

Promoting Swiss Graphic Design and Typography Abroad: The Case of Paris in the 1960s

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The Swiss Living Abroad as an Asset for Switzerland

In October 1964, the French journalist Pierre Descargues dedicated an article to Swiss graphic designers based in Paris, describing them as a “Swiss mafia.”¹ By this term, the journalist obviously did not refer to a criminal organization; rather, he suggested their omnipresence and success in the French capital. In the 1960s, this promotion in the media was not an isolated case. Swiss newspapers and lifestyle magazines often celebrated the designers’ achievements, drawing attention to their innovative and entrepreneurial spirit²; defining them as a “valuable exportation asset.”³ By doing so, they started producing an image of these Swiss citizens working in Paris as experts in the field of graphic design and more broadly stressed their importance for the cultural influence of Switzerland. At the time of the reconstruction of Europe and the liberalization of world trade, Switzerland as a neutral country, “locked in the heart of Europe,” sought to reinforce its international visibility.⁴ The Swiss living abroad were an asset in achieving this goal because they contributed to promoting Swiss values and skills.⁵ They were considered “bridge builders . . . to strengthen the international position of the country”⁶; and they were instrumental in developing cultural and economic relations with others countries, as stated by the Federal Council in 1946.⁷ To maintain and expand the Swiss presence abroad, the Swiss government took measures to encourage emigration. By the end of the 1950s, the emigration section of the Federal Office of Industry Trade and Labor (BIGA), which was in charge of managing the flow of emigrants, developed an information service. Its aim was to promote emigration and provide free information and advice to Swiss citizens willing to work beyond the national borders.⁸ In addition, private organizations joined the federal authorities’ efforts to support successful settlement abroad. For example, the Schweizerischen Kaufmännischen Verein [Swiss Commercial Association], sought to stimulate emigration by organizing events, such as information sessions; these events were advertised in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* [New Zurich journal], a Swiss newspaper

- 1 Pierre Descargues, “Les Suisses font la loi à Paris” [The Swiss set the rules in Paris], *La Feuille d’Avis de Lausanne*, October 2, 1964, 4.
- 2 Andrée Taberlet, “Albert Hollenstein, l’homme qui ose” [Albert Hollenstein, the man who dares], *L’Echo illustré*, November 16, 1968, 23–30.
- 3 Jean Pierre Mac, “Valeur sure de notre exportation: les graphistes suisses à Paris” [a sure value for our export: Swiss graphic designers in Paris], *Tribune de Lausanne*, October 16, 1964, 5.
- 4 Edmond Müller and Friedrich Traugott Wahlen, *La Cinquième Suisse* (Berne: Organisation Des Suisses De L’étranger De La Nouvelle Société Helvétique, 1966), 30.
- 5 Raphaëlle Ruppen Costas, “Die Heimat ruft über das Meer” [Home calls across the sea], in *Die Schweiz anderswo—La Suisse ailleurs Auslandschweizerinnen—Schweizerinnen im Ausland Les Suisses de l’étranger = La Suisse Ailleurs: Les Suisses De L’étranger - Les Suisses à L’étranger* [Switzerland Elsewhere: The Swiss from Abroad - The Swiss Abroad], ed. Brigitte Studer et al., (Zürich: Chronos, 2014), 262.
- 6 See Angela Sanders, “Wonderland Peru’ Migration and the Making of an Andean Switzerland,” in *Colonial Switzerland: Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins*, ed. Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 115.
- 7 Federal Council, message to the Federal Assembly on extraordinary assistance for the Swiss abroad, May 10, 1946, 114, Federal Archives, Bern, <https://dodis.ch/2051>.
- 8 “Die Auswanderung als nationale Aufgabe,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, August 26, 1959, 10.

Figure 1

Advertisement published in *Graphis*, 22, 1948.
Courtesy of the digital library of *Graphis*,
www.graphis.com. © Graphis.

