



The History of the GE Monogram

*GE's Logo and Brand
Through the Years*

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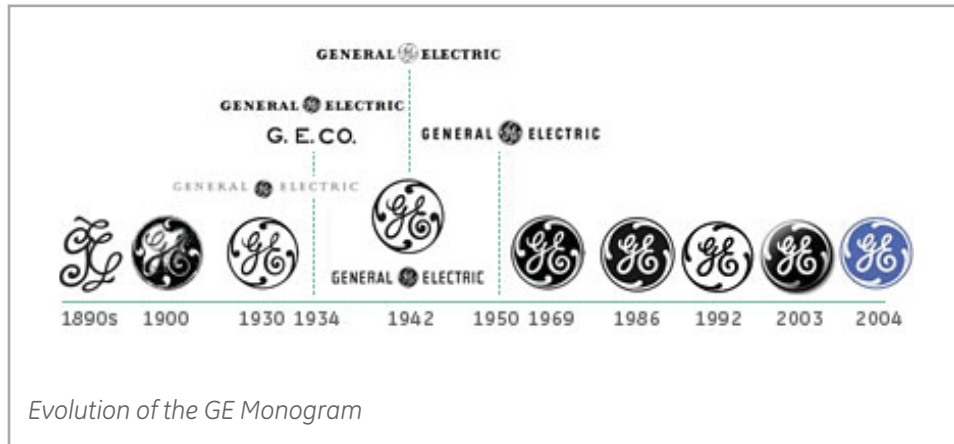
The GE Monogram

At Work in the World

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Location: GE World Headquarters
3135 Easton Turnpike
Fairfield, CT 06828

A Deep Dig into the Origins of the GE Monogram



Messrs. Rich? Stalberg? Glen? Or was it an unnamed contest winner?

Who originally designed our famous 112-year-old Monogram?

It depends on what you mean by designed.

The exact origin of the Monogram remains elusive. And while this article is one of many that have offered a guess over the past century, regrettably the mystery remains unsolved.

Theories, of course, abound, with most arising from historic memos identifying different executives who may or may not have come up with the original Monogram. These theories, of course, have become a part of our lore, binding us as a corporation and serving as part of the historic testament to who we are and what we stand for.

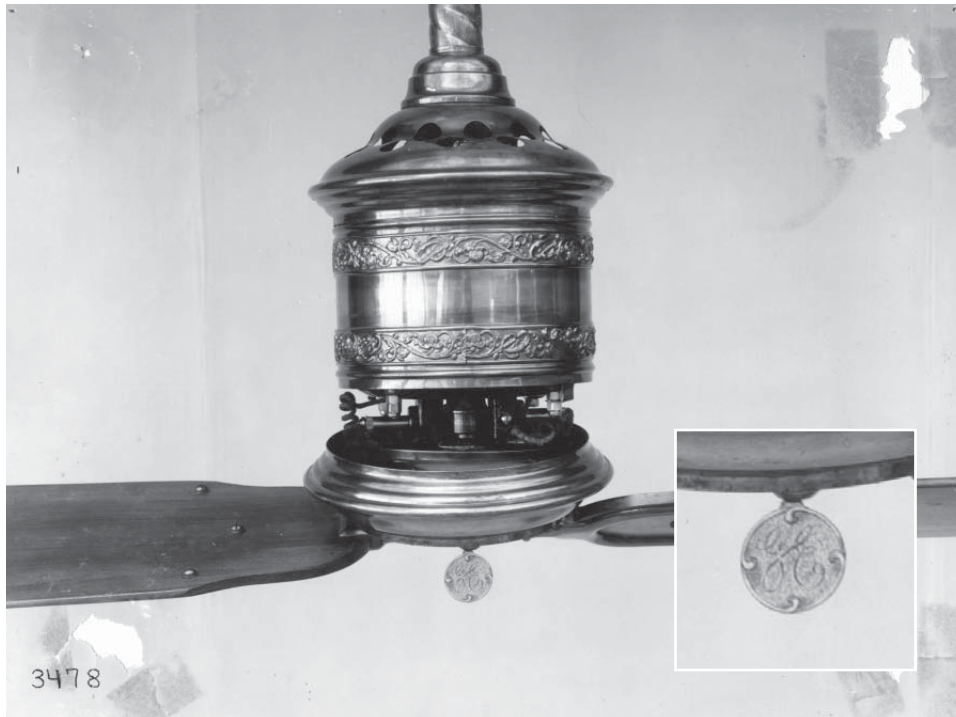
With this mythology in mind, we return to the subject of the genesis of the Monogram, hoping not to reveal some unknown truth, but rather to give light and example to our longstanding spirit of innovation and the pride that comes with being part of a dynamic, forward-moving company.

