Recovering the History of Graphic Design: The Voice & Vision of Elaine Lustig Cohen

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Recovering the History of Graphic Design:
The Voice & Vision of Elaine Lustig Cohen

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By Megan Moltrup

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I. Introduction

Archives contain records and documentation of people who are considered to be of importance in their fields. If deemed irrelevant or unimportant to the historical development of a discipline, a person’s body of work may not be collected by an archive. For this reason, many women have been excluded from the history of graphic design. The ratio of men to women represented at most graphic design archives heavily favors men, although women have been active in the field. However, there are a few women whose work is represented in archival collections. Some female designers have worked successfully to be included, while others have seen their efforts go unnoticed. Elaine Lustig Cohen represents the latter, despite the collection of her work being included in the Rochester Institute of Technology Graphic Design Archive. This thesis examines the relationship between the representation of a woman in the history of graphic design textbooks and the availability of her work in archives. This thesis will investigate the question of whether a woman can be considered part of the graphic design history without her life work being collected in an archive, and if a collection in an archive determines her spot in graphic design history.

II. Graphic Design History

Graphic design history is similar to other histories, dominated by men. So often, women are left out, or when included, their contributions seem to pale in comparison to their male contemporaries. Meggs’ History of Graphic Design is one of the most comprehensive graphic design histories available. Since its first publication in 1983, there have been four subsequent editions, with the latest being published in 2011. Even
the most recent of the editions is still lacking some key design figures, but it isn't the only history that has gaps.

Nine Pioneers in American Graphic Design chronicles the contributions of those who shaped American graphic design between the 1930s and 1950s. The nine designers that were chosen were all men, Mehemed Fehmy Agha, Alexey Brodovitch, Charles Ciner, William Golden, Lester Beall, Will Burtin, Alvin Lustig, Ladislav Sutnar, and Bradbury Thompson. While these men were significant in their field in various capacities, they were not the only ones pushing graphic design to what we know now. Cipe Pineles, who was married to William Golden and Will Burtin, worked during the same period and was one of the first female art directors. Martha Scotford wrote an article in 1995 discussing the absence of Pineles in the Nine Pioneers book. Pineles "created the role of the modern woman designer" (Scotford, 55). Like other women, Pineles was left out of design history for quite a long period of time.

The American Institute of Graphic Arts first began giving out medals in 1920, and it wasn't until 1959 that they awarded one to a woman, May Masse. During the next forty years they only awarded medals to four more women, while the medal count for men up to that point was seventy. Cipe Pineles received her medal in 1996, while William Golden and Will Burtin received theirs in 1988 and 1971 respectively. Alvin Lustig got his AIGA medal in 1993, while Elaine Lustig Cohen didn't receive hers until 2011. It's clear that they were slow to recognize women's contributions to the field that they represent, however more and more women have been recognized every year.

Meggs' was similar to AIGA in the time it took them to begin to include women in the numbers that they were involved in the field. The first edition (1983) was modest in
the number of women that were included. The 1991 edition contained only twenty-seven women, eight of whom were AIGA medal winners. Many contemporary female designers began to appear in the 1998 edition, with the number of women almost doubling to fifty three. The most recent 2011 edition of Meggs: Making Graphic Design History has fifty-eight women. There are still thirteen women who were awarded AIGA medals who have not been added to the history, one of them is Elaine Lustig Cohen.

Since the traditional accounts about this male-dominated field are written by men from their perspective, it's no surprise that women are not as prominent in the pages of the histories. The increased number of women in the field, as well as number of female historians working to uncover underrepresented artists, are leading to the greater visibility of women in graphic design. It is encouraging to see that institutions such as the AIGA and Meggs are working to restore the full history.

III. Women in Archives

There has been a shift in the compilation of archives, with many institutions focusing on acquiring women's collections. With increased research, the roles that women have played throughout history is becoming more apparent. Along with women's contributions, more and more underrepresented groups' collections are being sought to expand traditional histories. Rather than focusing on prominent and public figures, archives are expanding to include "a broad range" and a "diverse set of collections" (Mason, 345). This increase in women's visibility is bringing a new sense of empowerment, and a fuller understanding of history.
An article from 1959 compiles a list of women's archives that had been preserved. This list includes only seventeen individual women like Susan B. Anthony and Emily Dickinson; it also includes twenty-two groups of archives like the those of the Feminist Movement (Bell). With numbers like that, the quantity of women's archives that entered collections could only increase, which they did due to the women's movement of the 1960's and 1970's. A number of family and personal papers were donated to women's libraries, academic institutes, and national archival collections. The issue then became where should collections be kept, in general repository or a women's repository. "In the case of women specialists, the decision is not so clear. If the main point of the papers is that this was a woman specializing in a certain field or pioneering in it as a woman, they should be probably in a women's history repository." (Moseley, 222).

The Graphic Design Archive of the Cary Graphic Arts Collection at the Rochester Institute of Technology is a prime example of a special repository. Their overall goal is "acquiring, preserving and interpreting these unique original source artifacts of the history of design in America is for the education of our students and for others who seek this information" (Remington). During the last decade they have focused on building their collection of women designers. They now have the archives of eight prominent women who worked in the field of design, half of whom have been honored with an AIGA medal. The newest collection to the archive, Tomoko Miho, is described by AIGA as the design world's best-kept secret" ("Tomoko Miho"). Miho, a designer who worked alongside her husband, James Miho, was not valued as highly as he was in the telling of graphic design's history. With the aid of institutions like the AIGA and books like Hall of Femmes: Tomoko Miho her story and career has been shared with a wider audience
than it would otherwise have. Now with the availability of her archive, more can be uncovered about the "best-kept secret." Institutions like the RIT Graphic Design Archives are paving the way to fill in the gaps of history that women are meant to fill.

IV. Elaine Lustig Cohen

By no means has Elaine Lustig Cohen had a conventional career path. In 1927, she was born into a family that was very supportive of her creative side and who encouraged her from a young age to pursue her interest in art through drawing lessons. She recalls being struck by an exhibition she saw when she was just fifteen years old: a Kandinsky exhibition at Art of This Century Gallery in Manhattan ("The Reminiscences of Elaine Lustig Cohen" 3). This would ignite her love and passion for modern art for the rest of her life.

Cohen began her college career at Sophie Newcomb Memorial College at Tulane University, in New Orleans. It was here that she began taking classes toward a degree in art ("Elaine Lustig Cohen"). While there, Cohen took humanities classes in addition to basic Bauhaus-style design courses. After two years, her family moved to California. Due to the amount it would cost for her to return to Sophie Newcomb, she transferred to the University of Southern California. At that time, women were discouraged from pursuing a career in art, so she began taking classes to earn a degree in art education, as well as painting classes. After she completed her degree, she was offered a job teaching in a Los Angeles junior high school. Due to the fact that she could not begin teaching until the fall, her mother encouraged her to take the summer off and do something rewarding for herself. She decided to do volunteer work at the Modern
Institute of Art in Beverly Hills (Lustig Cohen, COHC 8). As she helped with refreshments during her first exhibition opening, she met prominent designer and her future husband, Alvin Lustig (Lustig Cohen, COHC 9).

Lustig proposed soon after they began dating and the two were married in December of 1948. Cohen had only been an art teacher for one year and she was not happy with her career. Voicing her disdain in being a teacher, Cohen states how she hated leaving her home office where “all of these interesting things were going on” (Lustig Cohen, COHC 12). She began working in Alvin’s office in Los Angeles, doing no design work, but rather running the business. Slowly, she learned everything. “It was like osmosis” (Lustig Cohen, COHC 13), she stated. Alvin never sat her down and taught her how to be a designer; she spent time in the office around him and his staff, learning by watching. The couple stayed in Los Angeles for two years while Alvin was working for well-known clients such as New Directions. In 1950, they made the move to New York City. Alvin, a diabetic, began losing his eyesight in 1952. He didn’t close the door to his design firm, however. He began to direct Elaine and his assistants on projects. Elaine was particularly involved in interior design projects. She chose fabrics and colors, worked on drawings, and interacted with the other projects. However, none of the ideas were her own, as Alvin was still very much in control. He described his vision and she did her best to make it happen. She was learning, but not developing her creative vision. She considered herself “one of the office slaves” (Lustig Cohen, COHC 17). Alvin died in 1955, and Elaine received two calls of condolence that had secondary motivations. One was from Philip Johnson, who had chosen Alvin to design the architectural lettering for the Seagram Building. Johnson now wanted Elaine to do it.
The other call was from Arthur Cohen. Shortly before his death, Alvin was designing book covers for Meridian Books, and Arthur wanted Elaine to finish them (Lustig Cohen, COHC 18). She agreed to both projects, and her career as an independent designer finally began.

