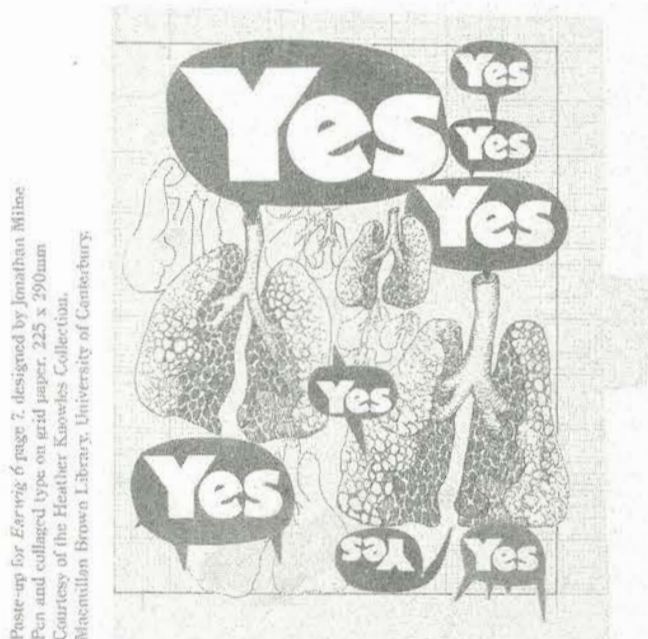


CHOMP: The Paste-ups of Earwig Magazine

Curated by Claudia Long
21 February – 29 March

Earwig magazine was a student publication launched by Jonathan Milne in 1967 when he took over the college magazine during his time at Palmerston North Teacher's College. It ran for 22 issues, and featured critical writing, poetry and political commentary. In 1969, Jonathan relocated to Auckland where he restarted *Earwig* as an independent counterculture magazine that operated as part of the international Underground Press Syndicate.¹ Jonathan and his co-editor Heather Knowles (née McInnes) produced the magazine at 10 Norfolk Street, Auckland, where they published 8 issues sporadically over a four-year period.

The leading objective of *Earwig* and the wider Underground Press Syndicate as described by Professor Linda-Jean Kenix in her historical examination of the magazine, was “to serve as an antidote to the indoctrination of mass media and mass society.”² This goal was pursued through psychedelic graphics, independent journalism and poetry submitted by readers. Creating an alternative aesthetic of bright colours, dense information and bold freehand lettering alongside confrontational imagery set the free press apart from the mainstream and aimed to foster communal efforts for liberation and resistance. In *Earwig's* case, the only requirement for their material was that it had “CHOMP.”³ Kenix points out that the meaning of CHOMP was never explicitly defined in the magazine. It was assumed that the audience would understand.



Paste-up for *Earwig* 6 page 7, designed by Jonathan Milne. Pen and collaged type on grid paper, 225 x 290mm. Courtesy of the Heather Knowles Collection, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.

Writing for the book *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia* (2016), Lorraine Wild and David Karwan describe how underground publishing of the late 1960s is characterised by a necessary employment of economical and accessible design and print methods (typewriters, mimeographs, etc.) and is therefore often more formally experimental, urgent, and dense in information than its aboveground counterparts.⁴ They explain that due to the affordable means of production, the entwinement of designer and audience, and complex “visual “argument”, underground design “smacked of amateurism to anyone with a trained eye.”⁵ Work like this has therefore been generally dismissed from the graphic design canon of the period, and has only recently begun to be taken more seriously.

Coming into graphic design in an era where it is becoming increasingly automated, I have enjoyed discovering the evidence of the human hands behind *Earwig*. Beyond the content of the magazine, I believe it is the physical effort that was put into the publication's design that demonstrates CHOMP. Revisiting and evaluating this work for its tactility feels especially relevant, now more than ever. The original artwork for *Earwig* magazine exhibits the labour involved in the design of each page.⁶ The pieces on display show a compilation of freehand illustration, transferrable ‘rub down’

lettering, photographs, and passages of text that have been cut out, arranged and adhered to cyan gridded pages. Prior to the introduction of the desktop computer graphic designers created these “paste-ups” to lay out compositions. Each layer corresponded to a different colour and offset lithography printing plate.⁷ The outcome existed only in the imagination and could only be ‘seen’ when eventually printed, with all separate colour layers combined. No screen previews, no ‘WYSIWYG.’⁸