The first appearance of the Monogram

In 1892, almost a full decade before the Monogram was trademarked, the Edison General Electric Company and the Thomson-Houston Electric Company merged to form the General Electric Company. We believe the merged companies' logo took its "G" from the "General" in the first company's name and its "E" from "Electric" in the second's.

While we do not know why these two letters were originally rendered in script, or by whom, official company letters report that the Monogram—as defined by more clearly rendered lettering and the framing circle with four “curlicues”—made its first appearance in 1898 attached to a GE ceiling fan.

A passionate, personal account



The first reported sighting of the new GE Monogram, on a pendant at the end of a cord hanging from a ceiling fan in 1898.

Mr. Arthur L. Rich—a former employee in the Catalog Department—disagreed; he claimed that the first public appearance of the Monogram came a year later, in 1899, on the cover of a General Electric fan motor catalog. He also took credit for designing and introducing the Monogram, bragging: “It was at my suggestion that the G-E monogram was made part of the fan guard. I used to unconsciously write the initials ‘GE,’ making sure to swipe a ring around them while also adding ‘dingbats’ for embellishment.”

Rich went on to explain that the Monogram was “made out of my own enthusiasm and on my own time, and was a really good investment for the General Electric Company.”

Broadly accepted as the truth, Rich’s story began to be repeated, appearing in articles in the *GE Monogram* magazine and *Schenectady Works News* in 1926, and then

almost five decades later in the cover story of the Lighting Systems Department's (Henderson, NC) 1975 internal newsletter, which asked, "How Did We Obtain the GE Monogram?"

Editor challenges Rich

In 1977, the editor of the *Schenectady GE News* offered the first public challenge to Rich's claim, writing, "True story? Take careful heed. Not one scintilla of evidence exists."

The editor didn't explore the Monogram's origins, but rather highlighted how Bruce Barton (of the BDO ad agency) "brought the identity of the concept to maturity with his classic 1923 'The Initials of a Friend' ad."

Though Barton did not claim involvement in the Monogram's original design, the newspaper editor wrote that he recognized its value, concluding that "with his



"Initials of a Friend" 1920's radio ad

[Barton's] help, the GE Monogram ultimately became the rallying point for the Company's identity."

Draftsman takes credit

In 1944, yet another former GE employee stepped forth with a very detailed—and a very different—account of the Monogram's beginnings.

Mr. J. A. McManus— a River Works employee who claimed to have been investigating the Monogram since 1933—told the story of a retired draftsman, Sven Stalberg, of the Lynn, MA, Drawing Office.

According to McManus, "Stalberg made the actual script of the now famous GE Monogram. He said it was he who used the German script and that there was no question that it was his work." Stalberg, however, did not claim that the inspiration was his, but rather that the design had been suggested to him.

In support of Stalberg's claim, McManus claimed that he had the Lynn file drawing in his possession and that it was drawn by a Mr. Charles Kelley, who used to work for Stalberg.

McManus also noted that "this drawing shows the cast plate being the Monogram for the fan hub, and that the Monogram is as complete as what is used today."

Lawyer discourages further exploration

Interest in the Monogram origination story persisted. In 1951, Neil Reynolds of the Schenectady Patent Department wrote that, after "exhaustive research," his department was unable to confirm any account "as to the true origin of the trademark." He then discouraged any further discussion about the Monogram:

"There is evidence that use of the Monogram was made at least a year or two prior to the [trademark] application date. In light of this, it is not desirable—either from the point of view of valid history or the Company's interest—to encourage the dissemination or publication of stories about the origin of the Monogram. I would recommend that, if you are asked, you reply that you don't know—that it was before your time and it is lost in the dim past of history. That will probably be the truest answer an inquirer will get. I recommend that further currency of these stories be discouraged."