For a time after Alvin passed away, Elaine maintained his studio, clientele, and the design projects he had started. Just nine months after Alvin’s death, Elaine married Arthur Cohen, a longtime friend and the man she said would change her into the confident designer she believed she was meant to be (Lustig Cohen, COHC 19). She continued doing book covers for Meridian books and work that Philip Johnson recommended her for. He was responsible for getting her work with Eero Saarinen doing building identifications, as well as advertisements for Schlumberger-DeMenil. She continued doing smaller freelance projects until she became the design coordinator at the Jewish Museum in the early 1960’s (Lustig Cohen, COHC 118). During her time working for her “best client,” she was able to rebrand the image that they had (Lustig Cohen, COHC 20). She worked on exhibition catalogs, invitations, brochures, letterhead, and bags. She continued working there until the late 1960’s, producing some of her better known works. She calls this the time when she finally “came into her own” (Barron). Elaine designed the exhibition catalog for “Primary Structures”, which was a minimalist sculpture exhibition. She was able to channel the essence of the exhibition into the catalog, which is why it was so successful. This was key to many of her designs, she did not stick to one signature style, but was able to suit her style to the project she was given. For the remainder of her career she did freelance graphic design work. At the time she was freelancing, Elaine was the only woman doing it in her field. She states that there were other successful women designers, but they worked in
publishing, fashion, or advertising (Barron). She never felt like her clients had an issue with her being a woman because the way she got her new clientele was through recommendations. The only people she thought seemed to take issue in the fact she was a woman were her male contemporaries. They did not take her or her designs seriously, regardless despite her being included in some of the same publications they were being featured in.

Elaine began to become bored with solving the same design problems over and over again. She wasn’t feeling challenged working constantly on the same type of project: books covers and museum exhibition catalogs. This led her to resume painting (Lustig Cohen, COHC 22).

V. Rationale for Inclusion

I believe that Elaine Lustig Cohen deserves to have a spot in graphic design history. While she is included in some accounts, she still has not gained her place in the major histories, like Meggs'. She is slowly gaining recognition and is being written about more and more. She deserves to be considered a luminary in the field because her career was diverse, her notable clientele relationships, and for the struggle she had to get to achieve this success.

Her retrospective exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt led to an article that was included in I.D. magazine in 1995. "A Place On the Map" not only tells the story of Elaine and how her design career came to be, but it also highlights her major contributions. Heller states that "Cohen's work was resolutely modern" (Heller, 52). Another important focus of the article that adds to Elaine's legacy is that she was not
affected by being a woman in a male dominated field. It did not matter to her clients, they trusted her with commissions after Alvin's death before they even had a chance to see what she could do on her own. This is incredibly telling of the relationship Elaine was able to forge with her clients not only personally, but professionally. They trusted her, and ended up using her constantly because of the level of excellence she always produced.

*In Women of Design: Influence and Inspiration from the Original Trailblazers to the New Groundbreakers*, Elaine was described as a trailblazing woman. I think that is a spot on description of her (Gomez-Palacio). Being able to break into a field and achieve the magnitude that Elaine Lustig Cohen did would be a feat for anyone. It was especially impressive for her not only because she was a woman, but was self-taught for the most part. While she did take basic design and painting courses in college, most of her ability and aesthetic came from watching. She never had formal training, she just had a natural ability for graphic design.

Designing everything from her own personal letterhead to more than a hundred book covers, Elaine had experience in designing in a variety of mediums. Not only were the projects she worked on diverse, but the techniques she used were as well. Sometimes she utilized collage, other times she created her own lettering with cardboard cutouts, overall it meant that her work appeared varied and fresh. She did not stick with one aesthetic and try to mold every project to fit that. She was able to realize that the commissions she received were unique and that they should be treated as such. "I did not have a specific design format that I imposed. I try to come up with an idea that tells the flavor, or distills what the person in the book or exhibition is trying to
say and render it abstractly," (Lustig Cohen, COHC 43). That flexibility and genuine interest in portraying her projects in their purest form, led to her timeless designs.

Being able to overcome obstacles that confronted her to attain success is proof that Elaine should be higher regarded. There are not many designers, especially women, that have had the career that she had. Her story could inspire up and coming graphic designers, specifically female designers.

VI. Archives and Exhibitions

Archives and exhibitions have always been co-dependent in the museum world. Archives are places that people, can go to find information from primary sources. It is their purpose to preserve history and the artifacts that contribute to it. The collections housed in an archive “serve as proof that an event occurred, explain how something happened, whether for personal, financial, or sentimental reasons” (“Archives”). The “possibility of forgetfulness is heightened when researchers only have fragments with which to work” (Morra 7). Archives are important to the formation of history because without all of the information, accurate and comprehensive research cannot be done in a field.

Collections come to be part of an archive through purchase or from donations. The issue with archival collecting is that sometimes the importance of objects is subjective. The first thing that needs to be considered is why the collection was added to an archive. A question that often comes up in the archival world is, is a person’s archive important because written history says that it is or is history written because of an archive that was collected? This has become a major issue especially in regards to
women’s roles in history. Throughout time women have not been represented for their contributions, in part because their place in society was not equal to men’s, thus making a lot of the history we know to be true to be incomplete.

The next objective that needs to be taken into account when using a collection for research is who processed it and the institution it is housed in. The archivist determines the way in which those who come to use the collection originally views the objects. Organization of the collection will begin the researcher’s opinions and thoughts that will form. The archivist’s notes and a finding aid will highlight what they believe to be important or the aspect which their institution is the most interested. A particular collection may be viewed through other lenses that could be just as important to the story it could tell, but since it is housed in an art museum rather than a historic house, it may not be recognized. The researcher must be conscious of the collecting biases, and not to simply regurgitate the information as it is presented to them.

Exhibitions are vital to exploring and showcasing the stories and information that archives hold. They can serve not only as a teaching tool, but as an outreach tool (Lacher-Feldman 7). Sharing the mission of an institution along with inspiring visitors is a great way to create interest in the topic and to hopefully inspire further research. Without exhibits, it is quite possible that people outside an institution will have no idea of the depth of the collections and potential information they hold. An archive can provide facts that may not have been known before, but it can also provide firsthand perspectives, primary sources, and objects that can reinforce the message that is being portrayed. Exhibitions and archives work together to tell the stories within and to hopefully create new opportunities for your institution in the future.
VII. Elaine Lustig Cohen Archive and Exhibitions

The Graphic Design Archives at the Rochester Institute of Technology began in 1984 when it acquired its first collections. Since then it has grown to include the work of more than thirty-five notable graphic designers. It is the goal of the Graphic Design Archive to “document and preserve the work of significant American graphic designers active from the 1920s to the 1950s” (“GDA History”). Not only are the Graphic Design Archives trying to preserve history, they are working to construct it. Their archives range from complete collections, having all surviving work of a designer, to sample collections, which highlight the work of a designer. The collections housed in the Graphic Design Archives are important to students as well as researchers that come from all over the world to study them. In 2008, Elaine Lustig Cohen donated a sample of her archive to the Graphic Design Archives. The Elaine Lustig Cohen collection in the Graphic Design Archives at the Rochester Institute of Technology, do not contain any primary source materials. In order to provide an insight to Elaine's world, we needed to find primary source materials to give us Elaine's thoughts and ideas about her influences, design, and her life.

The collection is comprised mostly of finished client work. Elaine worked for a variety of clientele, from architects to publishers, which is highlighted in her archive. While some of the work in the collection is the original piece, like the museum exhibition catalogs, others are only reproductions or photocopies, like some of the book covers. The rest of the archive is made up of personal objects, like photographs, invitations, and promotional exhibition cards. While the Elaine Lustig Cohen collection is not as large as
some of the others in the Graphic Design Archives, it is still an important piece of
graphic design history.

Archives have always been a source for information and objects for exhibitions.
The Elaine Lustig Cohen collection is no exception. The first solo exhibition featuring
her work as a designer was in 1995 at the Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum. The
exhibition, “Elaine Lustig Cohen: Modern Graphic Designer,” celebrated her importance
in the evolution of design, incorporating more than eighty pieces with a narrative telling
of Elaine’s contribution to modern design ("Modern Graphic"). In 2012 Elaine had her
second major exhibition, “The Lustigs: A Cover Story.” This exhibition, at the AIGA
National Design Center in New York City, included five hundred of Elaine and Alvin
Lustig’s cover designs. While Alvin wasn’t alive to see Elaine’s career blossom, the two
worked closely together while he did his finest cover designs. This retrospective shows
their book, catalog, and magazine covers, together in an exhibition for the first time. As
Elaine’s work continues to gain recognition, her inclusion in exhibitions will also
continue.

