Course sample

Please note that due to copyright reasons, some images may be greyed out in this course sample.

Graphic Design Level 1

Core Concepts

Level HE4 – 40 CATS

Front cover illustration
Poster advertising the film 'Chelovek s Kino-Apparatom' Man with a Movie Camera
V and G Stenberg

Contents

Times suggested here are only a guideline: you may want to spend a lot more. Research and writing time, time for reflecting and logging your learning are included.

Introduction

Your OCA Student Handbook should be able to answer most questions about the basics of this course and all other OCA courses so keep this to hand.

Course aims

This course aims to provide you with a practical and contextual introduction to the visual language, practices and processes of graphic design. This is a hands-on course that also explores the role graphic design plays in our lives. The course material, exercises and assignments will help you to develop an understanding of the basic visual language of graphic design, looking at typography, composition, colour, images and layout.

Assignments will focus on paper-based graphic design practices, such as poster design, page layout and logo design producing designs on a computer. Creative problem solving, research and ideas generation processes will be explored, tested and evaluated as effective ways to resolve design problems. An appreciation of the historical and contemporary contexts of design will be developed by exploring other designers' work and by examining the role of design in the world around you. You will be encouraged to put into practice what you have learnt through by undertaking a range of practical assignments that pose 'real world' graphic design problems, these require both visual flare and an appreciation of how to communicate to people.

By the end of the course you will be able to use the basic visual language of graphic design, appreciating the demands of both the form of design and its functions; you will be able to develop typographical ideas into visual outcomes, taking into account their historical and cultural contexts; and be able to generate creative ideas and visual outcomes in response to your own chosen brief.

Your tutor

Your tutor is your main point of contact with OCA. Before you start work make sure that you're clear about your tuition arrangements. The OCA tuition system is explained in some detail in your **Student Handbook**.

If you haven't already done so, please write a paragraph or two about your experience to date. Add background information about anything that you think may be relevant for your tutor to know about you (your profile) – for example, your own practice, your reasons for exploring this subject, what you expect to achieve from taking the course. Email or post your profile to your tutor as soon as possible. This will help them understand how best to support you during the course.

Arrange with your tutor how you'll deal with any queries that arise between assignments. This could be by email, telephone or post. You may agree, for instance, that you'll scan or photograph sketchbook images and upload them to the OCA website or a free website such as Flickr or Picassa in between tutorials, if you need your tutor to comment on something in particular, or if you have a problem that you need help with.

You may want to consider setting up your own blog, as a way of sharing your ongoing progress with your tutor. A blog can be treated as an online sketchbook containing your work, links to research and reflections, and can be set up for free using websites such as Blogger, Tumblr or Wordpress.

Send or show your tutor a cross-section of the work that you've done for each assignment in addition to the finished piece(s). This should be preliminary work for the final assignment piece as well as a sample of the work you've done for the various exercises. You could scan or photograph the relevant pages of your learning log and email them to your tutor and then post the final assignment piece, or you could post your learning log as an online blog on the OCA website so that your tutor can see how your work is developing between assignments. It's particularly important that your tutor sees regular evidence of your development.

Make sure that you label any work that you send to your tutor with your name, student number and the assignment number. Your tutor will get back to you as soon as possible after receiving your assignment but this may take a little time. Continue with the course while you're waiting.

Make pencil notes on the back of all your work as it develops. This will enable your tutor immediately to see what thoughts and issues you've had with each piece of work.

Formal assessment

Read the section on assessment in your *Student Handbook* at an early stage in the course. The *Assessment and how to get qualified* study guide gives more detailed information about assessment and accreditation. For assessment you'll need to submit a cross-section of the work you've done on the course. You'll also need to submit your learning log, sketchbooks and tutor reports.

Your learning log

Keeping a learning log is an integral part of this and every other OCA course. If you're new to OCA courses, read the *Keeping sketchbooks and learning logs* study guide for further information.

Planning ahead

This Level 1 course represents 400 hours of learning time. You should allow around 20% of this time for reflection and learning log development. The course is divided into five parts. Within each part are several exercises, research points and reflection questions to prompt you to use your learning log.