These paste-ups communicate a type of care and effort that is uncommon in many commercial (aboveground) design practices today. To physically conceptualise, plan and construct a paste-up design exercises a level of thought, craft and complexity that is at odds with the resources, space, and time available in our contemporary world. Many design decisions now exist *within* a machine and are managed by software at the command of the designer. In recent years the smooth automation of digital platforms with embedded AI has led to an increasingly *frictionless* ability to generate graphic design without any real ‘labour’ at all. This new version of graphic design is fast, flexible, and immaterial – excellent for consumption and profit, not so great for anyone genuinely interested in the *doing* of design. We can now engage endlessly in a frictionless design of convenience. The old physical craft of graphic design – the CHOMP that is visible in the original artwork for *Earwig* magazine – is now obsolete.

J. L. Wall, writing about the lack of friction in our digital worlds, frames this development not just as the result of technology, but of the choices we have made about it. He also warns us, “we’ve chosen to prioritise efficiency over friction... despite plentiful evidence of the need for friction to help us learn, remember and be satisfied with our experiences.”⁹

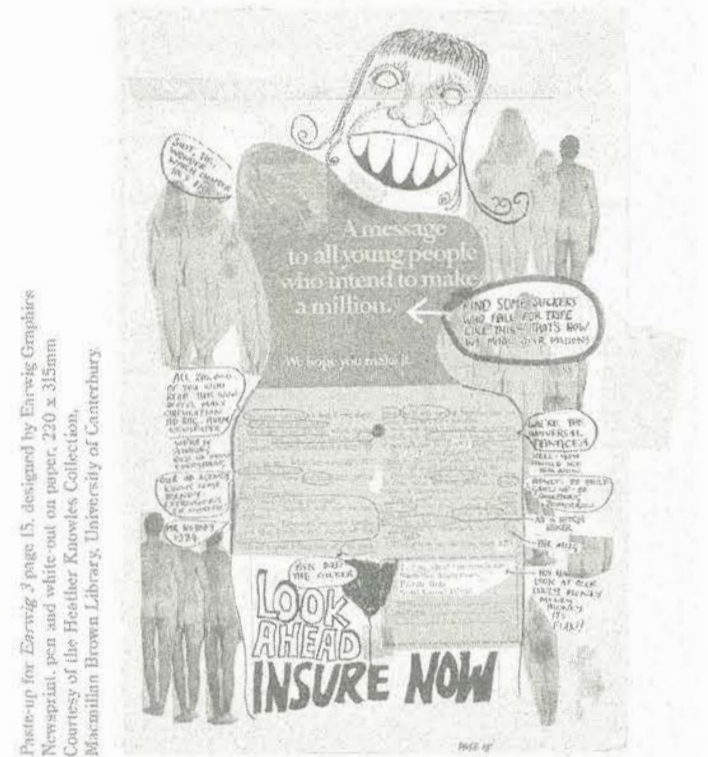
In November last year, two well-known New Zealand authors were controversially ruled out of the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards due to their books having AI generated covers.¹⁰ The decision to exclude the two books was later overturned, but the public conversation around regulating AI generated artwork in creative fields pointed to a larger concern about the ‘creep’ of AI into the things that we tend to really ‘care’ about. It seems we want to know that *somebody* put some *effort* in. Connecting effort with meaning, American economist Kyla Scanlon has suggested that “the most valuable commodity in the world is friction”.¹¹ And, according to art historian and curator Lars Bang Larsen, “our life environment has become so abstract... there is an understandable desire for that which is not mediated through digital media or conceived as readily transferable information.”¹² In a fully digital world people – some people at least – still yearn for physical relationships and tactile objects.

In the digital mainstream there is no shortage of subversive or ‘alternative’ content, and equally there is no limit to the design conventions that can be delivered on-screen. Through the algorithms of social media, we may engage with a constant feed of material that proliferates through controversy and outrage, but there is no landing place for the necessary friction to do anything about it. As Yuval Harari states in his most recent book *Nexus* (2024), “we have the ability to connect with billions of people all over the world, and yet humanity is closer than ever to annihilating itself.”¹³ Kyla Scanlon further explains “the more we optimise individual experiences for frictionlessness, the more collectively dysfunctional our systems become.”¹⁴ My interest in looking back in time to publications like *Earwig* comes from a hunch, an evolving hypothesis, that rethinking analogue processes and platforms might circumvent an otherwise dystopian trajectory.