Along with solo exhibitions, Elaine has also been included in multiple group
exhibitions. Since her first group exhibition in 1989, emphasizing her importance in the
field of graphic design, she has been included in over ten exhibitions across the country
and internationally. In 2000, she was a part of the “Women Designers in the USA,
1900-2000: Diversity and Difference” exhibit, which was held at the Bard Graduate
Center. This particular exhibition focused on the women that had been working in the
field of design since the early 1900’s, even if their accomplishments were not
recognized during the time of their careers, like Elaine Lustig Cohen.
VIII. Exhibition – Elaine Lustig Cohen: Her Voice & Vision

The planning of the Elaine Lustig Cohen exhibition at the Graphic Design Archives at RIT officially began in January 2014. After months of discussing possibilities and ideas, Kari Horowicz and I began to discuss details. This exhibition needed to combine the themes being developed for my thesis and the chapbook based on Elaine Lustig Cohen’s career that was set to be published by the Rochester Institute of Technology Press during the summer of 2014. The dominant theme of the thesis - the lack of recognition for Elaine Lustig Cohen and the current efforts to redress that - was the main focus for the exhibition. We decided to interweave the chapbook and exhibition is by using some of the same work in both, as well as incorporating some of the same stories and quotes in our labels. The lens we used to unify the work is the “voices” of Elaine Lustig Cohen that chronicle her design career. The sources for her voices are “The Reminiscences of Elaine Lustig Cohen,” an oral history from Columbia University, and multiple interviews that have been done with Elaine. Within the oral history Elaine recounts her life, emphasizing her design career and specific projects done with Alvin Lustig, as well as the later work done after his death. These personal stories were woven into the exhibition to illustrate her importance to the field of graphic design, as well as to make her someone that the audience can identify with.

After we decided on the exhibitions “big idea,” the next step was to determine how to break the exhibition up into sections that made sense based on the work in the Graphic Design Archive. We had enough material to fill the eight main display cases outside of the Cary Graphic Arts Collection in the Wallace Memorial Library, but we wanted to present the materials in an organized way. One option we considered was to
organize the work chronologically, however we decided that since she did a variety of projects, it might be easier for the audience if we grouped it that way. There are four vertical display cases on each side of the Cary Collection doors (see diagram on pg. 27). The first column would be filled with biographical information on Elaine, including the introductory didactic panel of the exhibition, as well as photographs of her with her late husbands and her daughter. The second column would be book covers she designed, while the third and fourth column would be museum exhibition catalogs and letterheads. The next four cases on the other side of the door, would contain columns featuring architectural lettering, corporate work and branding, work done for Ex Libris, and packaging. After going through the collection we were confident that even if we were not able to borrow additional objects from Elaine, we would have enough for a comprehensive exhibition. However if we could get more pieces from her it would enhance the showing significantly. One of the dilemmas we immediately confronted was the struggle between wanting to comprehensively represent Elaine as a designer, by showing as much of her work as possible, while still honoring her with a clean aesthetic in our exhibition design. We needed to be able to find a common ground between showing all sides of her career while not cluttering the exhibition.

Creating a skeleton outline for the cases gave us a jumping off point for formulating a checklist of potential exhibition pieces. Next, we combed through every folder to see what pieces warranted a spot in the exhibition, and to determine what objects we needed to borrow to compliment what was already in the collection. For the first column, -the biographical information,- we had most of what we needed. On the first shelf would be a photo of Elaine Lustig Cohen in addition to the introductory
didactic panel. The next shelf would feature two photographs, one of Elaine with her late first husband and prominent graphic designer, Alvin Lustig, and the other photograph with her late second husband, Arthur Cohen. The last shelf would showcase a photograph of Elaine and her daughter, Tamar Cohen, and birth announcement of Tamar that Elaine designed. While we had the birth announcement in our collection, we did not have a photograph of Elaine and her daughter to pair with it. We thought it was important to include Tamar because she was a large part of Elaine’s life, as testified to by the many stories included in the oral history. When choosing photographs for this section we wanted to include images that could help us tell the story of her life. A photograph of her and Alvin Lustig together in the studio, where she learned about design, would be much more revealing than a photograph of the two of them in an unknown setting.

Narrowing down the list of objects for the next cases was much easier task. After taking into consideration images of book covers that were to be used in the chapbook, we chose to incorporate a few of those. We then laid out all of the covers we had on a table. Being able to look at them all at once was a little overwhelming at first, but it sparked a great idea. Seeing all of the covers next to each other, almost in a collage form, we decided that it would be a great way to get people’s attention when they walked up the stairs and came through the doors. Reproductions of the book covers would be used to fill two cases bookending the exhibition poster to greet patrons as they entered our space, hopefully drawing more people in to see the work. We then got back to work editing the book covers down to the ones we wanted to highlight in the main display cases, and deciding how we wanted to put them in the cases. The opportunity to
see the covers side by side allowed us to see which covers went well with others, while also not detracting from each other. After deliberation we chose to display one book on the top shelf with six covers, matted and framed, hanging behind the book (see diagram on pg. 27). The next two shelves would have three books on display. Most of the covers in our collection are not the whole book, rather they are copies or prints of the cover. For the books that we want to showcase but didn’t have the physical book, we made plans to borrow them from other sources.

Choosing letterheads was done in a similar manner. We spread all of the letterheads out and immediately pulled out the ones that grabbed our attention and narrowed them down from there. It’s important to take into consideration that while the design is minimal in this type of project, generally only taking up a portion of a page of paper, it’s still easy to overcrowd a case. The white space of the page doesn’t mean that there is less to look at, it just means that there are more details to take in. In the case of the letterhead particularly, looking at it all at once made some design choices more apparent than if we had looked at each individually. For example, many of the letterhead she designed used the color red. It was something that may have gone unnoticed without viewing them all at once. We now had the opportunity to look into whether it was part of her design aesthetic, whether it was a client choice, or if it was a combination of two. Looking at a whole collection of objects at once made details more pronounced, which gave us another small insight into Elaine Lustig Cohen’s work.

Museum exhibition catalogs and Ex Libris objects were also organized on a table to be viewed together. Besides choosing what we liked, we also used the chapbook, so we could highlight some of the pieces they found to be the most significant. Again, we
made our selections based on what pieces would complement each other while on display. We did not want to use pieces that would fight for attention or that would distract the audience from the overall message.

The architectural lettering column was a little more difficult since we obviously could not bring in the buildings that the lettering was placed on. One of the key pieces we had to center the section around were the plaster letter prototypes from a Mitten Company building. Another piece we wanted to showcase was an article in *Print* magazine that talked about Elaine’s lettering. Besides the article and plaster letterings, the case also had photographs of the various signage work. The photographs were taken by Elaine Lustig Cohen herself. We had multiple photographs of some of the signage, we chose the photograph that was more aesthetically pleasing. A stronger photograph is important to highlight the beauty of her work.

To determine which objects to show for the packaging and corporate work sections was a little easier. While Elaine did do a lot of work in these fields, we had a limited number of pieces in our archive to pick from. One of the things we thought was important to show in the exhibition is not only finished work, but process work. The difficult part about that is that we have a limited amount of that and we didn’t know the extent to which Elaine had saved in her collection. For the most part, we used most of the packaging we have, and found a few photographs of packaging that we would request from Elaine. For the corporate work, we chose to use pieces that highlighted different companies and designs that popped, rather than designs that were more muted.
A major turning point in the exhibition planning was when Kari and I traveled to New York City to visit Elaine. Being able to see where she lives and the her studio really humanized her for me. Seeing how her work and art are what she lives, and not just jobs made a big impact on how I approached the objects we had. She also gave us a couple of great pieces we weren't expecting. The object that was the most exciting to me was the General Motors Technical Book. It was what Elaine used to present her ideas for signage to Eero Saarinen. Being able to see the objects used in the planning process was a nice change from the finished work we have in the collection. We also got to show Elaine the ideas we had so far for the exhibition as well as the exhibition poster that Amelia had designed, and she loved it. That was encouraging because we wanted Elaine to not only understand how we were presenting her body of work, but we wanted her to like it.

The next weeks were filled with laying out the cases. Since there was an ongoing exhibition at the Cary Collection, we would uninstall one case and try out different arrangements of the objects, and then reinstall what we removed. This ended up being extremely helpful in finalizing the object list, as well as determining what we need to put in other vitrines. It also proved to speed up the process of installation. We had figured out the placement of everything and were able to refer to our photographs during the actual installation, reducing the installation time significantly.