New stories continue to emerge

Says World-famous  was Designed 27 Years Ago

The origin of the now world-famous  monogram has long been a subject of discussion. It has been the trade mark of our Company for so many years that its history seems to be somewhat hazy. Below is an account of how it came to be designed and adopted, as contained in a recent letter from Arthur L. Rich, now of New York, to H. C. Meyers, of the Name Plate Section of the Publicity Department, in response to an inquiry from Mr. Meyers. Contributions on the subject from others will be welcomed by this magazine. Mr. Rich was formerly attached to what was then known as the Catalog Department, which has since been merged into what is now the Publicity Department. He left the service of the Company about 1898, and is now in the advertising business in New York. His letter follows.

—KERRICK'S NOTE.

I HAVE just located, and as per your request am sending herewith, a copy of the cover of the General Electric fan motor catalogue of some twenty-seven years ago, showing the first public appearance of the now universally-known G-E monogram trade mark.

Enclosed, also, is a proof of a cut showing a single G-E mark in a modestly decorative background, used as an inside catalogue page; for it was from my original drawing from which this cut was made, that the Nameplate Department made its tracing of the G-E mark for the blueprints that went into the record books of years ago, from which copies for its many uses were later made.

"It was at my suggestion that the G-E monogram was made part of the fan guard of the fan motors, this being the first of its general use on apparatus; and to 'put it over,' as we say today, I painted the mark in correct position on a fan motor photograph to show how it would look. It 'went over'—big.

"This design, which I made nearly thirty years ago, was done at the request of certain active officials of the Company, who felt that an organization such as the General Electric should have something for general use that would be what we now call a 'tie-in' between the product and its advertising. As I happened to have then, as now, the distinction of being the only advertising artist ever born in captivity, I was asked to develop a trade mark.

"I first submitted a design using in a lettered monogram the caduceus of Mercury as

typifying the General Electric Company's place in matters electrical, accompanying my sketch with the explanation of its application—that the rod or staff denotes 'power or authority,' the serpents 'wisdom,' and the two wings 'diligence and activity,' all of which the General Electric Company could claim. It was given careful consideration, with the final decision, however, that the caduceus could be, and might already be, used by other business organizations in other lines, and that something distinctively 'General Electric' that could not conflict with any other trade mark, would be desirable. So I was asked to try again.

"I was given no suggestion as to what to use, and it was left entirely to me. Being one of those eternally busy General Electric men who worked day and night, just to keep their hand in, I could find no time at the office to devote to the trade mark matter, and it was delayed, consequently, until I finally took it up on my own time at my home (as I really had done with the first one), so as to dispose of it. It did not take long, however, to develop it, for the idea came to me in a flash. And this is how:

"About eight years before that time, I lived in Zanesville, Ohio, where I knew most pleasantly a Mr. G. E. Gebest, who had been in his earlier years (and long before I knew him) a circus band master, and who later settled in Zanesville and became the orchestra leader at the theater, and taught the violin and other musical instruments. He always carried his violin in a green baize bag instead of in the regulation case, and he one day brought to me a new bag, asking that I put his initials, G. E. G., in my 'beautiful handwriting' on the bag in order that he might have them worked in in silk. So in my alleged 'best' and with a piece



COVER DESIGN AND INSIDE PAGE OF FAN CATALOGUE WHICH FIRST CARRIED THE G-E MONOGRAM. MR. C. A. COFFIN, WHEN SHOWN THE COVER DESIGN, REMARKED, 'I SUPPOSE IT IS ALL RIGHT, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE A KIDNEY STEW'



The Arthur L. Rich story as it appeared in a 1926 article in GE Monogram Magazine (part 1)