- 9 "Aufklärungskurse für zukünftige Ueberseer" [Information course for a future overseas], *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, October 7, 1956, 8.
- 10 Evert Endt, interview with the author, October 4, 2018, Paris. Endt left Switzerland in 1958 to work in Paris.
- 11 Peter Knapp, interview with the author, September 22, 2017, Paris.
- 12 Numerous Swiss-trained graphic designers and typographers moved abroad after World War II. See, e.g., Christian Brändle et al., eds., *Les Suisses de Paris: Grafik Und Typografie* (Zürich: Museum für Gestaltung Zürich, 2016); Roger Chatelain, *La typographie suisse du Bauhaus à Paris* (Lausanne: Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes, 2008); Davide Fornari, "Swiss Style, Made in Italy: Graphic Design Across the Border," in *Mapping Graphic Design History in Switzerland*, ed. Robert Lzicar and Davide Fornari (Zurich: Triest Verlag für Architektur, Design und Typografie, 2016), 152–80; Richard Hollis, *Swiss Graphic Design: The Origins and Growth of an International Style, 1920–1965* (London: Laurence King, 2006); Herb Lubalin Study Center of Design and Typography, *Jean Widmer, A Devotion to Modernism: Itinerary of a Designer from Zurich to Paris* (New York: Herb Lubalin Study Center of Design and Typography, 2003); and Michel Wlassikoff, *Histoire du graphisme en France* (Paris: Les Arts Décoratifs, 2005).
- 13 NHS, Secrétariat des Suisses à l'étranger: second annual report (1919–1920), Genève 1921, 5. When the NHS was founded in 1914, its main goal was to reinforce the cohesion between the linguistic regions of Switzerland. Later, the intention of strengthening a national consciousness was extended beyond the national borders.
- 14 "Swiss abroad" emerged as a national community, and became another region of Switzerland promoted using the label of "Fourth Switzerland" and then "Fifth Switzerland" in relation to the five linguistic regions of Switzerland, after

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with a large readership.⁹ Evert Endt, a Dutch graphic designer trained at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Zurich, reported that the idea of working abroad after his studies was widely stimulated by this general climate.¹⁰ Within the design community, teachers and professional journals widely encouraged working beyond the borders.¹¹ For example, *Graphis* served as an intermediary between freshly trained Swiss practitioners and companies based in North America, publishing advertisements with the aim of facilitating the professional establishment of practitioners overseas (see Figure 1).¹²

Different institutions and groups formed during this time to bind these Swiss emigrants to their home country. The movement had actually originated earlier, at the beginning of the twentieth century, through the formation of non-political and non-governmental organizations. For example, the New Helvetic Society (NHS) founded the Organization of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) in 1916 with the main goals to "keep alive in them the national spirit" and to make them "contribute to the economic and intellectual expansion of Switzerland."¹³ The Swiss citizens living abroad became an 'imagined' region of Switzerland first labelled "Fourth Switzerland" and then "Fifth Switzerland,"¹⁴ and functioned "as a surrogate 'national community.'"¹⁵ The OSA, recognized by the Swiss Confederation as the main representative of "Fifth Switzerland" in 1938, "cultivated 'Swissness' beyond territorial borders."¹⁶ Various institutions and groups organized conferences and concerts in these regions, and a monthly journal, *ECHO der Heimat* [Echo from Home], was diffused to promote Swiss culture to its co-nationals. Through these cultural events and media, graphic design and typography were presented as a constitutive element of Swiss culture and as embodying the nation's virtues,

Figure 2

A poster by Hans Kuechler and Philipp Giegel, commissioned in 1964 by the Swiss Tourist Office. The Zürcher Hochschule der Künste and Museum für Gestaltung Zürich. www.emuseum.ch. ©Katrin Kuechler, Bundesamt für Kultur (BAK), Bern.



the recognition of Romansh as a national language in 1938," in Gérald Arlettaz, "Introduction," in *Die Auslandschweizer im 20. Jahrhundert = Les Suisses de l'étranger au XXe siècle (Studien und Quellen: Veröffentlichungen des Schweizerischen Bundesarchivs = Etudes et sources: publications des Archives fédérales suisses = Studi e fonti: pubblicazioni dell'Archivio federale svizzero* 28, ed. Graf, Christoph, and Gérald Arlettaz (Bern etc.: P. Haupt, 2002), 11.

- 15 Sanders, "Wonderland" Peru: Migration and the Making of an Andean Switzerland, 110.
- 16 Angela Sanders, "Swissness abroad," in *Switzerland and Migration: Historical and Current Perspectives on a Changing Landscape*, ed. Barbara Lüthi, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 297.
- 17 René Bovey, "L'art de l'imprimé," *ECHO, revue des Suisses à l'étranger*, August 1964, n° 8, 32.
- 18 Manifesto of the GEHP, Federal Archives, Bern, E2001E#1978/84#308*.

such as "quality," "precision work," and "innovation."¹⁷ The promotion of Swiss graphic design in the Swiss design communities living abroad had, in fact, a wider scope because their members actively contributed to promote it in their host country. Such was the case in Paris in the 1960s.

