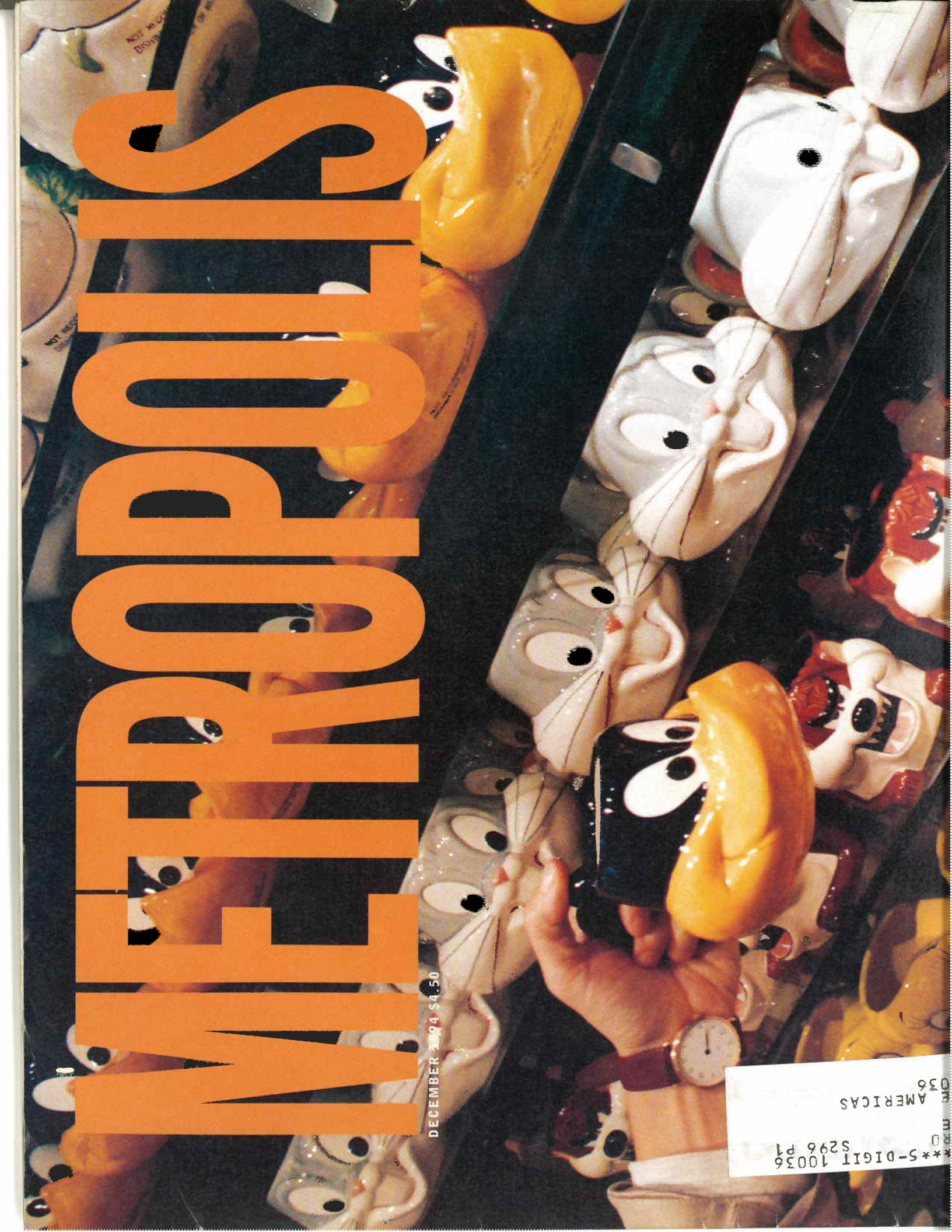


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buyers have expressed interest. "Universally the doorways, which traditionally tend to be narrow. Simple changes—like different ways. There are also separate plans for six to eight alternative bath-home simply because they like its style. LISA BURDIGE

signs of the times



"When I was a boy growing up in Dublin, everyone would just leave their door unlocked," says graphic designer Brendan Murphy. "The door was always open for a friend or a person in need." Such sentiments are at the heart of a progressive new signage system devised by the designer that re-considers the way information is communicated to people with sight, hearing, speech, and mobility impairments. Murphy's set of symbols—including an open door image, which signifies a barrier-free environment—also signal a new way to think about access codes in the built environment.

As a graduate student in design at the University of Cincinnati, Murphy received an education foundation grant from the Society of Environmental Graphic Designers (SEGD) to develop new symbols of access. While researching the project, it occurred to him that European countries may be more "socially ori-

ented." As he explains, "I was an athlete in Ireland, and I ran a lot of races with wheelchair athletes. Also, there were kids with cerebral palsy and multiple sclerosis. They were basically one of the lads."

That kind of background—and thinking—was clearly behind Murphy's symbol for wheelchair access. The designer found that the existing icon—which depicts a wheelchair user in a rigid, motionless position—was essentially a negative expression. So he modified the symbol by repositioning the angle of the torso, pitching it slightly forward, and by moving the arms back, to indicate a pushing motion. Murphy's image conveys a sense of forward momentum.

The designer also adapted the familiar "okay" hand gesture to be used as a symbol of access for hearing- and speech-impaired people, because, he says, we all use hand signals in places ranging from the stock exchange to the baseball diamond. Rather than segregating people with disabilities, such an approach in-

tegrates all users. As Murphy concludes, "It conveys the intended message in a much clearer fashion than, as has been suggested, a pair of lips or an ear with a slash through it."

Not surprisingly, when Murphy's access symbols were presented at SEGD's national conference in Seattle last August, they generated a lot of interest among members. And while liability concerns have prevented SEGD from formally endorsing the system, the organization is encouraging its use when and where people feel comfortable with it. "As a more sensitive and practical set of symbols, we feel these are going in the right direction," says Lynn Jeffery, SEGD education director. Indeed, whether these images eventually become acceptable by law or simply through general use, they open the door to some new thinking about universal access. AKIKO BUSCH



Designer Brendan Murphy brought forward thinking—and forward motion—to the wheelchair access icon.