During this process we made a few key decisions. The first was that the Museum Catalog case would include those from any gallery or museum except the Jewish Museum. Since the Jewish Museum was such a significant client in Elaine's career we decided that there should be a separate vitrine for their catalogs and still a separate one
for ephemera Elaine designed for them. We also decided not to extend the exhibition into the Sunken Gallery. We only were able to borrow three collages from Elaine and we believed that they would not look right in the space separate from the other commercial work. It would look too spare. Instead we decided to put the three collages into a vitrine and to keep the posters and broadsides in the space by the Cary Collection rather than separating them from the main cases. We thought if we put the on the farther wall, people wouldn’t see it or realize it was part of the exhibition. The last vitrine case choice that was made in this time period was regarding the General Motors Technical Book. We were struggling over how to display it because there are so many stunning page spreads. Luckily for us, the book is made of a thick cardboard. We opted to put it in its own vitrine where we would be able to open it, showing not only the front and back cover, but two page spreads (see photo on pg. 54).

Label writing proved to be a difficult and daunting task. While it is not my first experience label writing, I had to write a lot more than I did the last time. Kari and I decided to each write four of the case labels. In addition to those I had to write two object labels, we only used object labels when we believed when we believed they were needed to highlight a key design in Elaine’s career. I also wrote the label for the Jewish Museum catalogs vitrine and the introductory panel. While some of the labels just seemed to flow and write themselves, there were a lot of times when I had writer’s block. It wasn’t that I didn’t know what to include in the label, rather I often didn’t know how to make it into a short, concise paragraph. The introductory panel was the hardest to write. It was daunting to know I was writing the section that would set the stage for the rest of the exhibition. Once I got over that, writing it was much easier. Kari and I did
countless edits of our labels, and we were very lucky to have so many other people willing to read them and give us their feedback.

With all of the labels written and the previous exhibition uninstalled, it was finally time to install. Amelia Hugill-Fontanel, Associate Curator at the Cary Collection, was working hard to typeset all of our labels in Illustrator, while Kari and I were working on installing the physical objects. The eight main cases were fairly simple since we already knew where everything was going to go. The biggest issue with those cases was finding stands that matched. After averting that crisis by borrowing quite a few from the RIT Press, there were only a few tweaks that needed to be done in that section. We decided we needed to mount the photographs used in the biography section because they appeared flimsy. We also needed to find books of similar size to wrap some of the book jackets around, in order to display them as they were intended to be viewed. The additional vitrines went up with similar ease. Many of the cases only had one or a few objects, so arranging them was not hard. The Jewish Museum Catalog vitrine took the most thought since we wanted to have the catalogs that were being shown to look aesthetically pleasing not just as if they were thrown together. The three cases at the top of the stairs also were installed around this time. Augie Park, a graphic designer at the Cary Collection worked hard to reproduce a variety of book covers and print them out. She was the lead on this install since she had laid out how she wanted them to appear in the cases. Again, the prior preparation that she had put into it made the process go much faster.

Seeing the exhibition come together and people taking the time to really look at the objects and read the labels at the opening was a very rewarding experience. I felt
like we were able to convey the message that we wanted in a way that people were interested in. Not only did we inform the audience about Elaine Lustig Cohen and her incredible career, we also opened their eyes to the types of things that can be hidden in an archive.

IX. Conclusion

Women have worked hard in their various disciplines since the beginning of time, and they are finally getting the recognition they deserve, even if it is years later. Archives, and exhibitions of the materials contained in archives, are helping to reveal some of the secrets that have been kept for years. Slowly recuperating the contributions of incredible women like Elaine Lustig Cohen who changed the direction of their fields is the reward for archive collecting. With the continuation of collecting women's archives, more and more can be discovered and history can be changed to include all that affected it.

X. Works Cited


XI. Appendix

A. Exhibition Journal

1/27/14

Kari and I finally had the chance to sit down and discuss the details of the exhibition. We've obviously been talking here and there about what we would like to accomplish, but we hadn't made any concrete plans other than it would be about Elaine Lustig Cohen and it would go along with my thesis and hopefully, the chapbook that the RIT Press is doing. We sat down and started to think about what the cases outside the Cary would contain. The first idea we had to organize the objects was in chronological order. After looking at some of the dates for her big projects, we realized that it might get confusing for the viewer to jump from project to project. For example in one year she might have done 5 book covers, some letterhead, architectural signage, and an exhibition catalog. I was thinking that putting it together that way might seem jumbled and thrown together. We scraped that plan, for the aforementioned reasons.
We decided it would be better to organize the eight cases outside the Cary by the type of work that would be in each column. We decided on the cases to be as follows: biographical, book covers, letterhead, museum exhibition catalogs, architectural lettering, corporate work, Ex Libris, and packaging. One note that I made while Kari and I were talking was an issue we ran into when talking about how many of each to include. I wrote down, "One of the issues with exhibiting graphic design is the constant struggle between showing a lot but also keeping a clean aesthetic with the exhibition's design, thus honoring the designer. A lot of Elaine's work is gorgeous, but we can't show everything or the cases would be cluttered, we really needed to edit down the list of objects we were going to show.

We drew up a diagram of the cases, and the shelves for the first two columns.
We were able to decide the layout for the first two columns, biographical is mostly photos and the introductory panel, which I will write. We chose to include photos of Elaine by herself, with her late husbands, and with her daughter.

Our idea for the book cover column is to matte and frame 6 of the covers we have and hang it above the first shelf, which will have one book on it. The second and third shelf will each have three books. We want to try and get more physical books to have on the shelves. A three dimensional object is a lot more interesting to look at than a reproduction of the cover. We made a note to ask Elaine if she has copies, Kari also knows a few people she can ask, the last option to get the books is to see if we can find them for sale on the internet. To decide which books and covers we wanted to use we took the multiple folders from the boxes and spread them all out and just picked out covers we knew were going to be in the chapbook, ones we liked, and ones that she is better known for. From there we made a list of all the ones we wanted the most, which might need to be edited down later.

I also made a note to look in the oral history from Columbia to see if Jack Reich was mentioned, he worked for Alvin Lustig, and on some of Elaine's work it said he worked with her.

1/29/14

The task Kari and I set for ourselves today was to go through the letter head and museum exhibition catalogs and make a preliminary list for those two categories. Just like the book covers, we laid all of the letterhead out. The letterhead was a little more difficult to narrow down, partly because we didn’t know how many we would need on each shelf. The issue with letterhead is that so much of it is white space. While that
theoretically seems like it would make the clutter less likely to happen, we also don’t want it to look like a lot of nothing going on in one case. We tried to pick a range of letterhead. We chose some that had embossing details, some with interesting typography and some of the letterhead she did for her more prominent clients. After narrowing it down to fifteen letterhead we decided that we would have to wait to finalize choices until we could see them in the cases. We think we will only end up needing around nine or ten for the actual exhibition.

While we had the letterhead laid out, we noticed that many of her letterhead she used the color red. We were wondering whether this was an aesthetic choice she made or if it was the client’s request. Hopefully when/if we go to visit her, we will get a chance to ask her that.

The museum exhibition catalogs was done the same way. And again, we had a similar issue of have to cut down from the amount the collection contains to the amount we would include in our exhibition. Since the Jewish Museum was one of her best clients, we chose multiple catalogs that she had designed for them. As with the other selection processes, we also picked out some of the catalogs the chapbook is going to highlight. We will still have to finalize our choices at a later date, but we have a good starting point.

While we will still have to come back to these sections later to decide on which pieces we will definitely include, we made a lot of progress. Spreading out all of the material at once also gives me a great sense on Elaine’s comprehensive design career, especially into the sections we are focusing on.
We also decided that we would expand the exhibition to the Sunken Gallery if we are able to borrow some of Elaine’s collages. This was we will put them in the cases in the Sunken Gallery and frame some of Elaine’s posters and put them on the wall near the gallery to bring the audience from the Cary cases over to the gallery. So, if all goes as planned, we will be highlighting two more sections of design, collages and posters.

2/15/14
Since the last time I wrote, I have been working on captions for the chapbook, compiling dates, dimensions, and images. This is helping me see the story they are planning to tell and allowing me to compare it to what we are doing. Today, Kari and I created a list of goals to accomplish in the next two weeks. The most important thing being a full checklist draft. When this is done we will have all of the object labels basically done, doubling as a list of things to put in the exhibition. The next item on the list is to decide what book covers we want to reproduce for the splash at the top of the stairs. We also had the idea to get quotes that Elaine said and get them made in vinyl lettering to put up around the exhibition, so our goal for the next two weeks is to find some quotes that would be appropriate for that.

We are considering three different days for the exhibition opening, May 8th, May 9th, or May 13th. We need to figure out when the current exhibitions in the Cary cases and in the Sunken Gallery will be taken down and speak to the curators of the Cary Collection to make sure there aren’t other conflicts.