The Swiss Based in Paris

The Groupe d'études helvétiques de Paris (GEHP) [Swiss Helvetic Studies Group of Paris], played an active role in the promotion of Swiss graphic design in Paris. Founded in 1963 under the authority of the New Helvetic Society, the group comprised Swiss diplomats, journalists, lawyers, and men and women of letters and aimed to strengthen relationships between the home country and the expatriate community in France.¹⁸ In 1966, the GEHP, jointly with the Fondation suisse de Paris (Swiss Pavilion), organized a cultural week at the *Cité internationale universitaire de Paris* [International University Campus] (January 13–23, 1966). The event's main objective was to promote "Swiss productions, artistic and intellectual

creation.”¹⁹ Graphic design, seen as well representing the “Swiss national character” as stated by the Swiss art historian and member of the Swiss foundation Robert L. Füglistner, occupied a central position in the program of the event.²⁰ Two exhibitions and a talk by Albert Hollenstein, a Swiss typographer based in Paris, were scheduled. The first exhibition displayed about forty posters which had been selected by the director of the Gewerbemuseum in Basel, Antonio Hernandez, along with Füglistner. The posters were mainly designed by well-known designers of the 1960s such as Armin Hofmann, Herbert Leupin, Richard-Paul Lhose, and Emil Ruder. Although the selection aimed first and foremost to illustrate the artistic qualities of Swiss design, it also served as a means to support commercial promotion of Swiss products and services. Among the selection, the half advertised Swiss brands or institutions such as Swiss National Tourism Office that promoted Switzerland as a perfect tourist destination (see Figure 2).

This strategy was not an isolated case: It was initially adopted by Pro Helvetia, the official organization in charge of the promotion of Swiss culture abroad. Beyond their cultural scope, the posters’ exhibitions also were a means to promote Switzerland’s leading export products and to develop commercial relations with the host country.²¹

Under the supervision of Hollenstein, the second exhibition of the event featured different printed materials designed by twelve Swiss graphic designers and typographers who had established a presence in Paris.²² In the context of France’s post-war reconstruction and rapid economic growth between 1945 and the beginning of the 1970s, these Swiss designers came in great numbers to the French capital.²³ Helped by the flourishing economy that Paris offered, they rapidly occupied key positions in French companies or ran successful businesses.²⁴ Promoting their work was a means to tie them to the home country and, at the same time, to promote their expertise to an international audience. The Swiss cultural week was indeed strategically organized at the International University Campus of Paris.

The Studio Hollenstein

Albert Hollenstein (1930–1974) trained as a typographer at the Brunner printing house in Lucerne between 1948 and 1952 and then moved to the French capital in 1953. He first worked as a typographer at the French advertising agency of R.L. Dupuy, where he adapted “Swiss typography for advertisements.”²⁵ After taking an apprenticeship in a photographic studio and gaining additional professional experience as chief of production in a publishing house, he decided to launch his own eponymous studio (1957–1974).

19 Robert L. Füglistner, Report of the Swiss cultural week, Archives de la Maison internationale de Paris, *Archives nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine*, 20090007/102.

20 Ibid. Along with graphic design, movies were projected and conferences about Swiss architecture and literature were scheduled.

21 Thomas Kadelbach, “Swiss made”: *Pro Helvetia et l’image de la Suisse à l’étranger (1945–1990)* (Neuchâtel: Editions Alphil-Presses Universitaires Suisses, 2013), 231.

22 The twelve included Théo Ballmer, Erwin Banz, Etienne Bucher-Cromières, Adrian Frutiger, Albert Hollenstein, Rolf Ibach, Gérard Ifert, Peter Knapp, Urs Landis, Beni Trutmann, Jean Widmer, and Tjerk Wicky.

23 This period was called the “Trente Glorieuses,” a term coined by French economist Jean Fourastié (1907–1990) in his book, *Les Trente Glorieuses, ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975* [Glorious Thirty or the invisible revolution from 1946 to 1975] (Paris: Fayard, 1979). Based on several sources—including interviews, French and Swiss professional journals of the period, and secondary literature—I identified through my research about seventy Swiss practitioners who moved to Paris between 1945 and the beginning of the 1970s.