The times given are only approximate. The time you spend on each exercise will depend on how quickly you work, the time available to you, how easy or hard you find each exercise and how quickly you want to complete the course. Don't worry if you take more or less time than suggested provided that you're not getting too bogged down in a particular part of the course and that your tutor is happy with the work that you're producing. If it helps, draft a rough study plan and revisit this at the end of each part.

Using technology

For the purposes of this course you will need to have access to Photoshop, Illustrator and desk top publishing software that will allow you to create and manipulate images, create graphics and work on layouts. You will also need a range of typefaces or fonts to choose from. It might be difficult to undertake your assignments without some of these tools. You should also have the ability to use your technology.

Since technology moves so fast, and as there are plenty of tutorials available elsewhere, this course doesn't go into the detail of each software package. It does however, assume that you have access to and familiarity with basic techniques such as scanning and image manipulation, creating simple graphics, and laying out images and text and that you will practice and develop your skills with your specific software during the course.

Spending too long working on a computer can be bad for your health, having a negative effect on your posture, wrists and eyesight. Make sure your computer, desk and chair are comfortable and you take regular breaks.

You can't do this course without using specialist graphic design computer software, particularly if you are considering formal assessment and moving towards working as a professional graphic designer. You do need to have and learn to use such software.
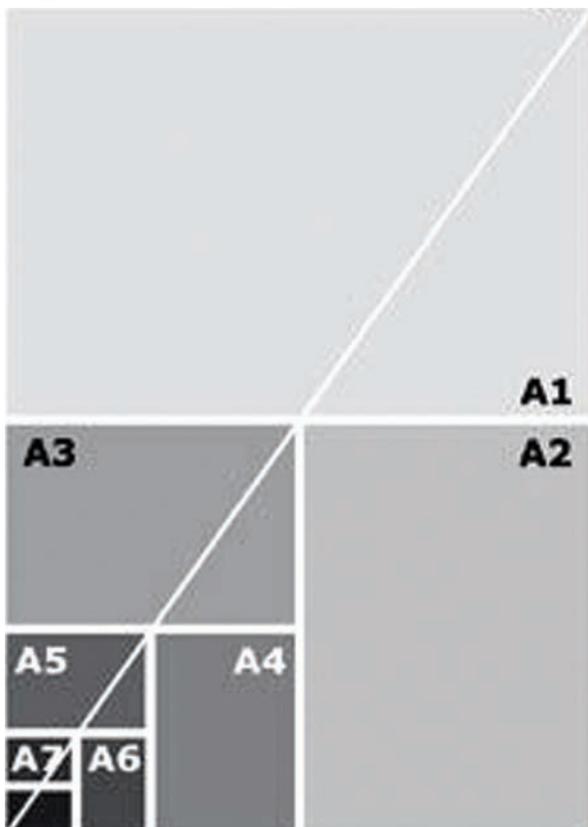
Paper

Paper sizes

The exercises and assignment in this course focus on paper-based graphic design. Throughout the course sizes for paper and artwork will be ISO sizes that are the standard for Europe and most of the rest of the world. Your computer software and printer settings should also use these sizes

A sizes describe paper. B sizes are larger and used for printing as they include a trim and C sizes are for envelopes to contain the A sizes.
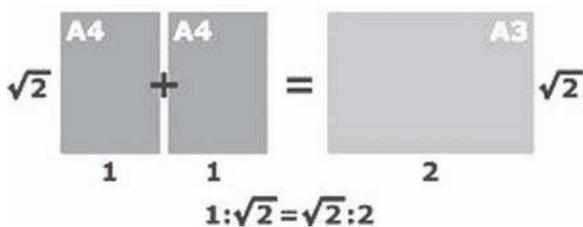
In the ISO paper size system all sheet sizes have a width to height ratio of the square root of two (1:1.4142). By placing two sheets of A series paper next to each other, or by cutting one in half parallel to its shorter side, the resulting sheet will again have the same width to height ratio.

The A sizes (mm)

A0	841 x 1189
A1	594 x 841
A2	420 x 594
A3	297 x 420
A4	210 x 297
A5	148 x 210
A6	105 x 148
A7	74 x 105
A8	52 x 74

Which paper?

