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Graphic Design In The Mechanical Age: Selections From The Merrill C. Berman Collection



Synopsis

Drawing from Merrill C. Berman's private collection of 20th-century posters, adverts, photomontages and graphic ephemera, this book showcases over 200 examples of progressive graphic design from the 1920s and 30s. European, Soviet and American avant-garde designers and artists of the time, using new technologies of mass production and mass distribution, marketed everything from salad oil and cigarettes to communism, utopian socialism and the avant-garde itself. These selections from the Berman Collection include works by well-known artists (Lissitzky, Rodchenko, Cassandre, Man Ray and others) and by lesser-known masters. The book begins by detailing Berman's role in shaping the history of graphic design as he amassed his collection. The authors then investigate the filtering of avant-garde design into mass produced posters and advertisements, the evolution of design production techniques in the Machine Age and the avant-garde's promotion of itself. This book accompanies an exhibition that opens at the Williams College Museum of Art in April 1998, then travels to the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in February 1999, and later to Spain, Japan and The Henry Museum in Seattle.

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Customer Reviews

Deborah Rothschild, Ellen Lupton, and Dara Goldstein The look of the machine age was crafted in the design studio before machinery had been invented that could approximate it. For a poster advertising the 1924 film *Kino Eye*, Aleksandr Rodchenko employed crayon to mimic the continuous tonal range of photography, and hand-lettered a "machine" font of his own rather than use the

old-fashioned scripts (ultimately based on handwriting) that were available on printers' blocks. A 1928 poster for a municipal pool in Germany seemingly depicts a muscled diver in midair, but a surviving production photograph shows that the swimsuited model was stretched out stiffly on a towel and "diving" into a rose bush, his clothes tossed behind him. This beautifully printed selection of 210 objects (on view now at Williams College, moving to the Cooper-Hewitt in February) forms the basis for intelligent essays on the dialectical evolutions of design and production, on the Dadaists' unwitting invention of modern promotionalism, and on the often conflicting commercial and political uses to which that exuberant visual language was turned. If today the diver and the rose-bush look like something out of Magritte, there is more than coincidence involved. Don't see the ensemble in a Fruitopia ad tomorrow? Look for it in Russian campaign posters next year.

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this book is a real find! there are some truly magnificent and stylistically ground-breaking samples of early 20th century graphic design here. most of the selections represent the pinnacle of the german and russian avante-garde designers of the 1920's and 30's, including alexandr rodchenko, el lissitsky, lazlo-moholy nagy and many others. But there is also a decent overview of french and american designers as well. this period of work is profound because of it's ingenuity, daring graphic experiments in text and layout, and it's use of collage, photos and text, and dada influences to create bold graphic statements. the pieces included in this volume span many different media in the graphic arts...war propaganda, art exhibition posters, product advertising, civil program posters, packaging, publishing, and even fine art. it is a testament to this collection of designers, because many of them worked simultaneously in many different mediums all at once, especially those involved in the bauhaus movement and the russian avante-garde artists. this book is an excellent overview of this period in graphic design, and would provide endless inspiration for anybody involved in any field of design. i cannot recommend it strongly enough!

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