

ITINERARY OF A YOUNG SWISS GRAPHIC DESIGNER

ERICH BRECHBÜHL escaped the dogma of traditional Swiss typography by working with Niklaus Troxler. As leader of cross-disciplinary **collective Mixer**, he tackles each of his posters with a fresh mind

by Joshua Naumann, with Vanina Pinter

Mixer, left to right: Erich Brechbühl, Remko van Hoof, Marco Sieber, Maurus Domeisen.

A graphic designer with Mixer, Erich Brechbühl works for local clients and enjoys international success – like his former mentor Niklaus Troxler. The young creative was just 24 when his powerfully impactful images began to feature in biennials, picking up numerous awards. Here *e:i* sheds light on Brechbühl's path to date and on the roles of the other, lesser-known members of Mixer.

early steps

In 1990, aged 13, Erich Brechbühl founded the Mix Pictures non-profit association to stage cultural events and short films. A few years later, he trained as a typographer and at the same time worked as a photo-typesetter at the printworks in his home village of Sempach, in Lucerne canton, Switzerland. This training taught him traditional letter

drawing and the Swiss rigour of grid-based layouts, which he implemented in his job. Yet he felt his creative possibilities were restricted. His training over, he decided to do another course, this time in graphic design. During this period he met Niklaus Troxler, who agreed to host him as an apprentice in his studio for four years, to 2002.

Troxler mainly tasked him with corporate-identity projects and a few poster jobs. Troxler, applying his usual pedagogy, accepted all Brechbühl's ideas and let him execute each of his projects from start to finish. Along the way, Troxler queried his formal choices and urged him to experiment and try accident-based techniques, in a bid to unsettle the traditional approach to typography that his apprentice had hitherto absorbed.

After struggling initially, Erich Brechbühl

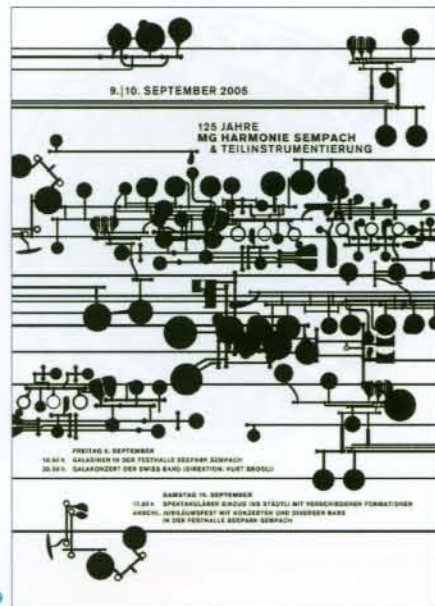
embarked on the initiatory journey that distinguishes simple form-drawing from the creation of meaningful signs – a practice specific to graphic design. *Niklaus helped me realise that you need content as well as style to produce good design.*

In parallel he continued with Mix Pictures, now helped by three friends. They staged concerts and theatre productions that enabled him to create his first posters as a freelance. In this he is similar to Troxler, who is known primarily for his posters for the Willisau jazz festival, which he also directs. After his stint with Troxler, Brechbühl sought to extend his experience in a bigger studio, and did a placement of several months at MetaDesign in Berlin. He was hired as an artworker on the Volkswagen account and came away with the clear idea that he would freelance.

Mix to Mixer

The four guys involved in Mix Pictures wanted to stay together and combine their experiences and skills in a cross-functional group. Marco Sieber is a photographer and studio manager; Remko van Hoof, a marketing director; and Maurus Domeisen, a stage designer. In 2003 they turned Mix Pictures into a commercial outfit, which they named Mixer. The group work together on some projects, such as the one for the Sempach retailers' federation, [6] for which van Hoof handled the advertising and marketing and Brechbühl did the graphics. For commissions from a children's fashion shop and a metalworking firm, Sieber took photographs which became the visual material for brochures and posters created by Brechbühl. Many of Brechbühl's commercial projects don't feature in





9. *Mg Harmonie Sempach*, 2005. Poster for the 125th anniversary of Sempach orchestra.

10. *Erziehen heisst auch Grenzen setzen* ("education is also about marking boundaries"), 2005. Poster for an education event.

11. *Bourbaki Panorama*, 2006. Poster for the 125th anniversary of the panoramic painting of General Bourbaki, depicting the French Army of the East under his command retreating into Switzerland.

12. *Die Welle* ("the wave"), 2004. Poster for a play about the rise of fascism, Tremolo Youth Theatre, Lucerne.

15. *Faustrecht/Pubertärer Blues*, 2006. Poster for an event about youth violence and depression.

14. *Sennentuntschi*. Poster for a play after a scandalous story by Hansjörg Schneider, in which three lustful mountaineers build their own woman. Aeternam Theatre, Lucerne.