The Monogram

of chalk, I wrote on the bag—pleased him very much. And so it transpired that when I took up this trademark matter, one evening, casting about in my mind as to what would be distinctively 'General Electric,' I unconsciously and in my everyday handwriting wrote the initials, *GE*, and was immediately reminded of that similar monogram that I had made years before. So I swept a ring around it in a single stroke, and further engrossed it with four ingrowing dingbats, and it looked good to me. I then made a finished sketch, which had advance approval of 'the wife of my youth,' who had watched the development. When I submitted it there was no discussion as to its being anything but distinctively 'General Electric.' It was suggested, however, by Mr. E. W. Rice, that perhaps the 'GE' with the word Company in smaller letters, and Schenectady NY USA also might be advisable; but I argued that the General Electric Company



ARTHUR L. RICH
AS HE LOOKED 27 YEARS AGO

was 'a big concern that needed nothing more than G E to identify and locate it—G E would never be lost.' Mr. J. R. Lovejoy agreed with me, and with an approving smile, and after the design had gone the rounds for comment, it was returned to me as O.K.—and there you are.

"The General Electric monogram design was made out of my own enthusiasm for work, and on my own time, and was a really 'good investment' for the General Electric Company, for it cost them not a dollar; and out of their judicious exercise of 'power and wisdom and diligence and activity' (with which I had previously undertaken to invest them), they have made it worth millions.

"If Mr. Charles Gebest (the son of G.E.)—who has been for many years the musical wizard of the George M. Cohan theatrical productions, has ever noticed the similarity between the monogram of the General Electric Company on the electric fan above his desk and the monogram on his late father's violin bag, he will know how it happened, should this ever come to his attention."

The Arthur L. Rich story as it appeared in a 1926 article in GE Monogram Magazine (part 2)

General Electric Company - History SCHENECTADY GE NEWS June 10, 1947 PAGE 3 Origin of the GE Monogram?

(Editor's Note: The GE News often receives inquiries as to the origin of the GE monogram. The following article, which appeared in a recent issue of the GE Monogram, should help answer any questions those readers may have.)

Advertising: Establishing GE's Identity

Myths are hard to bring down to reality. Take the many myths about the origin of the emblem we call the GE monogram. Although careful searches of the past indicate these stories are entirely without substantiation, they continue to be circulated. Here's one of the most widely quoted versions.

So the story goes, a New York man named A. L. Rich was visited years ago in Zanesville, Ohio, by a G. E. Gebest who had been a circus handmaster. Admiring Mr. Rich's handwriting, Mr. Gebest one day brought Mr. Rich a new violin bag and asked him to put his initials, G.E.G., on the bag so they could be worked in silk. With a piece of chalk, Mr. Rich wrote *GE* on the bag. Years later, Mr. Rich suggested similar initials be placed on the guards of GE fan motors, and he painted the letters *GE* on a fan motor photograph to show how it would look. GE officials reportedly liked the idea and Mr. Rich later wrote the initials—then swept a ring around them and further embellished them with four dingbats.

True story? Take careful heed. Not one scintilla of evidence exists to substantiate this story. GE's monogram is first mentioned in the GE Sales Committee minutes of

July 1, 1899, and GE patent attorneys could find no trace of the monogram prior to that. Or of Mr. Rich. And isn't it ironic that the name "Gebest" is so close to "GE is best"?

At a recent GE Customer Communications Council meeting in Atlanta, David W. Burke, Manager-Corporate Communications, observed that the GE monogram established GE's company identity earlier than that of most companies, and he went on to explain how the monogram's usage evolved and was finally defined by corporate advertising policy.

Burke noted that around 1900 GE had two ad men, F. H. Gale (later GE's first advertising manager) and E. H. Mullen. They advertised GE's entire line of industrial-consumer products—everything from Curtis steam turbines and mercury arc lights to light bulbs and flatirons.

As GE entered so many different markets, Gale became concerned about the Company's possible loss of its central identity. So about 1905 he created a standard ad format with "General Electric Company" across the top and identification information across the bottom. Hundreds of ads appeared in this format.

Ironically, either Gale changed his mind or the "creatives" of the

day later rebelled. The standard format all but disappeared within a few years.

But the appetite for a common identity lived on. Soon the GE monogram—first used in an ad in 1899—gained prominence as an identity symbol. And in 1910 the Company's signature first appeared somewhat as we know it today—a black-field monogram with white letters, centered between "General" and "Electric." Alas—only a few such ads appeared in 1910, and none for the next 15 years.