While the cultural mainstream continues to move towards eliminating effort, and the path of least resistance is endless generation, manual practices that require more time and more effort become radical. ‘Slow design’ has been described as a form of creative activism that can contribute to a shift in values towards more sustainable practices. As Carolyn F. Strauss and Alistair Fuad-Luke

state in *The Slow Design Principles* (2008); “in looking beyond the needs and circumstances of the present day, slow designs are (behavioural) change agents.”¹⁵ Actively inconveniencing ourselves with tactile craft invites friction back into creative practices, that are surely anyway about creating ‘meaning’ – be that for ourselves as artists or for those that experience the work. This *generative friction* works against the modus operandi of the digital world. It becomes countercultural, acting to centre humanity – rather than technology and industry – in graphic design and wider creative practice. It creates room for, in the words of *Earwig*, CHOMP.

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Paste-up for *Earwig* 3 page 15, designed by Earwig Graphics. Newsprint, pen and white-out on paper, 220 x 315mm. Courtesy of the Heather Knowles Collection, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.

1. The Underground Press Syndicate (UPS) was a network of countercultural newspapers and magazines that operated from the mid-1960s through the 1970s. Members of the UPS allowed other members to freely reprint their content and often exchanged subscriptions with one another. This network was significant to the alternative movement in Aotearoa, as it allowed publishers to engage with and redistribute the philosophies of countercultural hubs in the United States and Europe.
2. Linda-Jean Kenix, *Resistance narratives in radical, alternative media: A historical examination of Earwig*, *Equid Novi*, 31(1), 2010, pp. 89-113.
3. *Ibid*
4. ‘Agency and Urgency: The Medium and Its Message’, *Hippie Modernism-The Struggle for Utopia*, by Lorraine Wild and David Karwan, Walker Art Center, 2015, p.46
5. *Ibid*
6. *Earwig* was produced in-house by Jonathan Milne and Heather McInnes. A collection of paste-ups, original artwork and documentation for the magazine, called the Heather Knowles Collection, is housed in the UC Art Collection and Macmillan Brown Archives at the Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.
7. Paste-up is a method of laying out page designs that predates computerised desktop publishing programmes. It involves adhering page elements such as type, imagery, lines or blocking out colour onto different layers to produce a composition, each layer corresponding to a different colour or opacity. Once completed, these pages would be called mechanicals, and they would be photographed by a flat camera to create a negative for each printing plate in the offset lithography printing process.
8. Pronounced “wiz-ee-wig”, WYSIWYG stands for “What You See Is What You Get.” It describes a user interface that allows the user to see an accurate representation of the result of what they are creating, while the document is being edited.
9. J. L. Wall, *Is the Lack of ‘Friction’ in Our Virtual World Leading to Liberalism’s Decline?*, published on *The Unpopulist*, 15.09.2025, https://www.theunpopulist.net/p/is-the-lack-of-friction-in-our-virtual-world-source-share&utm_medium=android&utm_campaign=triedRedirect=true
10. RNZ Morning Report, *Top writers ruled out of NZ book awards due to AI covers*, 18.11.2025, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/life/books/top-writers-ruled-out-of-nz-book-awards-due-to-ai-covers>
11. Kyla Scanlon, *The Most Valuable Commodity in the World is Friction*, published on *Substack*, 09.05.2025, <https://kyla.substack.com/p/the-most-valuable-commodity-in-the>
12. Lars Bang Larsen, ‘Tracing Circles with Other Centres: Notes on print and the materiality of affect’, essay in *Onomatopoeia 118: Can You Feel It? Effectuating Tactility and Print in the Contemporary*, edited by Freck Lomme, Set Margins, Eindhoven, 2017, p.42
13. Yuval Noah Harari, *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks From the Stone Age to AI*, Random House, 2024.
14. Kyla Scanlon, *The Most Valuable Commodity in the World is Friction*, published on *Substack*, 09.05.2025, <https://kyla.substack.com/p/the-most-valuable-commodity-in-the>
15. Carolyn F. Strauss, Alistair Fuad-Luke, *The Slow Design Principles*, conference paper published and presented at *Changing the Change: Design Visions, Proposals and Tools*, Torino, July 2008, pp. 1-10