24 Wlassikoff, *Histoire du graphisme*, 181.

25 Albert Hollenstein, personal notes, undated, Hugues Hollenstein Archive, Tours, France.

During the prime years of its existence, the firm was named Atelier Hollenstein and was located in Montmartre. In 1960, as the payroll extended to about 35 employees, Hollenstein rented a loft (previously a gymnasium) close to the former offices. At the same time, the studio acquired an official business structure, in the legal form of a limited company; and the name was changed, from Atelier Hollenstein to the English translation of “atelier”: Studio Hollenstein. With its payroll numbering in the hundreds at the end of the 1960s, the company moved to a bigger space in Saint-Denis, a northern suburb of Paris.²⁶ Thus, within a few years, Hollenstein had turned rapidly from a craftsman typographer to a “team leader” of “a creative core able to execute and manage diverse works of advertising and publishing,” as he explained in his personal notes.²⁷ Through the strategies he used to develop his business, Hollenstein, the “major ambassador of the new Swiss graphic arts,” was instrumental in promoting and disseminating Swiss graphic design in Paris.²⁸

In March 1963, the Swiss professional journal, *Typographische Monatsblätter* [Typographic Monthly Sheets], which specialized in typography, ran an article featuring Studio Hollenstein.²⁹ The article portrayed the Studio as a collaborative space where a team of young “artists” work in a playful ambiance. Beyond this energizing atmosphere, the author stresses the seriousness of this “organization,” defining the Studio as a “normal enterprise” so as to stress its professionalism.³⁰ In addition, the Studio, a “hotspot for graphic design,” is presented as the perfect place to develop a career: “Your promotion depends on your competencies,” Hollenstein often repeated to his staff. Stressing the possibility of professional development at the Studio, Hollenstein explained that, after completing an internship in typography, interns could soon become a chief of typography.³¹ With a mostly Swiss readership, the article arguably serves as an invitation addressed to freshly trained graphic designers or typographers who aimed to pursue their professional career in Paris. Hollenstein generally sought to hire his staff in Switzerland for their specific skills in typography, thus providing a technical quality that he “could not obtain” from his French employees.³² During the Studio’s professional activity, Hollenstein employed up to twenty Swiss-trained practitioners. In a job offer for the position of the Head of the typesetting department, published in the French Swiss newspaper, *Feuille d’avis de Lausanne* [Lausanne notice sheet], one of the main selection criteria is identified as “intransigence on quality.”³³ A constituent element of Swiss production, “quality” was, and still is, a cultural stereotype associated with Switzerland.³⁴ Hiring Swiss typographers was a means to achieve typographic quality, understood as a competitive strategy in the French market.

26 No official record exists providing the exact number of employees of the firm. The information provided here is based on interviews with employees and on an article in the Swiss magazine, Andrée Taberlet, “Albert Hollenstein, l’homme qui ose,” [Albert Hollenstein, the man who dares] *L’Echo illustré*, November 16, 1968, 23.

27 Albert Hollenstein, personal notes, undated, Hugues Hollenstein Archive, Tours, France.

28 Victor Malsy and Axel Langer, *Helvetica Forever: Story of a Typeface* (Baden: Lars Müller, 2009), 63.

29 “Studio Hollenstein Paris” *Typographische Monatsblätter* 82 (1963): n.p.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Albert Hollenstein, personal notes, undated, Hugues Hollenstein Archive, Tours, France.

33 *Feuille d’avis de Lausanne*, July 29–30, 1967, 24.

34 Thomas Kadelbach, “Switzerland in Geometric Abstraction,” <http://www.mirroroftheworld.ch/article/switzerland-in-geometric-abstraction.html> (accessed June 1, 2019).

Figure 3

Photograph of Albert Hollenstein (middle) and Edouard Hoffmann (right), ca. 1960. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Hollenstein Archive, Ville de Paris, Bibliothèque Forney. © Hollenstein family.



Not surprisingly, Hollenstein was the first to import into France the Swiss typeface Helvetica. The typeface was designed by Max Miedinger (1910–1980) for the Haas'sche Schriftgiesserei AG Type-foundry, under the art direction of Eduard Hoffmann (1892–1980), and was released in 1957.³⁵ Hollenstein's preliminary negotiations began in 1959 with one of the directors of the Haas Foundry, Edouard Hoffmann. A photograph from the archive shows Hollenstein with Hoffmann; they both are dressed formally in suits, symbolizing their commercial transaction (see Figure 3).

According to reports from Hoffmann, Hollenstein could not afford the cost of the new typeface, but he insisted on buying it.³⁶ Purchasing a typeface family and storing it was expensive. No clear evidence indicates whether Hollenstein purchased the complete series or only a part of it; nevertheless, it was a substantial investment. In the early 1960s, the Swiss typeface was sold exclusively in Paris at the Studio Hollenstein, first for hand-setting and later for machine setting. The typeface was widely advertised

35 Initially named Neue Haas Grotesk, Nouvelle antique Haas or Haas and later Helvetica. However, in France the typeface was still called Haas.