We would like to have a large portion of the labels done by April 11th, to allow for ample time to have them produced by the graphic design student that works for the Cary.
A major accomplishment we made today was figuring out the material to be included in the remaining cases, Packaging, Corporate, Ex Libris, Architectural Lettering, and Posters/Broadsides. The first section we tackled was the Architectural Lettering case. Unfortunately for us, most of the material we have for this case are copies of photographs. Because of the nature of what’s in the case it’s hard to have anything 3-D. It’s lettering on buildings, it’s not realistic to have much more than photographs. We do have plaster letter prototypes from the Mitten Company building, which will hopefully make the case more dynamic. We chose which photographs to include based on which ones were stronger photographically.

Packaging was the next case we worked on and it proved difficult because of the lack of material we have in our sample collection.

3/31/14

Today we made a couple of small decisions. While they weren’t anything major, every little bit is important. We were unsure to whether to have the quotes matted on grey or black matte board. We decided to print of an example of a longer quote and a shorter quote and put one on a black background and one on a grey background. We
then hung them up on the outside of the glass cases to see which we liked better. We ended up deciding that we liked the quote on the grey background better than the black, partly because the grey blends in with the back of the cases and makes the quote less distracting from a distance.

Amelia gave us two drafts for the exhibition poster that she had told us about last week. We had decided we liked poster A better than poster B due to the spacing. We didn’t like the blank space on the right side of poster B, it made the poster seem unbalanced.
4/1/14

Only small things were worked on for the exhibition today. After talking to the graphic designer that will be working on the splash of covers at the top of the stairs, we made a little progress on decisions regarding that section of the exhibition. First, we decided that since the book covers are of varying sizes, we would reproduce them all at the same size, 6” x 9”. We also decided that we should try and use different covers in each case. If we don’t have enough high quality images/objects to photograph to get high quality images we can mirror the cases. So far we have 22 high quality images, I’m confident we have enough material to not repeat covers. There will be between 18-21 covers in each of the side cases, with the main exhibition poster in the center case.

4/2/14

As discussed last week, instead of vinyl lettering of quotes by ELC, instead we will be framing quotes for each column of the cases outside the Cary Collection. We realized yesterday that while we had multiple quotes picked out that Kari and I liked, we still needed to assign quotes to each column. Part of the reason we need to decide on the quotes as soon as possible is because if we’re using quotes from the Columbia Oral History, we need to submit the quotes we want to use ahead of time to gain permission. We decided on the following quotes for the different sections of the columns, for the sections we couldn’t find a specific quote about, we chose a general quote about design that we thought was relevant.
ARCHITECTURAL LETTERING -- “The thinking, the planning for architectural lettering is an extension of other graphic design problems.”

MUSEUM -- “What is great about being an artist is that everything is open to you, if you want it to be.”


BOOK JACKETS New Directions -- “I tried to reflect the spirit of the book”

CORPORATE -- “A designer should look at a problem holistically and design a solution that is particular to that situation.” Source: “The Reminiscences of Elaine Lustig Cohen” (March 19, 2009), in the Columbia Center for Oral History Collection, p. 24.

LETTERHEAD-- Long version – might be too long, so shorter is listed below, which is probably what we should go with “In contrast to today’s instant faxes and e-mail, this
sheet of paper – the letterhead – signed, folded, stamped, and posted, allows for reflection and intimacy.” Short version “The letterhead – signed, folded, stamped, and posted, allows for reflection and intimacy.”


EX LIBRIS -- “During that time the hunt for material was exciting!”

Source: “The Reminiscences of Elaine Lustig Cohen” (March 19, 2009), in the Columbia Center for Oral History Collection, p. 49.

4/5/14

Today our main goal was to try and figure out the exact layouts for two of the columns in the main cases. We were anticipating getting done the Meridian Book column and the letterhead section. One of the things we were struggling with before beginning to work today was having a lot more objects on our checklist than we would need. However, until we actually were able to put things in the cases, it was hard to visualize how many books and covers we could have on each shelf without it looking crowded. Each shelf needed to have something to tie the covers together. The first shelf on Meridian would be three books that are unified because on each Elaine exaggerated one letter of the title. Also on the first shelf, to the left of the covers is the case label. The second shelf is comprised of four covers with photographic covers. A fifth cover probably would have fit and wouldn’t have crowded the shelf, however we wanted to leave space for a few object labels because two of the covers are well known pieces. The third shelf is five book covers that have similar purple and blue tones used.
After finishing this section, we decided it would make the most sense to do the New Directions book column. We were hoping to mirror the layout since the columns will be on opposite sides of the Cary Collection doors. After pulling all of the New Directions covers and books we have, we quickly realized we wouldn't have enough material without the shelves looking sparse. There were multiple folders in the collection containing books and covers by “other publishers”. New Directions and Meridians were the publishers Elaine mainly worked with, she didn’t as substantial amount of work for the others. On the first shelf, again the label will be on the left. Three New Directions book will be on the first shelf, the two on the ends have similar purples used and serve to bookend the center cover. The next shelf, similar to the Meridian column, are four photographic covers. The last shelf is made up of four books from a variety of publishers. However, each of the four books was either written or edited by Elaine’s late husband, Arthur.
The last case we got figured out today was the letterhead column. This was one that I personally was concerned about.

I was unsure about how multiple letterhead would look. I wasn’t sure if all of the whitespace would be boring or too intense. The issue with letterhead is that the design is so subtle, I didn’t want people to just see the large amounts of white space and just pass the case by. Being able to lay out the case before installing the exhibition was really important, for this column especially. This first time we laid out the top shelf we choose three letterhead that all used the same red color scheme. After looking at it from far away though we realized it just wasn’t making an impact, and definitely was not going to draw in anyone from a distance. We switched gears and picked out three letterheads, with their accompanying envelopes, that were a lot louder graphically. The second shelf we decided to include both Elaine and Arthur’s personal letterhead. We also included one of Elaine’s envelopes, an invitation to one of their parties, as well as a note with embossed Hebrew letters. The third shelf contains three subtle, yet beautiful designed letterhead.
After working the main cases, Kari and I began discussing the Sunken Gallery. In this space we were planning on showcasing Elaine’s collages. After doing more research we realized the collages are much smaller than we originally thought. In order to make the case look full enough we would need at least four and we aren’t sure if Elaine will let us borrow that many. We decided to cut out four of paper in the dimensions of some of Elaine’s collages. If the case didn’t look full enough with only four we were going to just abandon the idea of using them all together. We would rather not have the case at all if it was going to end up looking sparse and half done. After putting up the paper we decided that if we could get at least four the case could be utilized, six collages would be ideal but not necessary. The next step is to email Elaine to see how she feels about lending us that many.
4/6/14
I spent a good portion of time today drafting and redrafting the label for the letterhead case. Writing labels is challenging for me because it's hard to squeeze everything I want to say in a concise paragraph. I'm also not the best creative writer, so the hook for the first line is hard for me to write. For this label, I worked on three drafts before I had someone read it and give me their thoughts. I emailed the edited draft to Kari for her to check over. I need to check with Kari to make sure that none of the objects in this particular case need and individual label.

4/7/14
Today my first task was to edit the checklist draft that Kari and I had created with all of the objects we wanted to include in the exhibition. Our list had way too many objects, and we weren't really that sure how the objects would work together in the cases. We picked them because we thought they represented her work well and we liked them stylistically. After the work we put in on Saturday, we finally decided how we wanted to organize it. When organizing the Meridian Books case, we decided we wanted to have themes to unite the shelves. Two of the books we ended up using on the first shelf we didn't have on the original checklist draft. On the second shelf, we added two more books that weren't on our list. The final shelf only had one book that we didn't have on our list. There were six Meridian Books that we had on our list that we
decided to cut since they didn’t fit the themes we had decided on. For the New Directions and Other Publishers case we ended up adding four books to our checklist. We also significantly edited down the letterhead list by eliminating seven of them. We also added three smaller pieces Elaine designed for her and Arthur's personal use.

In addition to editing our checklist, I also pulled material we hope to use in the Ex Libris and the architectural lettering cases. Tomorrow night, Kari and I will be working on laying out those cases like we did with the three previous cases. I also began drafting a list of questions to ask Elaine when we go visit her this upcoming weekend.