Modern institutional/corporate advertising began in 1916 when ads appeared explaining the Company's purpose and what the monogram meant. These efforts culminated in 1923 when the BDDO advertising agency's Bruce Barton brought the identity concept to maturity with his classic ad, "The Initials of a Friend" (right).

With Barton's help, the GE monogram ultimately became the rallying point for Company identity. After "floating" in and out of GE ads from 1899 to 1925 (as well as "floating" all over the ad layout), the monogram received regular use from 1925 onward as part of an official signature. Registered in 1934, GE's present signature is one of General Electric's principal corporate trademarks, and has been used in combination with various ad slogans.

Article in Schenectady GE News questioning Rich's claim

Reynolds was displeased because the *GE Monogram* magazine editor had told the story of a Mr. B.A. Garrett. Apparently, in 1900, Garrett asked Mr. J. Ellis Glen to design a monogram in the Boston office—and Garrett had suggested “the circle enclosing the script initials.” According to the editor’s retelling, Glen drew it, and “a few days later, the Monogram was given publicity. In the meantime, the only change having been the addition of the ‘curlicues’ inside the circle.”

Although the “Glen” story was the third regarding the origin of the Monogram, the editor of the *GE Monogram* thought it fit to circulate a fourth: In a 1950 letter, R. T. Kahn of Chicago wrote, “I was told that [the Monogram’s] source was the result of a contest, and that the winner of that contest is related to me.”

An enduring legacy and increased recognition

Despite the many uncertainties surrounding its origin, the Monogram endures as a compelling icon not only with the public, but also in the hearts and minds of GE employees and their families, as evidenced by the following clip from a young girl:



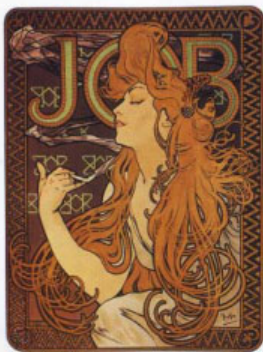
A 5-year old's perspective of GE

Furthermore, it holds its place in art history and popular culture, appearing in textbooks highlighting superb examples of the Art Nouveau and Ukiyo design traditions, the 1964 World’s Fair as well as a silkscreen collaboration between the artists Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat.

A final note



Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat in 1985, standing in front of “General Electric with Waiter”