36 Edouard Hoffmann, telephone interview with the author, November 8, 2017.

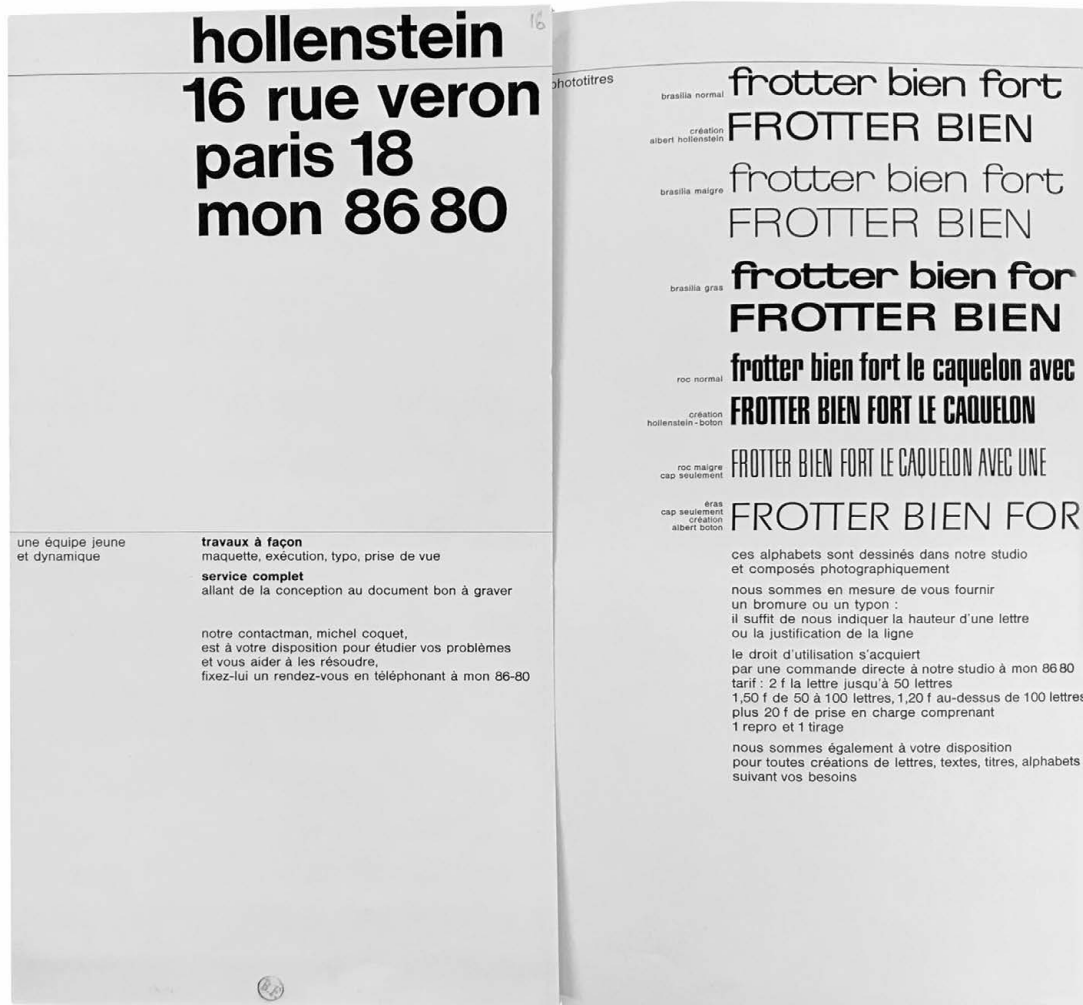


Figure 4
A self-promotional brochure designed by Studio Hollenstein, ca. 1965. Designer unknown. Courtesy of Hollenstein Archive, Ville de Paris, Bibliothèque Forney. © Hollenstein family.