4/8/14

We made the layouts for the Ex Libris and the Architectural Lettering cases this afternoon. The Architectural Lettering case was hard because two thirds of the material we have for the case are copies of photographs. To make the case more dynamic we included a magazine article and the plaster letter prototypes. The first shelf is the label then the plaster letter prototypes and an image of the alphabet that the plaster letters are a part of. The second shelf the magazine article bookended by two photographs. The magazine is a nice addition because it brings color to the case. The third shelf of the case has three more black and white photographs. One thing that we were considering was putting a piece of black foam core behind the plaster letters to make them stand out more. After putting a test piece behind the letters we decided it wasn’t necessary.
The Ex Libris case was a little simpler to figure out. We only had one object that we had on the checklist that we decided not use. The first shelf is the label, the Ex Libris 16 catalog, and the catalog for the Piet Zwart exhibition. The next shelf has four brightly colored book lists. The last shelf has a catalog, mailer, and an envelope from an exhibition at Ex Libris that was in memory of Arthur Cohen. The catalog was difficult to figure out how to place. It folds out and we weren’t sure which side to show. We decided upon the part that tells of the exhibition because it shows the witty personality of Elaine. Also it’s open in a way that the viewer can see inside the catalog by looking down upon it.
4/10/14

After the work that Kari and I did the Ex Libris and the Architectural Lettering cases, the checklist draft needed to be updated. We had to cut only two objects from Ex Libris, a catalog and letterhead. The Architectural Lettering section of the checklist required minimal changes as well. We decided to include a periodical article about Elaine and her work with signage so that needed to be added, we also chose to not include two photos we originally planned on showing.

While we decided that most objects wouldn’t get their own individual labels, some key objects do warrant their own. I wrote the first draft of one of these labels. *New York Places and Pleasures: An Uncommon Guidebook*. This book was one of, if not the most successful book Meridian Books had while Arthur Cohen owned it. I also thought it would be nice to include because in the Oral History she tells nice anecdote about how the book came to be. She and Arthur came up with the idea and found someone to write it. Kate Simon, the author, went on to be a bestselling travel writer and the book was one of Meridian’s best sellers.

Tomorrow Kari and I leave for New York City. While we are there we’re going to talk to Elaine and hopefully borrow some things for the exhibition. Today I wrote up a short list of questions to email Elaine before we go down. We thought it would be nice to give her time to try and think about the answers rather than just springing them on her when we get there.

4/11/14

During the drive down to New York City, Kari and I had a brief discussion on the title of the exhibition. We decided to remove the “Her” in the title and it became Elaine Lustig Cohen: Voice and Vision. “Her” was putting an emphasis on the fact that she’s a
woman. In fact, that’s not what should be focused on, her work is what got her the
exhibition. We thought it was counter intuitive to focus on her gender when part of our
argument is that it didn’t matter that she was a woman, her work should have been
recognized for what it was.

4/12/14

We visited Elaine at her apartment today. I was nervous going into it, but it went
incredibly well. First, we sat down in her living room, she answered some of the
questions we had emailed her before we came. The first question she answered was
about the cover of New York Places and Pleasures. Elaine used parts of a photograph
to create it. She also told us that her favorite thing that she designed was the cover for
Primary Structures exhibition for the Jewish Museum. Clear Writing was her favorite
cover that she designed for Meridian Books (which is exciting because that’s our
favorite too!). After talking with her for a bit we began our descent up the stairs. On the
second floor was her workspace and library. She let us look around and was telling us
stories about some of the work she had hanging up.

The next floor up, she took us into her spare bedroom and began pulling out her
work. The first thing she showed us was from her work with General Motors, it was a
signage mock up that she presented to Eero Saarinen. She said we could take it for the
exhibition and then she said we could keep it for the Graphic Design Archive! She also
let us borrow another copy of the catalog that she did for the Museum of Rio De
Janeiro. We have one copy, but we couldn’t decide which page spread to show, and
luckily she had another! The last floor she took us too, used to be her studio. It was a
gorgeous open room in the back of the room was where she keeps all of her paintings
and collages. She let us look through all of her collages and pick the ones we wanted to borrow. We chose three from the series, *My Heroes*, Man Ray, Rodchenko, and Lissitzky. After going back downstairs, we continued talking to Elaine about the upcoming exhibition. We showed her pictures of what we had laid out as well as the exhibition poster and she liked everything we have done so far. It was a really incredible opportunity to meet her and be able to talk to her. She had a lot of interesting tidbits that we can hopefully incorporate into the exhibition.

4/14/14

After getting back to Rochester, we made up a list of things that we got from Elaine to send to her. I also had to add the items we received from Elaine to the checklist. I sent the first list of quotes we are planning to use for the cases to the Oral History Department at Columbia, hopefully we get approval quickly. We took the three collages and went to the Sunken Gallery to see how they would look. We decided that the three collages we had weren’t enough to fill the space. It would look awkward with all of the empty space in the case, regardless of how we put the collages in. We are
considering asking Elaine for two to three more collages to fill the space. We do have a few back up plans in case we can't borrow more. We may put the three collages we do have in one of the larger, square vitrines. Our other possibility is to put them in the long rectangle vitrine, and have the Jewish Museum things on the other side of the vitrine. We'll have to take the time to think about whether or not we should ask Elaine for more collages.

4/15/14

I finished another label, the object label, for New York Places and Pleasures. It wasn't incredibly hard to write only because Elaine speaks on it so much in the Oral History. I also started the label for the Meridian case. The exhibition opens in less than a month, and there's still a lot of work left to do!

4/17/14

Kari gave me the edits for the letterhead label and I fixed some of the things she suggested. I think that now it sounds much better. We decided against asking Elaine for collages. It would be too much of a hassle for her to have to send them to us, and it's not feasible for us to drive back down there to get them. We also made a to-do list for ourselves for the next few weeks! We decided what things we needed to get done and then decided who would accomplish the tasks. One of the biggest items we have on our list is to write our labels, specifically the ones that use quotes from the oral history. We also need to have a meeting about the budget as well as with catering. I think that once we get the labels written and the cases figured out it will less stressful.
4/20/14

I finished up the *New York Places and Pleasures* label. I also wrote the label for the Meridian Books case. I am going to send them off to Kari for proofreading and editing so that hopefully I can send the next batch of quotes off to Oral History department at Columbia.

4/24/14

I wrote the blurb for the back of the postcards, website, and the Facebook event. Now we can get the postcards ordered and sent out. We also decided on a 50’s food theme for the reception. Some things we are considering for the menu are: celery stuffed with cream cheese, marinated mushrooms, cheeseball with crackers, two types of finger sandwiches (egg salad & ham and Swiss on pretzel bread with honey mustard), an assortment of Italian cookies, as well as tea and soft drinks. Today we also hung up all of the quotes that will go in the cases to see how we liked them. They looked really great! Amelia, who worked on these for us, found a few indentation things she wants to edit, but they’re basically finished. We’re getting them all matted and framed. We decided that we would cut all of the matte windows to the same size, regardless of the quote length. There are two versions of the main exhibition poster, the first has the title across the top, and the second has the title on the right side. The poster with the title across the top will go in the first case, I thought that the title across the top would be easier to read. A bigger version of the second poster will be going in the center case at the top of the stairs.
4/25/14

Today I wrote the first draft of the Biography label, and edited the Meridian Books label to include the mention of Elaine’s favorite cover that she designed, *Clear Writings*. I’ve been finding it difficult to describe things in the labels. Not that Elaine had a set style in her designs, but there’s only a limited amount of ways to say "bold, typographic.” Kari and I have noticed that we both have been repeating phrases throughout our labels. We have identified which labels they are in so that when we are finished with labels we can go back and edit those.

4/28/14

We continued laying out the final designs for the main cases. The first one we worked on was the biography case. The first shelf will have the intro label and the photograph of Elaine used on the poster. The next series of photographs we decided to put in chronological order. We wanted to include photographs that were not only important to Elaine’s design career but also to her personal life. The second shelf will
include photographs of Elaine and her father, Elaine and Alvin Lustig, and a photo of
Elaine while she was in Italy. The third shelf will have a photograph of Elaine and Arthur
Cohen, a birth announcement of Elaine’s daughter, and a photo of Elaine and her
dughter Tamar. None of the photographs we have in our collection are originals, they
are all photocopies. We decided to print out new copies so that we can mount them to
cardstock. They will be easier to show if they have a firm backing.

The second case we laid out was the containing Elaine’s corporate work. The top
shelf contains two advertisements done for Schlumberger and the cover to a Seagram’s
directory. We are considering removing the cover though, it just looks out of place. The
second shelf will have the cover for a Lightolier advertisement, along with a page
spread from the same ad. This piece is very significant because it is the only known
work that Elaine and Alvin worked together on that we have in our collection. Since we
only have one, we have decided to make a reproduction to show the cover. The third
shelf will highlight SONA, Elaine worked doing not only the graphic design work, but
also the interior for the store.

