

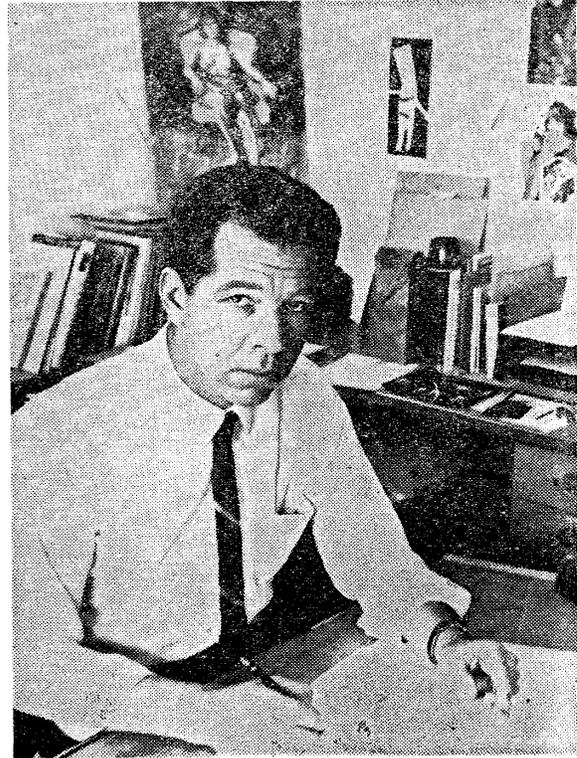
Southwesterner In Focus
HIS LIFE'S WORK IS COMPRESSED
INTO GRAPHIC ARTS WORD—
DESIGN

EPT Sundial 3/2/69

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Painter, illustrator, designer, photographer, whether it's in commercial or fine arts, he's equipped with the educational and professional background, and the talent that goes with it. Considering he's from a family of few if any artistic inclinations, it can only be concluded that all the inherited aesthetic characteristics from some ancestor far back in the past were incorporated into this one tall, lean, deep-voiced and quiet-spoken man.

Wolfe says he's been interested in art as long as he can remember, even when he was a young boy living on various farms with his father (an oil field worker), his mother, and his two brothers in such places as Enid, and Ponca City, Okla. Ponca City, he explains, is a former Indian Reservation, and he recalls with more an olfactory sense than nostalgia those good old days when he attended grammar school with many Indian classmates. It seems those Indian children still clung to some of their ancient tribal customs such as skunk hunting, and would come to class wearing the same clothes used during this particular sporting activity. Wolfe remarks wryly, "The classroom windows were always open on those occasions, no matter what the weather."



BASSEL WOLFE

MAJORED IN ART

When Wolfe was 10, the family moved to Houston, where he took private art lessons in the Houston Museum. After his father was killed in a Houston tornado in 1945, Mrs. Wolfe and her sons moved to Lubbock, where Bassel majored in art through junior high and high school. He then enrolled at Texas Tech, still majoring in art, once interrupting his college career to work at a nearby aircraft and missile plant, doing illustrations for manuals and handbooks for mechanics and pilots. His academic studies and his college credits progressed smoothly with the exception of trigonometry, a skull-busting subject necessary to a B.A. degree at that time.

Before tackling trig, though, he was drafted, and with his wife and children, found himself at Ft. Ord, near San Francisco, stationed with the 181st Engineers. Artist Wolfe was not assigned duty as a cook or mechanic, however, as Army custom sometimes de-

mands, but was given the job of sports editor, photographer, and staff artist of the post newspaper.

After completing his two years in the Army, Wolfe and his family returned to Lubbock, where he enrolled for an intensive six-week course in trigonometry, the only remaining obstacle to the attainment of his B.A. degree. As it turned out, the obstacle was insurmountable, but the lack of the degree seems to have had no bearing on his subsequent experiences and successes as a commercial artist. During the next few years he did free lance work, was art director of an ad agency in Dallas, then worked with trade journal advertising. But the latter position lacked what Wolfe wanted most: art and design with room for originality, creativity, and illustrative talent.

So Wolfe, following the advice of a friend, came to El Paso, in 1961, to visit and look into the city's graphic art possibilities. Three months after returning to Dallas, he, his wife Peggy, and his three children Tanya Maree, Perry Talbott, and Micaela Claire, moved to El Paso. There's a fourth child now, Shelby Bryce, age 5.

OWN STUDIO

After working with an advertising agency for a short while, he began his own studio, then, several years later, became one of the founders of what is now Marcom Inc. advertising agency. In addition, from 1962-65, he was an instructor of Art at U.T. El Paso. But, as Wolfe says, the pace became too demanding and "I found myself crossing and recrossing my own tracks," so in 1967 he was back at his original and individual stand—operating the only permanently established and independently owned magazine graphics studio in El Paso.