List of Works

1. *Earwig 1 - 8^{1/2}* magazine covers
Edited and designed by Jonathan Milne and Heather McInnes, 1969 - 1973
Digital prints.
841 x 1090mm
Courtesy of Tama Milne
2. *OINK!* artwork for *Earwig 3* page 9
Designed by Earwig Graphics
Pen and white-out on paper.
275 x 315mm
3. Paste-up for *Earwig 3* page 15
Designed by Earwig Graphics
Newsprint, pen and white-out on paper.
220 x 315mm
4. Artwork for *Earwig 4* page 3
Designed by Jonathan Milne and Heather McInnes
Ink, pen and white-out on photograph.
180 x 180mm
5. Paste-up for *Earwig 4* page 3
Designed by Jonathan Milne and Heather McInnes
Dry transfer lettering and type writing on grid paper.
255 x 300mm
6. Paste-up for *Earwig 4* page 11
Designed by Jonathan Milne and Heather McInnes
Photograph and tape on grid paper.
248 x 380mm
7. Paste-up for *Earwig 5* page 34 & 11
Designed by Jonathan Milne and Ruffo
Pen, dry transfer lettering, type writing, tape and white-out on grid paper.
580 x 380mm
8. Paste-up for *Earwig 6* page 25
Designed by Jonathan Milne
Pen, dry transfer lettering, type writing and white-out on grid paper.
240 x 300mm
9. Paste-up for *Earwig 5* page 42
Designed by Jonathan Milne
Pen, dry transfer lettering, type writing, white-out and tape on grid paper.
255 x 350mm
10. Paste-up for *Earwig 7* page 12
Designed by Jonathan Milne
Pen, dry transfer lettering, type writing, white-out and tape on newsprint paper.
260 x 330mm
11. Paste-up for *Earwig 6* page 7
Designed by Jonathan Milne
Pen and collaged type on grid paper.
225 x 290mm
12. Paste-up for *Earwig 7* page 4
Designed by Jonathan Milne
Pen, dry transfer lettering and typewriting on grid paper.
585 x 450mm
13. Paste-up for *Earwig 7* page 5 & 47
Designed by Jonathan Milne
Pen, dry transfer lettering, photograph and typewriting on grid paper.
585 x 415mm
14. Paste-up for *Earwig 7* page 3 & 45
Designed by Jonathan Milne
Pen, dry transfer lettering and typewriting on grid paper.
585 x 420mm
15. Paste-up for *Earwig 7* page 9 & 15
Designed by Jonathan Milne
Photographs, pen and tape on grid paper.
585 x 450mm
16. Paste-up for *Heralding Earwig 6* cover
Designed by Jonathan Milne
Newsprint, pen, dry transfer lettering and typewriting on grid paper.
380 x 520mm

17. *Heralding Earwig 6*
Designed by Jonathan Milne, published by Earwig Graphic, 1971
Newsprint
300 x 440mm
18. *Earwig* magazine spread reproductions
Edited and designed by Jonathan Milne and Heather McInnes, 1969 - 1973
Earwig 1, page 2-3.
Earwig 2, page 4-5, 6-7.
Earwig 3, page 8-9, 14-15.
Earwig 4, page 2-3, 10-11.
Earwig 5, page 2-3, 10-11, 12-13, 34-35, 42-43.
Earwig 6, page 6-7, 24-25, 46-47.
Earwig 7, page 2-3, 4-5, 8-9, 12-13, 14-15, 44-45, 46-47.
Earwig 8^{1/2}, page 10-11, 26-27.
Digital prints.
594 x 420mm
Courtesy of Tama Milne
19. Paste-up for *Earwig 1* promotional poster
Designed by Jonathan Milne, 1969
Ink, pen and dry-transfer lettering on paper.
290 x 460mm

Content warning for this exhibition: provocative material and coarse language.

Original *Earwig* paste-up art work courtesy of the Heather Knowles Collection, Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.

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