I wrote my first draft for the Primary Structure label. I think overall it’s pretty good,
I had a lot of information to choose from. Not only is it Elaine’s favorite piece that she’s
designed, but the Jewish Museum also used the cover for inspiration for a new
exhibition they are opening.
4/30/14

The case containing museum exhibition catalogs was our task for this afternoon. After looking at all of the catalogs we had originally chosen, we realized we had far too many for one case. Since the Jewish Museum was such an important client, we decided that we should have one vitrine strictly dedicated to their catalogs. So this case will contain exhibition catalogs from other institutions. The first shelf of this case will have catalogs from the Kootz Gallery, the second shelf was put together with two catalogs that look aesthetically similar, same with the third shelf.

We also went downstairs to look at a case that we could potentially use for the Jewish Museum catalogs. The case is downstairs and is currently being used by the RIT Press for promotional use, so we will have to ask permission. They are incredibly supportive of this exhibition because of the chapbook on Elaine coming out soon. We decided to try and lay out the case to determine how many catalogs we would be able to showcase. We should be able to have five catalogs on each side of the case, or four on each side with one catalog on each end.

The last thing we worked on today was attempting to figure out how to layout the GM Mechanical book we got from Elaine. We are trying to figure a good way to show
not only the cover, but also a layout. We think that it may be show it in the same case as the Rio de Jairo booklet.

5/5/14

Today was the big installation day. I was a little nervous, but also excited. This has been a long time coming and it's nice to see our hard work finally coming together.
While we did install almost everything today. There are still a few little things we will need to add in the upcoming days. We will still have to install the labels when they are finished. We also need to put the photos on card stock and install them. A couple of the issues we faced during installation were stands to put the objects on. We wanted them to match, and to look cohesive. We ended up having to borrow a couple smaller stands from the RIT press because the only ones we had were too big for the objects. Overall, I think all of the planning we put in really helped us have a quick installation.
5/6/14
The letterhead label as well as the Primary Structures label have been finalized.
Letterhead was a little easier to write because Elaine wrote an intro to a book about
letterhead, so I had a great jumping off point for that. Primary Structures didn’t need
much work, just needed to edit some of the words I used, since Kari and I kept using the
same adjectives to describe Elaine’s work.

We also decided that the three collages we have aren’t enough to fill the sunken
gallery. We decided to put them in a vitrine of their own at an angle so that the viewer
can look closely at her work.

5/7/14
Label writing is exhausting. I wrote the first draft and edited it to finish the Ex
Libris label. I continued writing and editing some of the other labels, but I felt like I was
in a rut, so I put them to the side. I want to write them, but I also want them to be well
written. I’ll pick up again tomorrow.

5/8/14
We finished installing a couple more vitrines today. We worked mostly on the
Jewish Museum cases. Since the big vitrine finally got moved upstairs, we can finally
put the exhibition catalog case together. We ended up deciding to put three on each of
the long sides and one on each end. We didn’t want the case to look too crowded, but
we still wanted to represent the variety in designs she created for the institution. We put
Primary Structures on one end, so that its label could be placed beside it. On the other
end of the vitrine we had the main label for the case. We had to use two labels on one
corner to cover up a broken piece (camouflage!). The other case we installed was much smaller and contained ephemera designed for the Jewish Museum.

I also sat down and finished the first draft for the Jewish Museum Catalog case. I had to wait until we installed it because I wasn’t sure which catalogs we would ultimately pick to include. I also wrote the first draft of the Museum Catalog label, had Kari look it over and made edits. Not only did I get the first draft of that label done, but also the final draft!

5/9/14

One more label down, only two more to finish. I finished the final draft of the biography label today. I thought this label would be the easiest, having written the Wikipedia and having access to so much information. However I found the issue with this label wasn’t writing it, it was editing it down to a reasonable length. The first few drafts I wrote were way too long. I couldn’t figure out how to get everything I wanted to say in a concise way at first. Once I had the first draft of the intro panel made it easier.
5/10/14

Today was a big day for labels, we’re definitely cutting it close to our deadline. I feel bad for Amelia who has to typeset all of our labels in Illustrator. Today I finished the final edits for two more of my labels, including arguably the most important one. The Introductory Panel took me about three drafts over the course of four days. I also finished the text for the Jewish Museum Catalogs label. These were the last of the labels I had to finish off, so I’m feeling incredibly relieved in that department.

We also decided that the GM Technical book should have case all to its self. The Rio de Janeiro catalog isn’t served justice in case since the beauty is in the way the pages are laid out. The GM book is able to stand on its own since it’s made of thick cardboard. This enabled us to show both the cover and two page spreads.
5/12/14

With the exhibition opening tomorrow, today has been a lot of last minute touches. One of the major tasks that Augie and I completed today was hanging up the reproductions of the book covers in the cases at the top of the stairs. Augie has been working hard to photograph the covers and to use a color correction process to recreate the covers in a larger scale. We decided to put 15 covers in each of the two cases. Augie arranged the covers to make them look balanced, rather than to put them in any specific order. We didn’t think it mattered if they were in a specific order since they were there to grab attention for the exhibition. Putting them up was a task, trying to keep them straight and evenly spaced. We secured them with T pins, since they were reproductions it didn’t matter if we put pins in them.

We also put the ABC book and the reproduction of its first few pages in its case. We decided that we should put it by the splash of covers to introduce the exhibition and explain the poster in the center case.

After cutting the labels and attaching them to matte board, we were set to install them. We decided not to use the biography label. There wasn’t enough space in the case, with the introductory panel being there. It was kind of a bummer since I worked hard on it, but it would’ve been far too many words in a small space.
Today is the day of the exhibition opening. I’m really nervous even though we’ve done everything we can to make it the best exhibition we could do. I’m going into work for most of the day just to make sure everything is perfect, or as perfect as we can get it before the opening starts.

When I first got to work today, I cleaned all of the vitrine cases again, just to satisfy my obsessive compulsive disorder. I also had to re-adhere some of the labels to the cases. The ones that we had put on triangles so that they would be easier to read kept falling off, so I loaded them up with painter’s tape, hopefully that will do the trick. I also had to cut more of the postcards because we seemed to have given them all out to promote the opening and we didn’t have any that someone could take away. We also decided to do up another little take away last minute. Luckily for us, Amelia is a life saver and is amazing at design. On the takeaway is the list of the framed quotes in the cases, as well as where they came from.

The last major thing I had to do before I went home and got ready was to move around the tables so that catering could begin their set up and not have to do any of the heavy lifting. Not that I had to do it either (thanks Derek and Thanh!) I realized today, not that I didn’t already know, that I’m really lucky to work with all of the people I do, everyone has been incredible helpful and encouraging in every way possible.

The exhibition opening went really well, I think we had a great turnout, (surprise guest, my dad!). Everything really came together nicely, and I think that people actually learned something. I’m always concerned with whether or not people are reading the labels and actually taking in the information I’ve worked so hard to portray to them. And everyone I talked to had pulled some piece of information that related to them in some
way. I guess that's the key to getting people to take something away, not only conveying your message in a concise, clear way. But to make the exhibition relatable in some way.

B. Exhibition Photographs
C. Labels

Introductory Didactic Panel

Elaine Lustig Cohen: Voice & Vision explores the life and work of a graphic designer, artist, and art dealer. Elaine Lustig Cohen (b. 1927), is one of the female pioneers in the field of graphic design. Art and design have always been at the forefront of Elaine's thoughts in every stage of her life. In a 2013 interview with Michael Barron, Elaine states, “the visual was my life.” Looking through the various stages of her work, one can see that design and its aesthetic impact is a constant influence. In the early 1950s, Elaine was one of very few women primarily doing freelance work as a graphic designer. Elaine states, “Every other woman either worked for a designer, worked in publishing, or worked for the fashion magazines.” (Reminiscences, 2001, 31). As Steven Heller reiterates, although Elaine was one of the few high-profile women working in the graphic design field at the time, she insists it was not a defining issue. Instead, she says, running a small business was her biggest challenge. “My gender may have been an issue for other designers,” she says, “but not for my clients.” As with most occupations, it took women much longer, to not only work in the field, but also to gain the recognition they deserved. While women have been active in the field for nearly sixty years, it was not until recently that they have been included in graphic design histories. For example, the 1991 edition of Meggs: Making Graphic Design History included only twenty-seven women. Twenty years later, the 2011 edition included fifty-eight women; nearly triple the previous issue’s count. Even though Elaine Lustig Cohen has been included in multiple design history books, she hasn’t been recognized by
Meggs, which is widely considered to be the most authoritative history. The American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), the professional organization of graphic designers, gives out annual medals to those who have made significant contributions to the field. In 2011, after nearly sixty years of hard work, Elaine finally received her medal. Like too many other institutions, the AIGA was slow to recognize the contributions of women, only having honored four women before the 1990s. Over the past few years, Elaine Lustig Cohen has received more and more of the recognition she deserves. This exhibition celebrates her voice and vision through interviews, journal articles, and oral histories along with her design and art, and aims to solidify her place in graphic design history. The Elaine Lustig Cohen Collection is part of the Graphic Design Archive, Cary Graphic Arts Collection and was donated in 2008. This exhibition, co-curated by Megan Moltrup, 4th year Museum Studies student and Kari Horowicz, Librarian and Liaison for the College Imaging Arts and Sciences, provides an insight to the ever-changing career of Elaine Lustig Cohen.