The majority of the exercises in this course rely on paper as part of the finished designs. If you are going to get your design work professionally printed you will need to talk to a printer about your choice of paper and paper finishes. Even if you are just using your home printer it is worth becoming aware of the paper 'stock' available to you.

Paper is made out of organic cellulose fibres held together at a molecular level, generally it is made out of wood but it can also be made out of old rags, hemp, nettles, straw, bamboo, cotton, papyrus and other types of grasses. These are broken down into wood pulp either mechanically or chemically. Chemically made wood pulp is used for printing. It uses agents such as calcium to break up the wood fibres, leaving them more intact and giving a higher quality paper. The demand for finer, better quality papers has increased and paper is now bleached by chlorine free, non toxic methods. Paper can be made by machine, as in the case of most commercially available papers but it can also be easily made by hand. Paper is an excellent material to recycle and most papers already include 30% recycled material.

Different types of paper

Paper comes in all sorts of different kinds and qualities including boards and card. It is usually described by its weight and finish.

The weight of paper provides a way of specifying paper by 'thickness'. Paper is counted (with each sheet a metre square). in reams (500 sheets). This measurement can then applied to any size of paper, so that 100gsm (grams per square metre) paper is the same thickness regardless of sheet size. Standard photocopying paper is usually 80gsm while a brochure would have pages of 100 or 130gsm and a cover of 250 or 350gsm.

Paper can be dyed to any colour, but professional printing is always done on white stock. It can be finished in many different ways, for example gloss paper is highly finished with a shiny texture, silk paper is smooth. If you want a totally matt paper (often used for forms as it is easier to write on and for an 'arty' finish) You would probably use a cartridge paper.

The advent of high quality digital printing in almost every high street has made high finished standards much more achievable – although you might be amazed at what can be achieved with a photocopier and coloured 80gsm paper!

The kind of stock you choose will be informed by the nature of the job you are doing. You need to check paper quality – the weight and finish of the paper – with your client. Most printers can give you a swatch of the papers they recommend for you to share with your client and keep for future reference.

Part one
Getting started

Golden Mean Rosalie Gascoigne
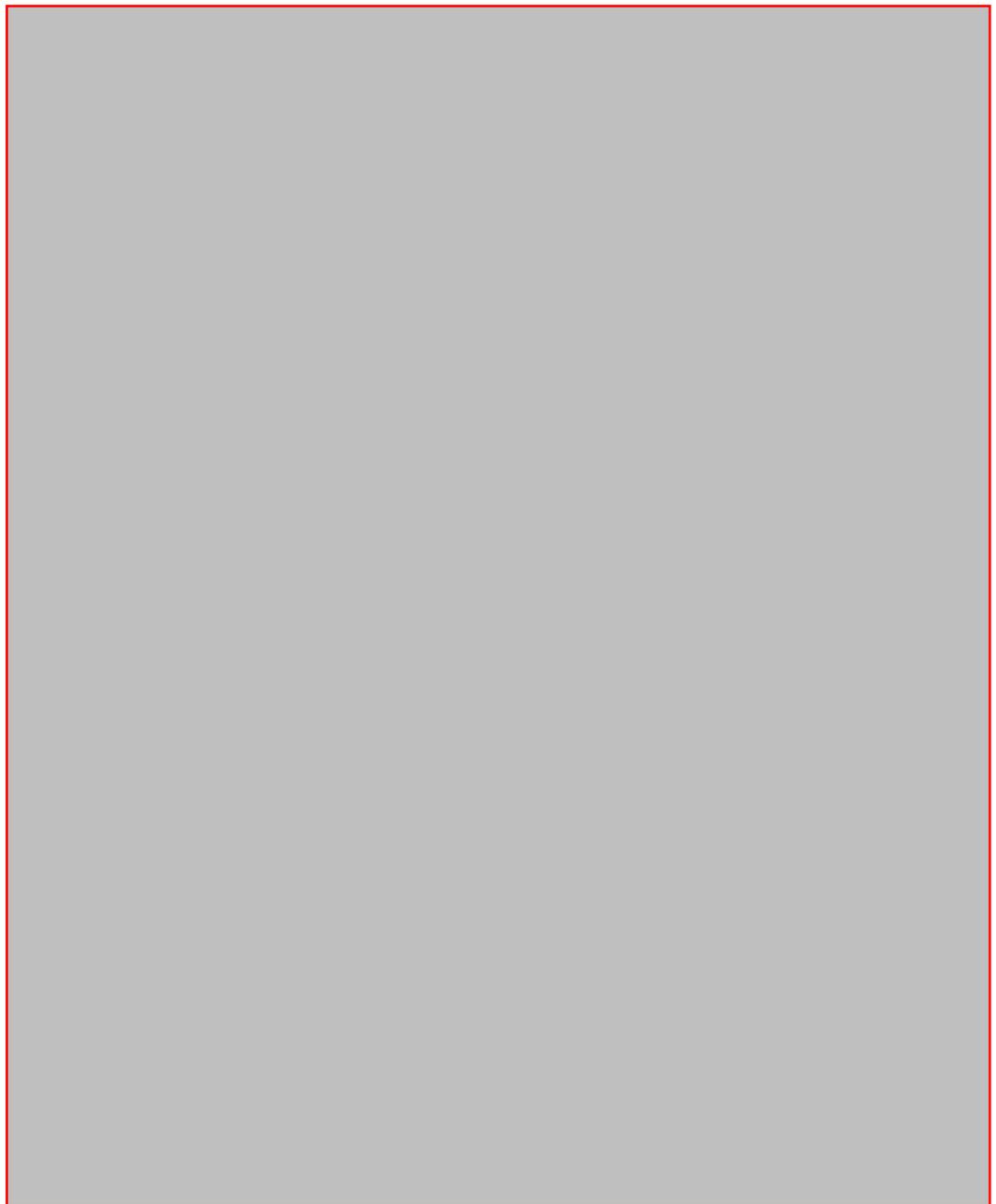
What is graphic design?

