



## REX RAY and ZUZANA LICKO

June 2 - July 22, 2023

Opening Reception: **June 2, 6 - 9pm**

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**Gallery 16 is delighted to present an exhibition of two Bay Area pioneers who worked in both the design and fine art fields: Rex Ray and Zuzana Licko.**

In the early 1990s, the San Francisco Bay Area was the epicenter of computer-based design. These two artists helped shape the future while straddling the fields of fine art and graphic design.

Zuzana Licko founded *Emigre* magazine with her husband, fellow typographer and graphic designer Rudy VanderLans, in 1984. *Emigre* set the standard for digital typography and design and led to the creation of the Emigre Fonts type foundry, which is credited for being the first digital type foundry. Their magazine started out as a very small, self-published culture magazine that quickly morphed into a graphic design magazine that evolved into one of the most significant forums for design of the past few decades.

Chloe Veltman wrote on *Emigre* in the *New York Times*: "From 1984 to 2005, *Emigre* magazine achieved cult status. With their unconventional and striking use of fonts, publications like *Wired* and *McSweeney's*, both based in San Francisco, owe it a debt. In 2006 the Museum of Modern Art in New York acquired the entire *Emigre* magazine canon for its permanent design collection, and put the magazines on display for a year." The *Emigre* archive was acquired by the Letterform Archive in San Francisco.

In recent years, Licko has turned her attention to creating ceramics and textiles. "I've always enjoyed creating ceramic objects, and I need this to balance out the ephemeral nature of digital work. I find that my current work on modular ceramic sculptures and textiles is actually an extension of type design. I'm using font software to create sketches for my ceramic sculptures, which consist of repeating elements. Each sculpture has a variety of shapes that can be combined to make different sculptures. The font software helps me go through the possible variations. The elements for the textile designs are also created as fonts, which I configure into various patterns. Perhaps my focusing on a physical medium is a reaction against everything being consumed digitally these days."

Rex Ray (1956-2015) began his career as a graphic designer but soon devoted his studio practice to the making of handmade fine art. He began his career creating digital designs produced as guerrilla marketing for nightclubs and rock shows. He made the first t-shirts and posters for ACT UP, the political advocacy group working on behalf of people with AIDS. By the mid-1990s, Rex, like many who toil before a computer screen, began to covet the analog. Fatigued with the digital and feeling a sense of rebellion against his design success, Ray created an outpouring of artwork using the simplest of tools: scissors and glue. His complex canvases and collages were a reaction to the hours spent on his computer. "As my graphic design business grew, my clients got bigger and the money they offered rose in direct proportion to the decline in creativity they required. The collage was my rebellion against that. I began by turning off the computers, unplugging the phones, sitting down and making collage. I'd do them to silence that internal critic we all have — the inner voice that judges, raves, and berates us. I wanted to get back to that magic of making something out of nothing."

Ray was a beloved San Francisco artist and designer and major cultural force in the Bay Area. He was recognized worldwide for his distinct compositions, saturated colors, and unapologetic devotion to beauty. His art was widely popular and an accessible link to the modernist aesthetic. Ray referenced a variety of influences including the Arts and Crafts movement, Fluxus, Dadaism, organic and hard-edged abstraction, pattern and textile design, and Op Art. Artist and author Douglas Coupland wrote, "Rex's work inhabits that small sliver of territory where art and design don't quite so much overlap, but rather swap identities so quickly and fluidly that one is never sure which is which. His pieces function as luxury goods, but at the same time they're art, and quite rigorous art at that. His work is well aware of its mission to confuse you. Its ultimate goal is to trick somebody who ought to know better into saying, 'It's not art, it's design,' thus exposing a lack of knowledge about shifting dunes in the sands of visual history."

This exhibition will present works spanning twenty years of Rex Ray's prolific career. The show will present artwork never previously exhibited, including large-scale canvases, prints, and collages. A new book about the artist written by Gallery 16 founder Griff Williams will be available.