Biography Label

Elaine Lustig Cohen was born Elaine Firstenberg on March 6, 1927. After being raised in Jersey City, New Jersey, she attended college in New Orleans, Louisiana, at the Sophie Newcomb College at Tulane University. It was there that she took her first basic design courses. In her sophomore year, she transferred to the University of Southern California where she participated in painting classes along with art education courses. In the summer of 1948, Elaine was fresh out of college and decided to volunteer at a
new art museum, The Modern Institute of Art in Los Angeles. At the opening reception she met Alvin Lustig. The two had a whirlwind relationship and were married that December. In 1949, after about a year of teaching, Elaine left to run Alvin’s design office. She worked on many of the design projects and learned by watching. “It was like osmosis,” she stated (Reminiscences, 2009, 13). In 1950, the couple, along with Alvin’s design firm, moved to New York City, where Elaine continued to work in the office. Slowly, Alvin’s diabetes worsened and he began to lose his eyesight, which meant that he needed to delegate work to his workers and Elaine more often. In 1955, when Alvin passed, Elaine’s independent design career began. Elaine remarried in 1956 to her longtime friend, Arthur Cohen. The two also had a working relationship. Cohen owned Meridian Books, which was a client of Elaine’s. They eventually opened Ex Libris, a rare book and ephemera business together. Their daughter, Tamar Cohen, born in 1960, also is a designer and artist. Arthur and Elaine remained married until his death in 1986. Throughout her career Elaine has been a designer, artist, and a book dealer. “I think I’ve been really lucky. I’ve had at least three lives, all of which have made me who I am today,” (Reminiscences, 2009, 96). Currently, Elaine lives and works as a fine artist in Upper Manhattan.

Meridian Books Label

Between 1955 and 1961, Elaine Lustig Cohen designed over one hundred book covers for Meridian Books. Arthur Cohen, publisher for Meridian Books, was a close friend of both Elaine and Alvin and he commissioned Alvin to design the first covers published by
the company. Unfortunately, at the time of his death, Alvin had not started any of the commissioned designs. One of the first calls Elaine received after Alvin passed away, was from Arthur Cohen. He called with condolences for her loss, but he was also in need of a favor. He wanted her to complete the covers that Alvin had agreed to do. Although this would be her first time taking the lead on a design project, Elaine accepted. In the oral history, The Reminiscences of Elaine Lustig Cohen, Elaine states that she “was terrified when I sat down to do the first jacket for Meridian Books. I probably worked on it a week and wasn’t really sure what I was doing,” (2009, 41). As she worked on more covers, she became more confident with her efforts. Her style evolved by distilling the essence of the books’ content into striking covers. Elaine used exaggerated typography to create a strong message. She would often use one letter as the focal point for the composition, as seen in the Dangling Man cover. Photographic covers were a design theme she employed often. For the Witchcraft cover, she took a photo of the fireplace in her apartment as the basis for the design. Clear Writing – one of Elaine’s favorites – is featured below. It uses simple geometric elements suggesting a typewriter.

Places & Pleasures Label

During a trip to London, Elaine and Arthur purchased a book titled Architectural Review’s Offbeat Guide to London. While looking through the pages of the guide in the cab, they simultaneously exclaimed, "why hasn't somebody done this on New York?" (Reminiscences, 2009, 34). They relayed the idea to their friend, Kate Simon,
who took on the writing task. This would be the first time Simon would author a book, but it would not be her last. Kate went on to write many bestselling travel guides along with two autobiographies. Elaine’s cover design features a photograph by Jay Maisel that she cropped and edited. New York Places and Pleasures: An Uncommon Guidebook went on to be not only Simon’s most popular book, but also one of the most successful books Meridian had ever published.

Letterhead Label

Before e-mail and other digital communication, letter writing was the primary method of correspondence. The author used custom letterhead or stationery to add a personal touch to his/her message. Letterhead design features simple elements to portray the essence of the writer or company. As an experienced artist and designer, Elaine Lustig Cohen realized the difficulty in perfecting this seemingly elementary art. In Letters of the Avant-Garde (1996, 7), Elaine writes, “As a designer, I have always been fascinated by the letterhead. This small-scale object is one of the most challenging design problems.” She favored a personal and strong approach that utilized “minimal means to reflect the spirit of the individual or a company.” Throughout her career, Elaine created letterhead for various clients. Elaine also designed her own personal letterhead and custom projects for family and special occasions. Although letterhead poses a unique challenge for many designers, Elaine Lustig Cohen flourished in this field due to her exceptional ability in aesthetic improvisation. The examples here show the dynamic range of Lustig Cohen’s aesthetic creativity. Examples of her work include: the bold typographic design
of the Spartan Shipbuilding letterhead, the geometric design for Arthur Cohen’s personal letterhead, as well as the subtle and reserved approach she took with the letterhead for Emily S. Nathan. In all cases, the design complements and enhances her patrons’ images.

Primary Structures Label

In 1966, Elaine Lustig Cohen designed the exhibition catalog for Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors. This show highlighted conceptual, minimalist sculpture by artists such as John McCracken and Judy Chicago. Elaine described the show as being very architectural; recalling one of the pieces as “just a slab leaned against a wall.”(Reminiscences, 2009, 118). While designing the cover, Elaine attempted to portray what someone would see in the exhibition in two-dimensional form. Utilizing both primary shapes and colors, she completed a notable catalog. Not only is it her favorite catalog that she has designed throughout her career, but The Jewish Museum values it as well. Other Primary Structures, an exhibition that opened in March 2014, is a sequel to Primary Structures that was inspired by Elaine Lustig Cohen’s original design catalog. Her catalog was successful due to the delicate balance of serious and playful that Elaine portrayed.

Ex Libris Label
It all started with the purchase Les Mots en Liberté Futuristes (The Futurist Words in Freedom) the typographic masterpiece by the founder of the Futurism movement, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. For years after that acquisition, Elaine Lustig Cohen and her husband, Arthur Cohen added to their personal collection of avant-garde books and ephemera. While traveling across Europe, they “hunted” and bought items from antiquarian bookstores and from the artists themselves. In a 2013 interview with Michael Barron, Elaine explains, “If we saw something we hadn’t come across before, we bought it regardless of its condition. If we saw it again in a better condition, we bought that too.” When Elaine left her long-term freelancing job at The Jewish Museum and Arthur sold Meridian Books, making ends meet became more challenging. They decided to put an ad in the New York Times to sell the duplicates they had. Surprisingly, after only one week, they had sold all of the items listed. This was the start of their book store, Ex Libris. When it officially opened its doors in 1973, it was unique because museums and libraries had not yet begun collecting this type of material. Elaine designed the shortlists, catalogs, mailers, and other items for Ex Libris until it closed in 1989. Much of the work Elaine produced for Ex Libris used simple, yet eye-catching typographic elements. The Piet Zwart: Typotekt and Dada Again catalogs are excellent examples of clarity and simplicity in design. Even when using geometric shapes for the Red + Black exhibition materials she kept her designs clean, reflecting the work that Ex Libris had to offer.
During an interview in 2013, Elaine stated that “it wasn’t until the ’60s that I really came into my own,” (Barron). In 1963, Elaine worked as a freelance design coordinator for the Jewish Museum in New York City. She designed over twenty exhibition catalogs for them. As each exhibition told a different story, she had to be flexible in her design aesthetic. Patricia Belen and Greg D’Onofrio summed up the relationship between Elaine and the Jewish Museum perfectly in a 2012 article in The Shelf, Elaine’s ability to think conceptually and experiment with type and form, made her an apt choice for designing the catalogs to compliment The Jewish Museum’s commitment to contemporary art. Her designs are as minimal and abstract as the work they represent. Instead of solely displaying the name of the artist or exhibition, she used the catalog covers as mini canvases to reflect the spirit of the exhibition or pay homage to the artist’s style. Knowingly or not, Elaine created a unique and vibrant graphic personality for the museum. When looking at a sample of the many catalogs she designed, one can see the individuality of each. From the prominent, graphic B’s on the Ben Benn: Painter cover to the feeling of motion conveyed on the catalog for 2 Kinetic Sculptors: Nicolas Schöffer and Jean Tinguely. It’s obvious she did not try to conform them all to fit her style, instead she altered her style to accommodate the essence of the exhibition.