Graphic design is the creative discipline that brings together words and visual imagery to communicate to an audience. A walk down a busy high street will illustrate how much graphic design is a part of our world; the advertising at the bus stop, the racks of newspapers and magazines at the newsagents, the packaging in the supermarket isles, the T-shirt of a passer-by, the fly-poster on the wall, the menu boards of the take-away, the shop front signage, the road signs, the livery of a passing van and rubbish on the floor are all graphic design. Back home there is as much evidence of graphic designers at work on the television graphics, DVD interfaces, computer games and the internet. What this tells us is that we are living in a particularly visual age in which the presentation of things is considered important. Graphic design is simply everywhere!

As a profession graphic design is still relatively young, however its activities are as old as the written word. A generation ago, a graphic designer might have been seen as a commercial artist, a sign writer, a layout artist or typesetter, and while these jobs still exist they are now covered by the overarching term of graphic design and include film, TV, the internet and mobile technologies. It is the role of the graphic designer to work within this visual world, to try to direct the eye and help mediate the experience of looking at, reading and absorbing all this visual material.

Graphic designers often work with a number of other creative professionals – writers, photographers, illustrators, PR people, advertising executives, computer specialists and printers. What they will always have is a client who tells them what they want, and an audience who is to receive the information.

Creative problem solving

Graphic design is essentially a process of problem solving – how best to get the identified information to a particular audience. Each communication will ask different questions and your role is to work out what these are and how to respond to them. To analyse what needs to be communicated, anticipate how your audience might read a communication, work out how best to construct your communication and think about how to distribute the final piece. Graphic design is both a process of problem solving and creating aesthetically and visually stimulating objects, so to be a graphic designer you need to be both a thinker and a maker. In 1896 the architect Louis Sullivan established the credo of "form follows function". The form of graphic design should be driven by what it is there to do, what its function is. However graphic design is also a creative activity that requires playful and inventive thinking, in which you develop new ways of dealing with communication problems.

