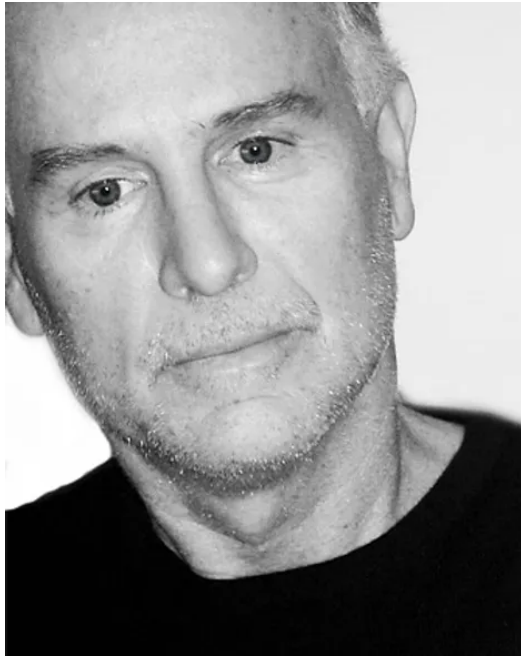


RIP Lanny Beal Sommese

1943-2022



“Know when your work is done, then just walk away before you F*ck up.”

The professional life of Lanny Sommese, graphic designer, poster maker, painter, and educator is easily told in numbers and letters: 100+ posters in the Library of Congress National Poster Collection; founder and longest running member (1976-2022) of the Philadelphia chapter of AIGA (American Institute of Graphic Arts); member in the prestigious Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI); artist whose work has been exhibited/is held in dozens of the world's major museums, from SFMoMA to the Pompidou Museum at Willinow in Warsaw to the Bibliotheque Nationale de France. Lanny spent 45 years inspiring and mentoring students as the head of Penn State University's graphic design program, sending dozens upon dozens on to distinguished careers as educators and successful designers in a multitude of industries; perennially awarded creator of gold awards from shows spanning the globe, from Biennial of the Poster in Mexico to the Triennial of the Stage Poster in Bulgaria; and the writer and/or subject of articles in a variety of the most important publications in his field, from *Graphis* and *Print* (New York) to *Diseno* (Mexico) to the Munich-based *Novum: World of Graphic Design*.

This last, *Novum*, the granddaddy of design publications (1924-2021) was the very magazine with which a chance encounter as a freshman at the University of Florida introduced Lanny into the field of design in the first place. Here's the story, as told to a journal in 2017: It was 1961, he was wandering through the stacks, and, as he recalled, "I picked up a book and the damn thing was about graphic design. It was called *Gebrauchsgraphik*, one of the major publications for graphic design. I opened the book and I was looking at my future. I said, 'This is what I want to do.'"

That honest memory, told guilelessly, brings the legend Lanny Sommese down to earth and gives a glimpse of the excited soul within the man and the creator, the one especially during the last few years of his life, took over, or came back into its own, charming and joyful. Lanny, kind and joyful, appeared to caregivers and others who made his acquaintance as Alzheimer's stole the parts of him that had sometimes terrified students, giving them reason to either persevere and do better or give up on design as a career, and also overtook the parts that had allowed for a long and productive partnership with his spouse, designer and design educator Kristin Sommese, in *Sommese Design* since 1989. In other words, as the ravaged and obscured the parts that had led to the successes tallied above, another, more forgiving and amazing soul came forth.

And yet this innocent and visionary Lanny was clearly also there within the productive design professional and the demanding, sometimes fierce professor. That insightful and canny Lanny was the force behind both the almost 50 years of cheerful, color-strewn posters for the Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts and those works that challenge the viewer to care, and to act. The Lanny Sommese whose rape hotline poster was so powerful that it brought university administrators into the discussion of its publicity, concerned that it was "too graphic" to be posted on campus, exhibited the same bold judgement as the one who put a striped cat on a spotted dog in front of a rainbow staff for the local arts festival. As Chip Kidd, former student, trusted friend, and highly successful book designer, novelist and nonfiction writer put it, writing in *NOVUM*, "



hands, these subjects [rape, war and racism] became giant political cartoons that posted everywhere and impossible to ignore." It is the penetrating eye, unique and undeviating, that animated the artist within Lanny Sommese and forever inspired, required, a response from us."

In their own work, Kristin and Lanny's children, Saige and Zane Sommese, have met what all parents wish for their children; they have gone beyond, combining the fervent discernment and discipline familiar to those who know the work of their parents with attention to the needs of today's world, creating meaningful messages in the contemporary context. Saige has continued to design the Arts Fest posters, at first with her father, most recently starting with some of his notebook sketches and adding her own ideas which include the introduction of the first female jester. Both Saige and Zane have been awarded high honors from Graphis for their work.

Always the sports competitor, from his earliest days as a basketball star in his birthplace East Moline, Illinois, and later at the University of Florida fighting Gators, to his later years as a fixture on the Joel Confer Softball Team and Toftrees Men's Golf League, Lanny Sommese found camaraderie on the court, the field and the course. There, he bantered with his various tribes, happily participating in a world where the mental calisthenics demanded by design were given over to the joyful physicality of game played among friends.

Lanny is survived by his beloved wife Kristin Sommese, daughter Saige Sommese, son Zane Sommese, sister Paula, father-in-law Robert J. Breslin, brothers Greg and Mike, and sister-in-laws Robin, Gwen, and Cathi Breslin, and grandchildren Madeline and Markus. In addition, there are many other dear family members, former students and assistants and friends that are too numerous to mention.

Lanny is preceded in death by his mother Maxine, daughter Lani Kaye, brother Joe, and mother-in-law Barbara Breslin.

In lieu of flowers, or in support of how he has touched your lives, his family asks that donations be made to the Lanny Sommese Foundation, whose mission will be to carry on his legacy of fostering excellence in design education and the dissemination of his work so that a wide audience can benefit from his vision and his passion. Further information will be available in the near future.

If you'd like more info about the Lanny Sommese Foundation, please sign up below

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