13-37



13-38



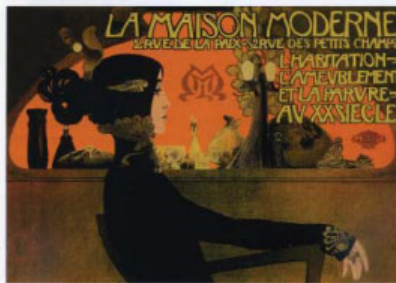
13-39



13-40



13-41



13-42

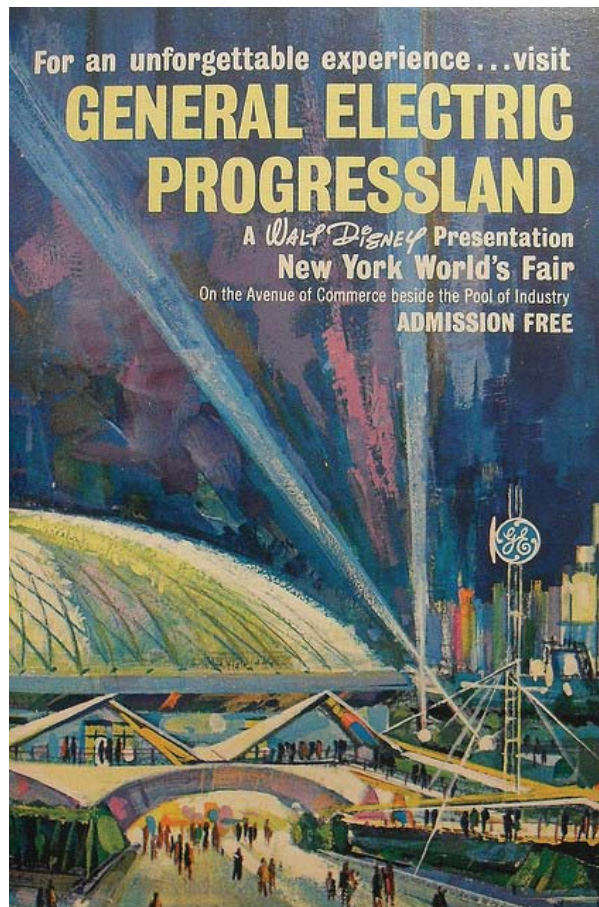


13-43



13-44

The Monogram is seen by many as a fine example of Art Nouveau design



GE's "Progressland" at the 1964 World's Fair

It has been said that the Monogram "just appeared." While that's highly unlikely, we do know that despite its mysterious past, it has been a tremendous asset to GE over the past 100+ years, inspiring employees and serving as a symbol to our customers that we have been and always will be a company where imaginations are always at work.

1920s GE Fan Ad

Digital print
30 1/4 x 24 in. (framed) 22 1/2 x 15 3/4 in. (mat opening)
001.MONO



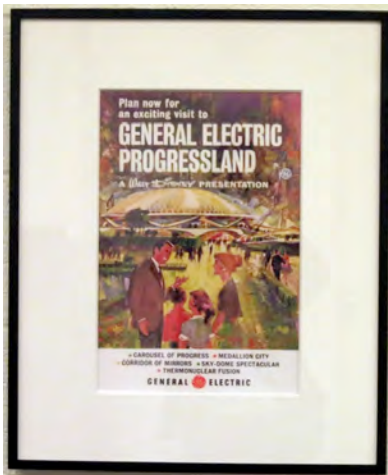
1923 GE Monogram Ad

2012
Digital print
28 1/2 x 23 5/8 in. (framed) 22 1/2 x 16 1/4 in. (mat opening)
002.MONO



1964 World's Fair GE Promotion

2012
Digital print
23 3/4 x 19 3/8 in. (framed) 15 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (mat opening)
003.MONO



Arthur Rich Schenectady Works News Article, 1925

2012
Digital Print
27 1/4 x 21 3/4 in. (framed) 19 1/2 x 15 in. (mat opening)
010.MONO



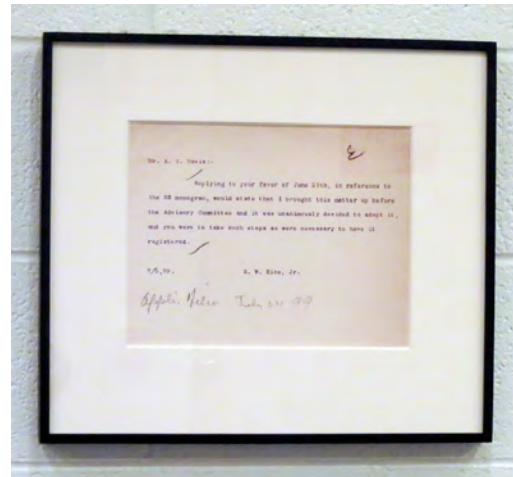
Bruce Barton 1977 Article Regarding GE Monogram

2012
Digital print
22 5/8 x 26 3/4 in. (framed) 16 x 22 1/2 in. (mat opening)
012.MONO



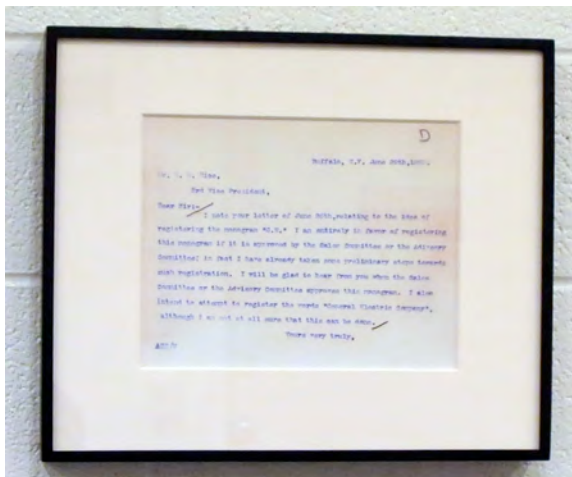
Corporate Letter Regarding GE Monogram, 1899