Visual language

Graphic design is rooted in language; it deals with written language through typography and visual language through images, colour, composition, signs and symbols. These are the basic visual elements of graphic design and to become a graphic designer you need to become fluent in how you use them. Like all languages, visual language is both a very personal experience and a shared activity. Our voices have distinctive qualities that make our viewpoint on the world our own, yet at the same time we are using words and syntax shared by everybody else. Visual language works in exactly the same way, it is culturally shared and constructed but at the same time holds the opportunity for you as a designer to say something in a unique way.

Being a designer requires someone who is 'visually literate'; who can understand visual language, is culturally aware and can use these visual references to communication to an audience. Developing your understanding of visual languages is an ongoing process that requires a dedicated curiosity in examining the visual world around you. This is all about becoming as culturally aware as you possibly can. Graphic designers are people who observe the world around them, take in the rich diversity of cultural references and draw on that material in order to communicate through their designs.

Designer unknown

Using communication technology

The industrial revolution of the 19th century ushered in the age of steam and the birth of modern manufacturing, with it came new ways of printing and new products to design for. In the late 20th century new technologies available to the graphic designer almost completely changed the way the designer worked and graphic design is still coming to terms with both the staggering pace of change of digital technologies and the environmental impact of producing so much visual material.

This course is going to focus primarily on designing for print, in other words leaflets, magazines and packaging that use paper and printing. Computers and desktop publishing (DTP) software has revolutionised how and where graphic design takes place. Technically all you need nowadays to be a graphic designer is a computer (usually an Apple Mac), the right software, scanner, printer, access to the internet and email. The tools might be available to everyone but you still need to learn how to use them effectively. You will find that as a student you can often get significant price reductions on purchasing the software you will need.

Learning to become a designer

Become a graphic designer involves a range of skills. It requires the technical ability to work with the materials, cultural awareness of the visual world around you, creativity and an ability to be analytical.

Nowadays the materials of graphic design are largely mediated through the computer, but you don't need to be an expert on the computer to be a good designer, computer skills will develop as you practice. Creativity is always difficult to define, but perhaps more than creative flare, the ability to play with ideas and try things out is important.

Being analytical is important, design is as much about thinking about information as it is about creating something visually interesting; being analytical helps the identify and solve problems creatively.

Perhaps most importantly to being a good graphic designer is cultural awareness, being aware of the visual language around you and being able to use it in your designs. Different designers will prioritise different skills and different design jobs require more emphasis on one set of skills than another.

A brief history of graphic design

Graphic design is a comparatively modern term that pulls together a range of different print, typography and visual traditions that stretch back millennia. The books, posters, postcards, newspapers and packaging that make up graphic design worldwide all have their own rich traditions and unique histories as both forms of graphic design and cultural artefacts in their own right. Graphic design is also tied to the histories of written languages, printing and image making, which makes any extensive history far reaching and complex.

The birth of the Modern

The unprecedented changes brought about by the industrial revolution (18th and 19th century) ushered in the inventions and ideas that were at the heart of the modern world. The social landscape changed with a move from rural to city economies, with people migrating from the countryside to the new factory towns to look for work. With it came the development of industrial cities, mass production and more goods or commodities for the growing population. For designers this meant developments in printing and a growing market for their services.