A description of the assignments handled by Wolfe's studio can be compressed into a single word—design. He designs everything from brochures for local businesses and industries, to waist-band tags for clothing manufacturers. He's even designed personalized Christmas cards. Whatever the job, he's happiest when he has free rein to develop and incorporate his own ideas for, as he says, "A true graphic artist has the ability to combine mentality (imagination) with manual dexterity, and thus create an artistic tangibility. This is why prefer to work on pamphlets, brochures, booklets, anything that affords me leeway and control."

This is also why Wolfe, though technically a commercial artist, prefers his own studio rather than working with regular advertising agencies which plan and carry out complete advertising programs often subject to the ideas and demands of sometimes non-artistic sponsors.

However, any commercial artist, including an independent one, says Wolfe, must serve two masters. "The finished art work must not only be aesthetically pleasing;" he explains, "it must also arrest the attention of and motivate the audience to a favorable action or reaction."

WORD GETS OUT

Sometimes the results do cause unexpected reactions. to mention one, Wolfe has been working, in his few free moments, on a large painting which he keeps in one of the studio workrooms. It's a portrait of a nude woman lying in a field of flowers and, until recently, had caused only complimentary comment with nary a raised eye brow. Recently, one of the cleaning women, a spinster, happened upon the painting while performing her domestic chores. She not only reacted, but also reported her discovery to any and everyone throughout the building and surrounding ar-

eas. The word spread and, as Wolfe says, “The next day my offices were crammed with people who had come to the ‘dirty’ painting.”

While it is true that much of its efforts are necessarily and realistically for monetary returns, a surprising amount of Wolfe's time has been spent on non-profit endeavors. He has designed awards, layouts, and letterheads, for numerous organizations such as churches, the Girls’ Softball Association, Cerebral Palsy, etc.

In this context, and as far as the staff of NOVA (U.T. El Paso’s quarterly magazine) is concerned, he’s worth his weight in gold. Ever since the founding of the magazine in 1935, Wolfe has contributed from 20 to 30 hours of his time without pay, to design the lay-out of each issue.

As a result, there have been awards and accolades for the magazine. In 1967 NOVA won first prize in the El Paso Ad Club contest in the category of “house organ” or “company publication” (it won second prize in 1966). And, in 1968, at an Atlanta Workshop, Abril Lamarque, one of the nation’s top magazine graphics experts, said that NOVA was the best example of a modern college magazine he had seen in years. Needless to say, NOVA considers Wolfe to be at the top of the list as far as unsung heroes are concerned.

GIVES IT CLASS

As NOVA editor Dale Walker puts it, “Without Bassel’s work, NOVA would be a run-of-the-mill college magazine. I get hundreds of them across my desk every year and few are worth a second glance. I think NOVA has class. It’s bigger, has better photography and writing and—best of all—it has the professional touch of the true graphics artist.”

Wolfe's professional career, past and present, is interlaced with a dream for the future. “Someday,” he says, “I want to turn out a magazine dealing with the Southwest, comparable to Holiday magazine in scope but with somewhat different editorial content.”

The dream might well be consummated sooner, but for one hang-up—the healthy hunk of money necessary for a publication measuring up to Wolfe’s high standards. The money might be more quickly forthcoming if Wolfe would concentrate solely on profit-making assignments. But then, a sense of values often takes precedence over the realization of a dream.

Wolfe sums it up in one brief, unadorned sentence: “The non-remunerative work that I do' is my way of repayment, for whatever talents I have, to the Supreme Being who' gave them to me.”

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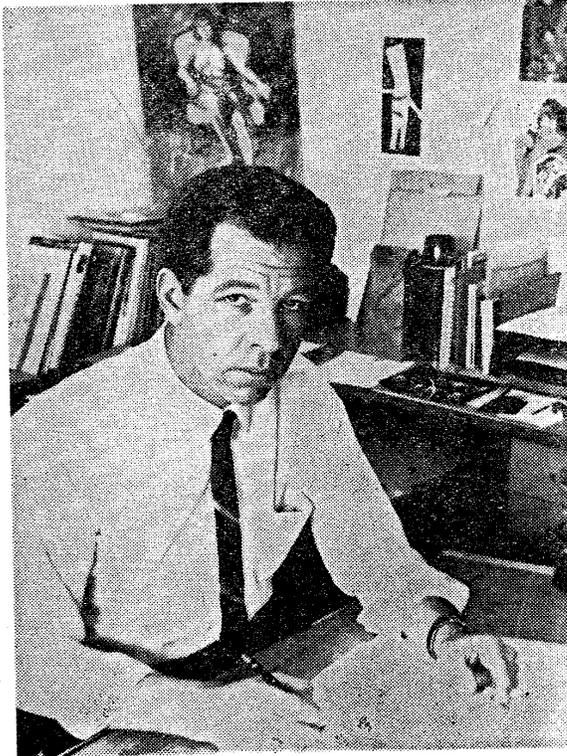
Southwestern In Focus

His Life's Work Is Graphic Arts Compressed Into Word--Design

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