

Exploring how crises are visualized in design activism campaigns

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In recent years, graphic designers around the world have become increasingly interested in how to make a difference in society (Bennet, 2006). According to Papanek (1985), designers have a moral responsibility to improve the society, and all design should be socially and ecologically conscious.

Throughout the history of design activism, visual strategies are used to express and ground a critical discourse. In 1964, twenty British graphic designers signed the First Things First-manifesto, by Ken Garland. The manifesto, called for a return to a humanist aspect of design and was a protest against the trivial productions of mainstream advertising (Garland, 1964). In 2000, The First Things First Manifesto 2000, was published, and the rebirth once again created discussion about graphic design and social responsibility (Garland and Poyner, 2000).

In previous studies, design activism is described as challenging the role of design as a marketing tool (Bichler and Beier, 2016). One example is the activism group Extinction Rebellion, a movement that encourages people across the world to act and stop the impact human intervention has on the planet (<https://rebellion.earth>). Here, visual strategy is that all art work is to be used non-commercially.

In research, visual strategy is discussed as a tool to influence opinion (Wong, 2016), change attitude and behavior (Frascara, 2006) and for transformation and social change (Buchanan, 1998; Bichler and Beier, 2016). Against this background, the purpose of this paper is to explore how environmental risks and crises are visualized in contemporary design activism campaigns. This is done by visual content analysis of international activist-campaigns produced during a ten-year period.

The interplay of crisis and art