Photo John Thomson

This rapid growth brought with it its own social, economic and environmental problems. A period of reform developed with the rise of the middle classes during the Victorian period, in which education, literacy and access to visual culture were all promoted. The effect was to increase literacy rates that consequently created a growth in newspapers, books and magazines. Karl Marx (1818–1883) developed the theory of 'commodity fetishism' to critique the factory production of capitalism, while William Morris (1834–1896) and other members of the Arts and Crafts Movement applied socialist ideas to their own designs, crafts and typography.
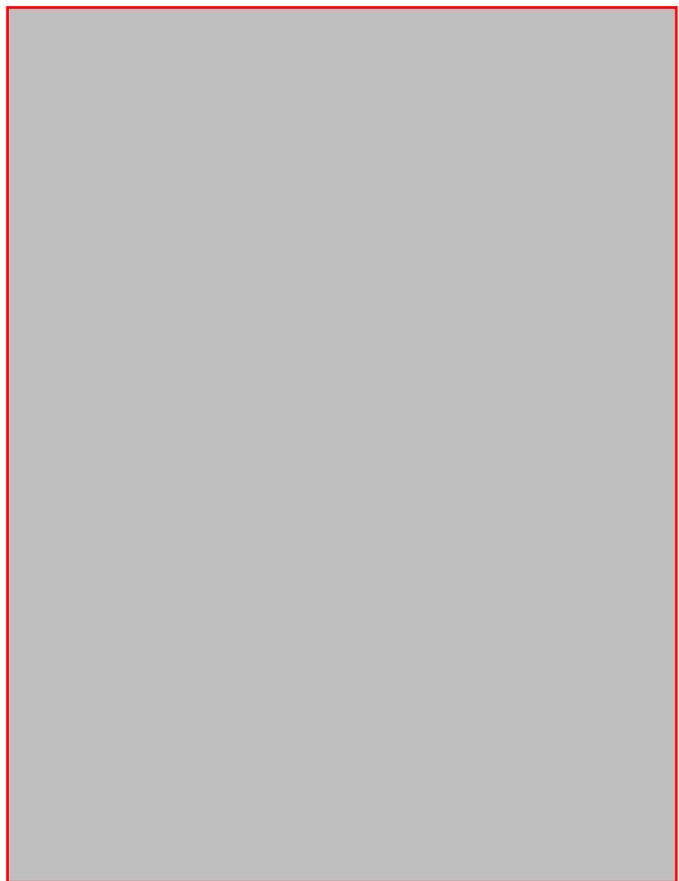
Morris sought refuge from the modern by returning to the traditional values of the craftsman, embracing handmade craft and printing techniques through his Kelmscott Press and placing value on the materials and process of design itself. Morris opposed the 'shoddy' mass production of the Victorian period that used cheap materials and cluttered decoration. Ultimately, Morris failed to make an impact beyond his circle of rich clients, however the Arts and Crafts Movement's ideas had a huge impact on thinking about design.

The 'Kelmscott Chaucer' William Morris

The international Art Nouveau movement (1890–1905) drew influence from Morris, producing art, architecture and design across Europe that was unified through a broad ranging and innovative aesthetic. While the style of the Victorian era was a hotchpotch of decorative elements drawn from everywhere and anywhere, Art Nouveau created furniture, wallpaper, buildings and art that worked in unison through a visual form influenced by curvilinear natural forms.
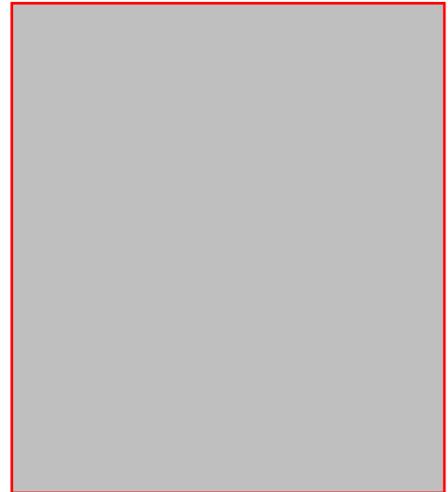

Lady with Cello Aubrey Beardsley

Revolution and the Avant Garde

The Italian Futurists and the German Dadaists were two literary and art movements that developed either side of the First World War (1914–1918), both responded to the mechanised warfare and industrial slaughter of the conflict. The Futurists celebrated the machine age, its speed, excitement and danger while the Dadaists challenged the establishment with its anti-war and anti-art stance creating photomontages that criticised mainstream values.

Immediately after the end of the First World War came the Russian Revolution and with it the equally

High Finance Hannah Hoch

revolutionary design, art and film making of Russian Constructivism. Designers such as Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956) sought to harness their creativity for social and political means rather than creating art for the sake of it, making everyday pieces of design and communication for the people of the new Soviet Union. All these movements ushered in the Avant Garde that saw successive waves of artist groups across Europe challenge the boundaries of taste, culture and accepted norms; all of which had a huge impact on broadening the visual language that graphic designers work with.


The Construction of the USSR Alexander Rodchenko

Bauhaus and Modernism

Influenced by both William Morris's design philosophy and Constructivism's application of Avant Garde ideas to everyday designs, German architect Walter Gropius (1883–1969) founded the Bauhaus school in 1919 with the idea that all the arts could be unified. It drew together designers, architects, crafts-people, theorists and artists from all over Europe to teach art and design across all disciplines.