- 37 "Nouvelle Antique – Haas," *Courrier graphique* (Paris: Le Courrier graphique 1960), 24.
- 38 Francine Tourneroche, interview with the author, November 24, 2017, Paris.
- 39 "Albert Hollenstein: l'évolution de la typographie," *Prisme international*, no. 1, (Paris. Impr. Interbus, 1968), 30. Translation from the French, "il ne suffisait pas de participer au lancement d'un style typographique. Il fallait en même temps apporter les caractères qui étaient l'âme de cette tendance."

in different French professional reviews dedicated to graphic design, typography, and industrial design, including *Courrier graphique* and *Esthétique industrielle* [Graphic messenger and Industrial aesthetics]. In 1960 an article in *Courrier graphique* featured different typefaces, providing technical details and listing the commercial and artistic imperatives for which the Swiss sans serif typeface is recommended—for the "daily needs for all city works of modern taste."³⁷ Francine Tourneroche, a French employee of the Studio, described the typeface as "new, revolutionary, light, elegant and modern."³⁸ The launch of this innovative typeface onto French soil cemented the reputation of the Studio, perfectly fitting with the modernizing trends of the post-war era. In addition, through and beyond this business scope, importing the Swiss typeface emerged as a patriotic mission. As Hollenstein reported, "participating in the launch of a typographic style was not enough. Instead, it was necessary to import the typeface to represent the soul of this trend."³⁹



Figure 5
 Photograph of Albert Hollenstein teaching a class in the cave of Studio Hollenstein, ca. 1965. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Hollenstein Archive, Ville de Paris, Bibliothèque Forney. © Hollenstein family.

As widely evidenced by the self-promotional documents of the Studio, Hollenstein strategically labeled the Studio as Swiss by different means. For example, he systematically used the Helvetica as the core element and combined it with a sober layout typical of the “Swiss style.” In addition, he used a fondue recipe text, a Swiss cultural stereotype, as a sample of typesetting in commercial catalogues and promotional brochures (see Figure 4).

Hollenstein not only promoted Swiss graphic design but also diffused its principles and methodologies. In the early 1960s, he developed a program of evening classes, named *Cours 19* [Course 19], and presented them in the cave of the first Studio located in rue Pilon 19 (see Figure 5). These one-year basic or advanced training evening classes, were at first a reaction to the backwardness of graphic design education in France.⁴⁰ Based on a transdisciplinary approach (typography, photography, and graphic design), Hollenstein regularly invited highly-trained practitioners coming from Switzerland, such as Peter and Sonja Knapp, Evert Endt, and Hans Rudolf Lutz, to give classes. The participants in the program came from advertising and industrial agencies or were Hollenstein’s employees who aimed to improve their skills in graphic design and typography. Lutz, a close collaborator of Hollenstein, supervised the final program of the academic year 1965/1966. At the end of the year, he published a book featuring exercises undertaken by the students.⁴¹ Both in its formal aspect

40 Albert Hollenstein, personal notes, undated, Hugues Hollenstein Archive, Tours, France.

41 Roch, Jacques, and Hans-Rudolf Lutz, *Cours 19: Exercices de base: travaux d'une année de cours du soir organisés par l'association 19, direction Albert Hollenstein* (Paris: Studio Hollenstein, 1966), n.p.

and in its educational scope, this book shared common traits with *Graphic Design Manual: Principles and Practice*, which had been published just one year before, in 1965, by the Swiss practitioner and teacher, Armin Hofmann.⁴² This teaching manual features the principles and methods of what was considered by the French design community as a “solid education practiced in Switzerland.”⁴³ Meanwhile, *Cours 19* was a “Swiss school” as formulated by Albert Botton (1932), a French employee of the Studio Hollenstein. He describes this program as a platform where knowledge in typography was disseminated in a “given style,” providing quality and rigor that was unknown in France at the time.⁴⁴

Conclusion

In this article, we have examined how Swiss designers living abroad constituted an asset for their home country. More specifically, we have shown how an informal network of actors based in Paris played a role in its cultural and economic development by promoting Swiss graphic design on the French stage. Nevertheless, these actors had different agendas. Swiss designer Albert Hollenstein imported Swiss products and disseminated Swiss graphic design methodologies for business purposes; meanwhile, the GEHP aimed to establish a Swiss community in Paris to strengthen ties with the Confederation. All in all, this movement contributed to advance graphic design as a Swiss field of expertise.

42 Armin Hofmann et al., *Methodik der Form- und Bildgestaltung : Aufbau, Synthese, Anwendung = Manuel de création graphique : Forme, synthèse, application = Graphic design manual: Principles and practice* (Teufen: A. Niggli), 1965.

43 “L’enseignement de la création graphique,” *Techniques graphiques*, no. 59 (September, 1965): 316.

44 Albert Botton, interview with the author, September 8, 2017, Paris.