

Medieval typography redesigned for the 21st century? It must be fun!

We bet that at the Casa Rex headquarters, the highly acclaimed international design consultancy with offices in São Paulo and London, people are throwing a party-celebrating both creativity and the win of awards. You see, during the last couple of days, Gustavo Piqueira and his multi-cultural team of more than 40 people won four Red Dot Awards (which will be added to the 250 international awards that already testify their creativity), while they also launched a project that's pure fun and intricate craft. A book, and an exhibition. Ok, that's enough.

Casa Rex's amazing book, Mateus, Marcos, Lucas e João, is neither for the faint hearted nor for those who don't appreciate the humorous latin spirit. Some think that this publication is a risky project. We think it's a bold and rather entertaining one, or like Casa Rex's head Gustavo Piqueira describes it: "a satirical, yet concise portrait of our era." The book transposes the idea of the Biblical saviour into the 21st Century, replaces the idea of Christ as saviour with anti-cellulite cream and there you have it. A masterfully crafted ode to the Age of Vacant Beauty. "I used the structure and the characters of the four Gospels, but to tell a quite different story – not of Christ, but about something that people crave in today's world as "salvation": a miraculous cosmetic, a anti-cellulite cream," says Gustavo. "There is an evident critique on hyperconsumerism and overvaluation of appearances, the superficial, in our times. It is a bit depressing that most people dream of a 'salvation' as small as 'looking younger'."

Four different versions of the trajectory of "the one who has come to save us", each written by one of the characters in its title are presented with opulent and complex design, "each one, like its medieval predecessors, presents a visual narrative." The typography of the book is an element that adds value to it, it is as important as its text. "The sheet metal cover is adorned with fake jewels that have been glued on manually and its pages are filled with contemporary versions of medieval historiated initials. All of them, like its medieval predecessors, present a visual narrative. However, instead of biblical scenes, these letters depict images of traffic jams, fast food, weapons and cell phones" says Gustavo.

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But it's not just a humorous commentary on our times. For mist academics, christianity was responsible for the consolidation of the written word as it is known today. The Bible has helped make society what it is today, it has changed how we read, how we process knowledge. The illuminated initials on the Bible pages played a vital role - far beyond their shape. They were the "decoration" of the sacred text and when combined with

drawings and figurative human or animal representations they were “Inhabited Initials”. When, at the beginning of the eighth century, this visual content started being used to illustrate passages of the supporting text (or to add images with a disconnected narrative), they became “historiated” initials. Right then, their function was no longer limited to the hierarchy of the text; they also acquired the task of establishing a visual narrative, and they also portrayed the value of each copy, depending on its complexity and finish. In many cases, the initial defined the very structure of the layout of a page, demonstrating its role as a protagonist in the visual design of a medieval manuscript. Such were the graphic possibilities that some reached a stage whereby they were barely perceived as being letters. It is not uncommon to experience difficulty in discerning what letter some historiated initials represent. The initials created for this project, as well as the medieval historiated initials, accrue functions and perform practical tasks at the same time, i.e. Mark up elements that aid the reading of a text (“letters that are larger than others”), and a narrative content that complements the written word.

This is a Nu New Testament designed and crafted for the neon signed Dark Ages we live in

Along with this publication, the exhibition “Inanis – iluminuras para o século 21” was also developed by the people at Casa Rex. It consists of the contemporary initials designed for the project – three complete Western alphabet sets created, available for free download at the project’s website – as well as a historical overview of the graphic evolution of the Bible dating from the dawn of Christianity until the discovery of the press in the West in the fifteenth century.

Mixing fiction, history and design, Gustavo Piqueira transposes illuminated medieval Bibles into the 21st century with the launch of a book that is not merely a parody of passages from the New Testament or a visually stunning publication for your coffee table book. It is a Bible for the neon signed Dark Ages we live in, while at the same time we enjoy our anti-cellulite creams.

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