The Bauhaus applied rationality and functionality to design, creating architecture, graphic design, textiles and furniture that shared the same simplified forms. It was these design principles of 'form follows function' that exemplified the Modern movement.

One of the Bauhaus teachers was the German typographer and book designer, Jan Tschichold (1902–1974), who wrote the influential 'The New Typography' in 1928, calling for modernist principles to be applied to typography and graphic design. The Bauhaus school ran in Germany from 1919-1933 before being exiled to Israel and the United States by the Nazis. Jan Tschichold relocated to the United Kingdom bringing his typographic ideas to Penguin Books.
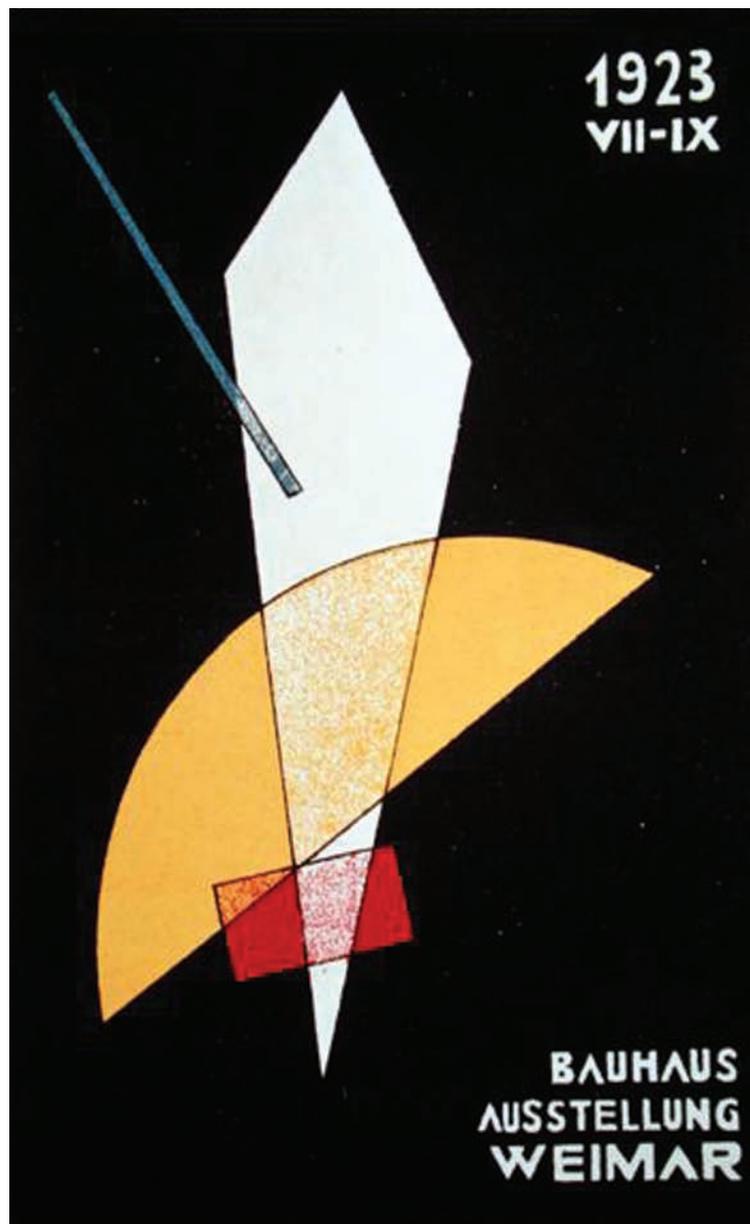

Poster for a Bauhaus exhibition Laszlo Moholy-Nagy

Consumption and mass culture

In parallel with Europe, the United States had been developing its own designs to meet the needs of the industrial age. Art Deco, while popular in Europe in the 1920s continued to thrive in America through the 1930s, it's visual style was influenced by the streamlined aerodynamic designs of modern transport. Henry Ford (1863–1947) developed the first production line cars and with it 'Fordism', which heralded the consumer culture of factory line mass production, consumerism and disposability.