2012
Digital print
17 3/8 x 14 1/2 in. (framed) 11 x 8 1/2 in. (mat opening)
013A.MONO



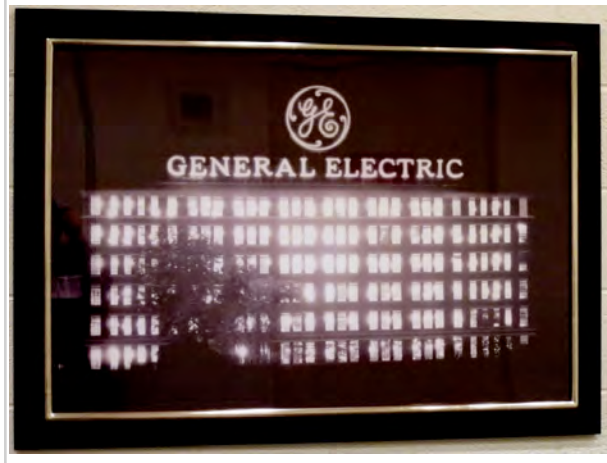
Corporate Letter Regarding GE Monogram, 1900

2012
Digital print
15 1/2 x 17 3/8 in. (framed) 8 1/2 x 11 in. (mat opening)
013B.MONO



GE Corporate Signage on Building

2012
Digital print
32 x 45 in. (framed) 26 1/2 x 39 1/2 in. (image)
014.MONO



GE Fan Photograph, 1899

2012

Digital print

23 7/8 x 28 3/4 in. (framed) 17 3/4 x 23 in. (mat opening)

015.MONO



GE Monogram Sketch from 1899

2012

Digital print

23 1/4 x 28 1/2 in. (framed) 15 x 22 1/2 in. (mat opening)

016.MONO



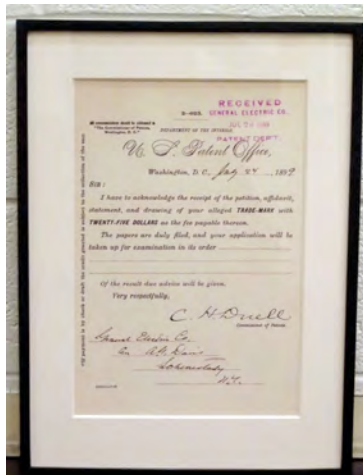
GE Monogram Trademark Registration Certificate, 1899

2012

Digital print

20 1/8 x 14 3/4 in. (framed) 15 x 10 1/8 in. (mat opening)

018.MONO



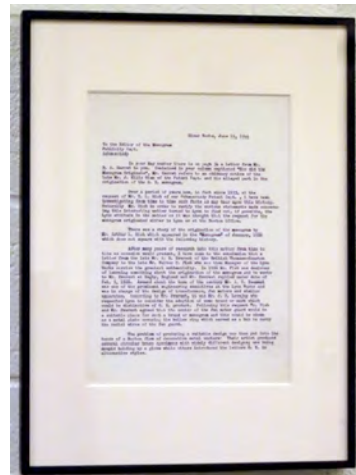
1944 JA McManus Letter Regarding Sven Stalberg's GE Monogram Design

2012

Digital print

20 3/8 x 15 in. (framed) 13 x 9 1/4 in. (mat opening)

019.MONO



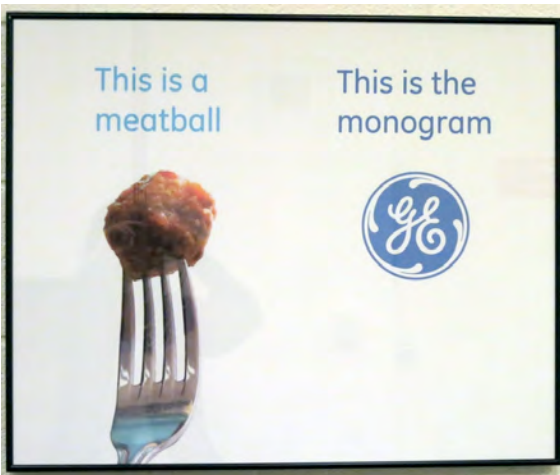
Warhol Basquiat Showing, 1977
Digital print
26 1/8 x 35 1/8 (framed) 20 7/8 x 29 7/8 (image)
020.MONO



