

Riley Rohrbacher
Thesis 2021

Artist Statement

Riley Rohrbacher is a graphic designer from Portland, OR by way of the Bay Area, California. His work focuses on type design and publication and finds influence from a multitude of areas including sports, the internet, and food. For him, his practice has focused on telling a story within designs, to connect visuals to deeper, more rich meanings to convey an array of emotions.

Written Proposal

The pillars that shape the landscape of our current pop culture climate serve as a foundation of our modern society. The landscape has been dominated by a consumer culture and it's hard to find a subculture now whose cultural impact stays within their specialty. Take the culture of basketball for example, aside from the impact it has had through the physicality of the game, the culture of basketball has been accompanied by fashion, music and visuals of the past and present. The primary goal for this project will be to create a display typeface imbued with characteristics that visualize the game and culture of basketball. Through this tool of design I hope that others will utilize it to further support the visual evolution of the culture.

The world definitely isn't demanding a typeface inspired by basketball, and admittedly there are larger problems in society occurring, but typography is such an important tool in the design process and must not be overlooked. Finding a typeface that elicits the same characteristics you are attempting to visualize throughout a certain piece of work can sometimes be a tricky scenario and ultimately you are left with options that involve other visual treatments such as, editing the type or taking the focus off of the text. The rules and regulations that shape the game of basketball elicit the same rules followed in technology and the organic fluidity of the game and its execution like dunks, dribble moves and speed, representing the rule breaking experimentation in typography. The strong influence the superhero-like athletes have on society is second to none and the stories and moments that have been etched into history throughout the timeline of basketball deserved to be given the chance to be represented and supported through an opportunist design system like my proposed idea for a basketball inspired typeface. It's why I am so enamored with the history and culture of professional basketball because of the beautiful moments from buzzer beaters, cross up plays or a highlight dunk. It's not so much as it is things that seem interesting visually to me, but the greater than life stories being told in real time by real people. There's a unique atmosphere and narrative that produces so much excitement and it gives you something to cheer about, especially in a world of uncertainty. It's holistic to have an escape in life, and sports and the game of basketball provides that escape for me. Another reason basketball resonates with me so much is its strong relationship with its roots and subcultures. Basketball sneakers for example have become the most profitable and lucrative industries in the fashion world with high profile companies like Nike and Jordan who have built their legacy and empire solely (O.K. pun intended) on shoes. From days of wearing only Converse Chuck Taylors to now 75% of the NBA signed to a shoe endorsement it's apparent that the game of basketball has had an extremely powerful influence through time in the world of fashion. In music, namely hip-hop, you have basketball players being used as

metaphors of dominance. This constant level of relevance in society and culture is a true testament to the influence that basketball has throughout the many things we encounter in day to day in life.

The tone of this project is to ideally be an inspiring one. The reason I took an interest in basketball was because of its sheer positive impact on society through an execution of entertainment. The beautiful details of typography run parallel to the small beautiful details found in basketball and like basketball, typography has a set of rules to adhere to. Typography as a system is such a complex one with so many different rules that, ironically, allows for an endless experiment of breaking said rules. A character contains many levels of details. It allows us to expand our idea conceptually because you can visually represent so many facets of your idea. From line patterns found on the court, to certain characteristics of notable basketball shoes or even the appreciation of the ability of a 40 inch vertical leap there are equally so many little details about the game that can take the form of a character in an alphabet. As a design tool, typography is going to be the best communicator of information and aid in the emotion that can be conveyed visually. As a designer creating a typeface, you are putting yourself in a position to create a foundation for future designers to create work supported with your typeface, making an impact like that on the design community and making me really proud to see this project manifest into the real world. The ultimate objective is for the typeface to be used by designers and enjoyed visually by the people who enjoy basketball.

The execution of this project will contain two display style typefaces, one typeface designed around the offensive impact of basketball and the other representing defense. Ultimately these will come together as one usable font, randomly generating letters from each typeface to create a natural rhythm of a basketball game in the type. This extends the concept beyond just a visual one and changes the way type can function on its own.

Technical influences for this project include a lot of research into type design and namely, type designers. You have classic Swiss typography that has set the standard for structured type like Joseph Muller-Brockman and Jan Tschichold just to name a few. But overtime type has evolved from a structured rule following style to a more open ended experimental tone. New wave type foundries like Ohno Type, ABCDynamo, and Grilli Type create typefaces with a preliminary understanding of the standard design rules, but with pleasing adjustments made to these rules that allow for a more abstract font that retains a strong legible structure, a big goal of my typeface to achieve.

Within my work, I tend to grab a lot of inspiration from the sport of basketball in so many ways from the urban streetball culture, to the design language of the NBA both past and present. Seeing how a team logo for example, dominates in its success as a piece of design inspires me to make an impact with my design. Typography is such a delicate work of design that I see this working in my portfolio very successfully, because it allows for me to utilize it in the real world in so many ways, as opposed to say a piece in my portfolio that is a school driven project that doesn't really exist in the real design world.

In conclusion, I feel like this typeface is me giving back to the design community, as opposed to my thesis having some end-all be-all messiah-esque question that nobody really asked for, the benefits of the typeface will be how it exists in the real world. I really wish for this typeface to be able to be used by everybody and because the relation to basketball and the arts are so prevalent I see many situations involved with designers seeking to create a basketball

inspired piece of design, and hopefully utilizing visual characteristics of the typeface to further push their communication allowing for a more successful design in the end, and a more visually pleasing piece for the viewer to look at.

Thesis Abstract

My final thesis for my BFA is an exploration of type design by intersecting conceptual visuals that are influenced by the style and play of basketball. Through this intersection, I seek to create a unique typeface that is unlike any of its kind. Since the history of type design and the history of basketball have about 900 years between them (with type design being the older practice) it makes it impossible for there to be any existing typefaces that are influenced by basketball, because a good amount of current existing typefaces reference historical typefaces. I ultimately wish to see this implemented into the graphic design community to be used in other peoples graphic work and to possibly bridge a cultural gap between basketball and design.

The process of the project has been executed in a very traditional type design way. First beginning with research to familiarize myself with various letterforms, the process then transitions into calligraphy where pen is experimented upon paper, pushing letterforms in uncharacteristic ways with the organic tool of the pen. After digitizing the drawings in the computer, a lot of time is spent making adjustments and corrections, as it's imperative that the entire group of letters communicate harmoniously together.

I have never delved into type design before, and although me being a graphic designer has given me an advantage when it comes to working with type, creating one from scratch is a new journey that even in of itself is a constantly evolving practice, and it ultimately relies upon how much you want to push the typeface. I have built one family with five different weights and a more abstract font that exists as a single style, so comparably to existing typefaces it is a very small sample size of what type design can become.

Deliverables

2 Typefaces

- 1 Defense Type

 - 5 weights

 - 1 style

- 1 Offense Type

 - 1 weight

 - 1 style

- 1 Standard Type Specimen Pdf**

- 1 Final Presentation**