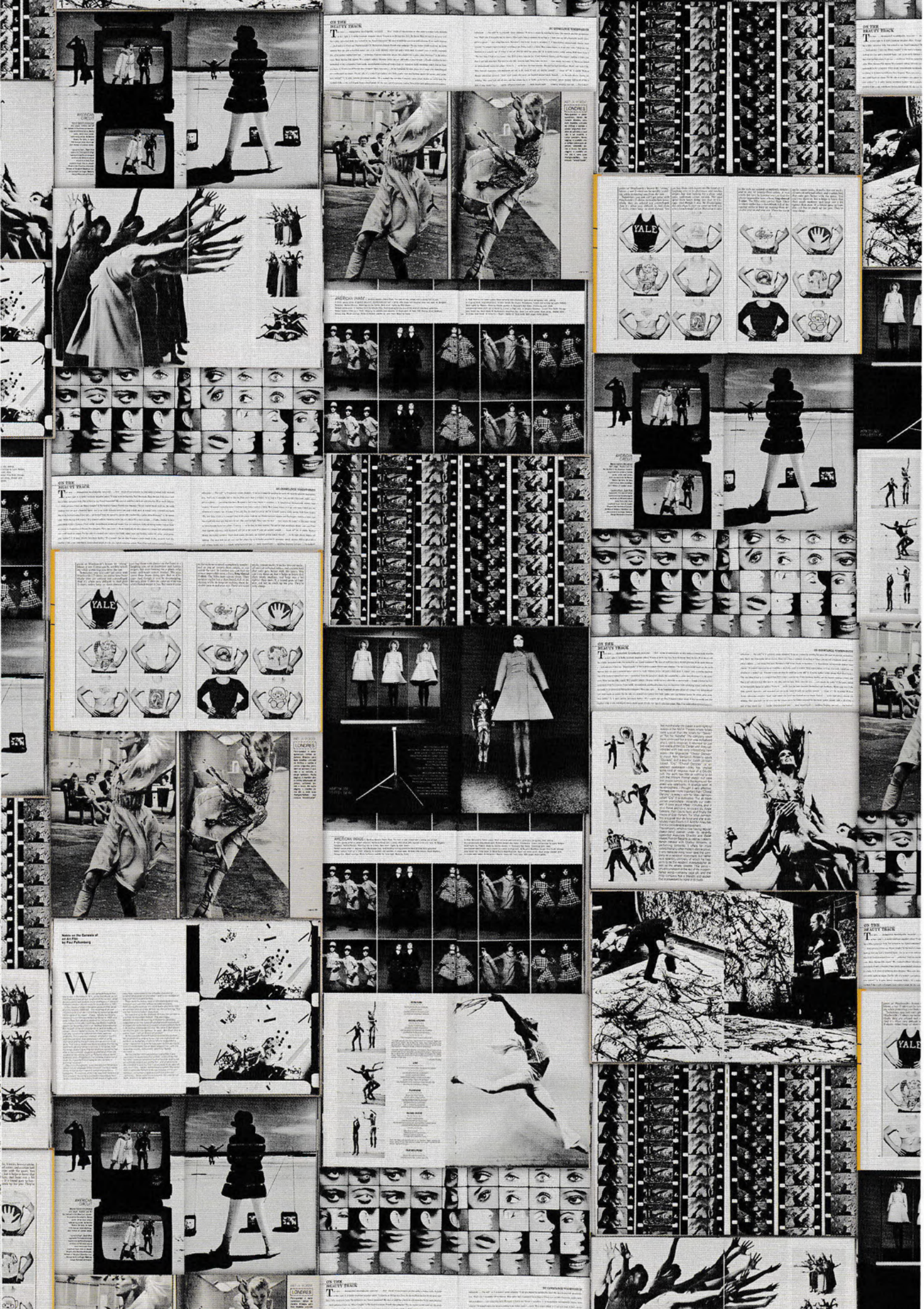
The exhibition "Power of Print" focused on the recurrent themes of Feitler's work—the human silhouette, typography, solarization, the centerfold gutter as compositional device, collage—through which she reimagined the relationship between the body and graphic design in both layout and sensorial terms.

Guided by Feitler's design vision, we translated her work from publication form to exhibition space, reimagining her design as wallpapers, showing magazine covers and spreads in interactive flip frames, enlarging covers and placing them in windows to face the public space of the street, designing topical wall posters and vitrines containing original material. We wanted to ask ourselves what it felt like to walk into a magazine. How could we emulate the flow of an editorial spread in an exhibition format? How can the magazine content be negotiated into a physical space?

Feitler described herself as a "natural collaborator", which is reflected in the exhibition through the inclusion of original pieces, by friends and collaborators, which were dedicated to her. Among original works and artifacts by Diane Arbus, Annie Leibovitz, Richard Bernstein, and Richard Avedon, "Power of Print" also included footage from the dance piece *Hidden Rites* by the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre, which Feitler created costumes for, and Andy Warhol's 1964 *Screen Test* #100, which depicted Feitler. Through a deep engagement with Feitler's oeuvre, we think of this project as a form of "collaboration" with her practice and world, bringing it forward into a contemporary context.

"[A MAGAZINE] SHOULD FLOW. IT SHOULD HAVE ITS UPS AND DOWNS. IT SHOULD HAVE A BEGINNING AND AN END. IT SHOULD NOT BE DESIGNED AS A SPREAD-BY-SPREAD CONCEPT. THE CLOSEST THING TO MOTION IS EDITORIAL DESIGN."

Quotes this spread: Robert A. Propper in conversation with Bea Feitler, "Bea Feitler—Sense Ability", in *Graphics Today*, vol. 2, no. 4 (July/August 1977): 23–32.




Collage poster (frame sequence) for "Power of Print—The Work and Life of Bea Feitler," Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, 2019