GE Metal Monogram Signage
Metal
52 in. (diameter)
021.MONO



This is a Meatball, This is a Monogram Ad
Digital print
23 1/4 x 28 1/2 in. (framed) 22 1/2 x 27 3/4 in. (image)
022.MONO



Precision in Big Things... Precision in the Tiniest, 1947-48
Vintage Print Ad
22 x 18 1/4 in. (framed) 14 3/4 x 11 in. (mat opening)
030.MONO



GE Research & Engineering Help Everybody

Vintage Print Ad
22 x 18 1/4 in. (framed) 13 1/2 x 11 in. (mat opening)
032.MONO



Scientists & Engineers Make New Things Happen

Vintage Print Ad
22 x 18 1/4 in. (framed) 13 1/2 x 10 7/8 in. (mat opening)
034.MONO



Untitled (570 Lex Clock)

Photograph
23 5/8 x 28 5/8 in. (framed) 19 x 24 in. (mat opening)
042.MONO



Circles of Confusion

1965
Screenprint
32 1/4 x 28 1/4 in. (framed) (23 7/8 x 19 7/8 in. (image))
Ed. # XLVIII
043.MONO



GE Refrigerator Warranty Certificate

Warranty certificate
15 3/8 x 18 7/8 in. (framed) 7 x 9 in. (image)
045.MONO



Untitled (GE Graffiti on Metropolitan Ave)

2012
Photograph
28 5/8 x 23 1/4 in. (framed) 24 x 18 1/2 in. (mat opening)
046.MONO



Monogram and Flag

2012
Digital print
23 3/8 x 28 1/2 in. (framed) 23 3/4 x 18 3/4 in (mat opening)
056.MONO



Contemporary Schenectady Building

2012
Digital print
32 x 45 in. (framed) 26 1/2 x 39 1/2 in. (image)
057.MONO



Adventures Inside the Atom GE Comic Book, 1948

2012
Digital print
27 1/4 x 21 3/4 in. (framed) 19 1/4 x 14 in. (mat opening)
058.MONO



It takes a lot of odd looking General Electric lamps to fight a war!

Vintage Print Ad
19 7/8 x 16 1/2 in. (framed) 10 x 14 in. (image)
059.MONO



Full Range Radio

Vintage Print Ad
20 x 16 3/8 in. (framed) 11 X 8 1/2 in. (paper)
060.MONO



Blow the heat out of your kitchen

1930
Vintage Print Ad
22 1/2 x 16 1/4 in. (framed); 13 7/8 x 10 3/4 in. (paper)
063.MONO



Vintage GE Fan

Metal fan
11 1/2 x 9 1/2 in.
064.MONO



Untitled (GE Monogram Asian Crochet)

Silk string
54 3/4 x 26 1/2 in. (framed) 45 x 19 1/2 in. (mat opening)
065.MONO





From left to right: Introductory Panels, Monogram v. Meatball, "Circles of Confusion" (James Rosenquist)



From right to left: 570 Lex Clock (J. Simmons), Warhol & Basquiat in front of GE Logo Artwork (Corbis Images), GE Graffiti (C. Nelson)



From left to right: Introductory Panels, GE Monogram Trademark Memos, Sketch, and Registration Certificate



From right to left: Vintage Fan Advertisement, Vintage Fan, Vintage 1920's Fan Advertisement, Ceiling Fan with Monogram Tag Photo



From left to right: "The Initials of a Friend" ad, GE Monogram and Flag



From right to left: Vintage Adventures Inside the Atom GE Comic Book, 1964 World's Fair Promotion



Schenectady General Electric Building



Schenectady General Electric Building



From left to right: GE Vintage Ads, Various Claims of Monogram Invention



From right to left: GE Vintage Ads, Various Claims of Monogram Invention



From left to right: Vintage GE Ad, GE Refrigerator Warranty Certificate, GE Vintage Lightbulb Ad



GE Bridgeport Facility Metal Monogram Signage



GE Monogram Asian Crochet