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**SFMOMA PRESENTS DESIGN WORK BY 2X4  
2x4|DESIGN SERIES 3**

From May 13 through November 27, 2005, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) presents the exhibition *2x4/design series 3*, showcasing works by the New York–based graphic design firm 2x4. Organized by Joseph Rosa, the SFMOMA Helen Hilton Raiser Curator of Architecture and Design, *design series 3* is the Museum’s third annual exhibition devoted to emerging talents in the fields of architecture, graphic design, and industrial design. The objective of the series is to identify and provide exposure for artists and designers at the forefront of their disciplines who have not yet had solo museum exhibitions. A small-format catalogue will accompany the presentation.



2x4, *Vomit* (detail), custom non-repeating wallpaper, Prada Epicenter, New York, 2001

“Once perceived as a marginal discipline within twentieth-century design ideology, graphic design is changing into one of the most inclusive and visible design categories,” states Rosa. “2x4 is a leader in this ideological shift. Its irreverent, critical methodology moves branding and environmental design into new areas at once contextual and avant-garde.”

2x4 is a collaborative group of creative directors, writers, and designers founded by partners Michael Rock, Susan Sellers, and Georgianna Stout in 1994. With cutting-edge projects spanning print, Web, motion graphics, and environmental design, 2x4 emphasizes critical thinking and research. Known for intellectual content and explorations of rhetorical meaning, many of the studio’s projects question the nature of design and are as much about the thought process behind each work as they are about the finished product. This ideology, based on an algorithmic approach, is the foundation for 2x4’s pioneering model for design—one that makes process the product.

For this exhibition, 2x4 will present its full range of design activity through a series of graphic and media presentations. The gallery will consist primarily of custom-designed wallcoverings, video experiences, and a selection of book “sketches”—all representing high-profile projects executed for clientele including *ANY* magazine, the Brooklyn Museum, the Illinois Institute of Technology with Rem Koolhaas/Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), KnollTextiles, Prada, Princeton School of Architecture, and Swiss furniture manufacturer Vitra.

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## **Environmental Graphics**

*2x4/design series 3* highlights 2x4's striking reinvention of wallpaper as an avant-garde design medium, as evidenced by its environmental graphics for Prada's Epicenter in New York. Created as part of the store's experimental retail space and intricate multimedia element, 2x4's two-hundred-foot-long graphic installation stretches the full length of the dramatic Rem Koolhaas–designed space and can be replaced easily, permitting change with each season. In its premier incarnation the gigantic expanse of wallpaper featured a garish collage of banal and pornographic images cut into small pieces and superimposed by a floral pattern. A continually shifting field, the dynamic surface was visible from the street as a continuous, abstracted floral motif; in the store it could be read as individual images; and in close proximity the pattern broke down to individual pixels. Also on view will be a selection of video clips and animation commissioned by Prada and dispersed amid store merchandise on various-size plasma screens.

The exhibition also will feature 2x4's environmental design for the McCormick Tribune Campus Center at Illinois Institute of Technology, 2003. An architectural masterpiece designed in collaboration with Rem Koolhaas/OMA, the Center is a tribute to the modernist legend Mies van der Rohe, the campus's original designer. 2x4's all-encompassing environmental identity plays with notions of scale by employing a lexicon of some three-hundred pictograms—international symbols of humans—in a range of activities corresponding to the building's various functions. These icons serve as the basis for various graphic elements throughout the space and communicate on scales both large and small. Visitors entering the building are greeted by a twenty-foot-tall portrait of Mies composed of the small circular icons; upon closer inspection the circles reveal their own distinct graphics, each housing a stick figure in one of a seemingly infinite range of gestures.

2x4's two new collections of wall coverings and upholstery for KnollTextiles recall the Pop movement of the 1960s. The "Field Theory" collection features geometric patterns based on three simple spatial conditions: city, suburb, and "the space within." The "Chatter" collection, which references the digital stream of electronic transmissions—e-mails, chat rooms, instant messaging—is based on the letterforms of basic punctuation marks.

The exhibition will include 2x4's graphics for Vitra's first U.S. advertising campaign and retail interiors, which center on profuse, layered collages of forms resembling psychedelic Spirograph drawings or colorful, stylized flowers. The imagery derives from composites of Vitra's own products—Prouve and Panton chairs—repeated and rotated into circular forms. Playing on the well-known austerity of Vitra's high modernist aesthetic, 2x4's design process transforms these classic objects of ordered functionality back into pure decoration.

## **Book Design**

Exemplifying 2x4's genius for schematic proposals that deconstruct complex systems and ideas into easily understood language, a number of book projects will be featured, including catalogues for the Guggenheim museums in Berlin and New York; *Charette: The MoMA Urban Expansion Competition*, a 400-page submission for OMA's analysis of the Museum of Modern Art's expansion project; and *UnCity*, a limited-edition book designed for submission to a New York urban design competition. Described by Michael Rock as "one long sentence," *UnCity*'s fifty-eight-foot-long fold-out structure fluidly moves through illustrations, photographs, and text, diagramming intricate architectural ideas and distilling them into a concise narrative of simple gestures. A selection of three-

dimensional book studies will also be on view alongside monitors displaying time-lapse videos that flip through each example.

## Identity

Brand identity, such as 2x4's packaging for Malin+Goetz's skincare line, launched in February of 2004, comprises an additional component of the exhibition. The skincare products' modern-looking unisex labels integrate contemporary urban and old-world sensibilities, inspired by the ultra-plain chemist labels found in European pharmacies. Susan Sellers explains, "We wanted to do something clean and generic, but made idiosyncratic through printing processes and materials choices." The result is sleek packaging that evokes a global lifestyle and carries a fresh, minimalist appeal. Identities for the Brooklyn Museum and Nasher Sculpture Center also will be on view.

*2x4/design series 3* is accompanied by a catalogue (48 pages, soft cover, \$19.95) that includes more than fifty full-color reproductions, with an essay by Joseph Rosa and project descriptions by Darrin Alfred, curatorial associate for architecture and design at SFMOMA.

2x4's work has received honors from organizations and publications such as the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), the Smithsonian National Museum of Design, *Graphis*, *Print*, and *Communication Arts*, and it is part of SFMOMA's permanent collection. A prolific design critic and esteemed educator, founding partner Michael Rock has been a contributing editor at *I.D.* magazine and held various design fellowships worldwide including at the Jan Van Eyck Akademie in Maastricht, the Netherlands. He is the recipient of the 1999–2000 Rome Prize in Design from the American Academy in Rome. Rock is a professor of design at the Yale University School of Art and holds an M.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design.

*2x4/design series 3* is generously supported by an anonymous donor and Christine and Michael Murray.

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**Museum hours:** Open daily (except Wednesdays) 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas. Koret Visitor Education Center: Open daily (except Wednesdays) 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: open at 10 a.m.

**Admission prices:** Adults \$10; seniors \$7; students \$6. SFMOMA members and children twelve and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings, 6 to 8:45 p.m., admission is half price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

**Visit our Web site at [www.sfmoma.org](http://www.sfmoma.org) or call 415.357.4000 for more information.**

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