With Europe in ruins after the Second World War, power and influenced moved to the United States. One person who made the move was Edward Bernays (1891–1995), a nephew of the psychoanalyst Dr. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Bernays used his Uncle's thinking about how we construct our idea of our 'self' through our desires and applied it to consumerism, propaganda, public relations and advertising. Bernays was aware of the growing momentum for women's rights started by the Suffragette Movement: seeing this dissatisfaction with women's role in society as an opportunity, he began to promote smoking to women as a form of 'rebellion' thereby harnessing their desire for change.
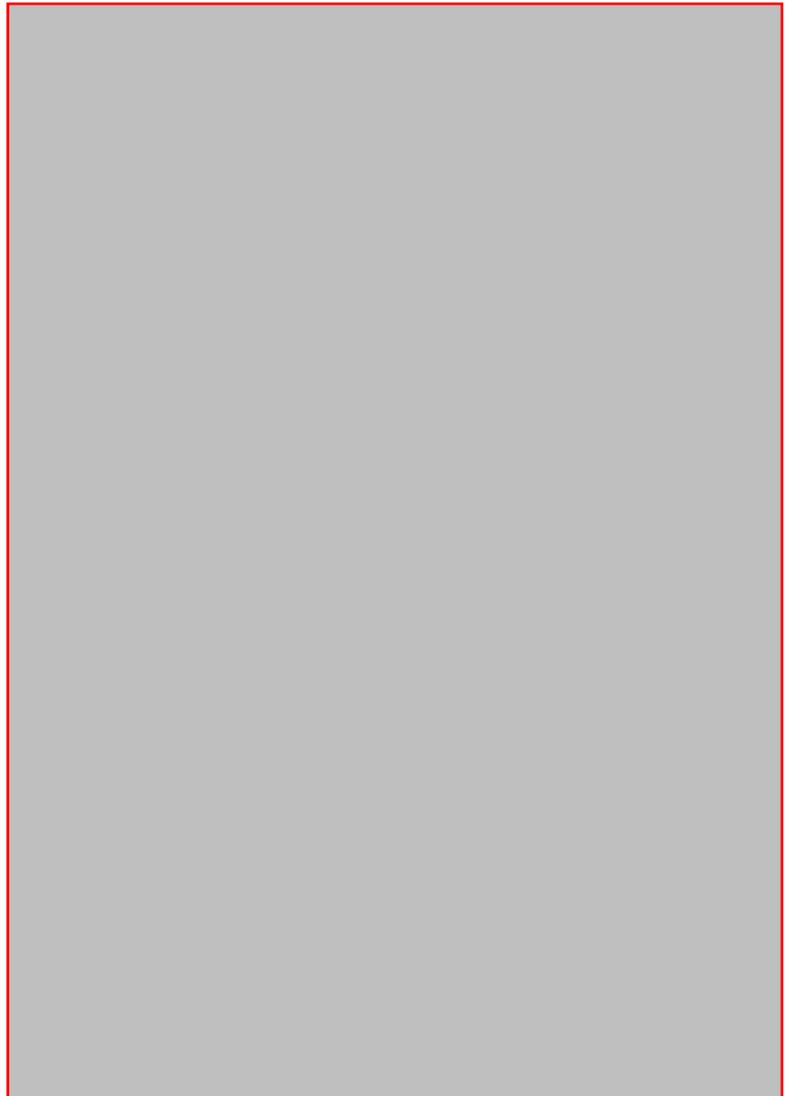
Edouard Chimot

The International Style and Pop Art

The Modernist design thinking established by the Bauhaus was further developed by Swiss designers Josef Müller-Brockmann (1914–1996) and others in the 1950s into what became known as the International Typographic Style, Neue Graphik or Swiss graphic design. The International Style valued order, simplicity and rationality, using plain photography, san-serif typefaces, geometric forms and the grid to create clean and functional designs. American corporations embraced the International Style, creating company logos, identities and packaging by designers such as Paul Rand (1914–1996). This produced an enduring legacy of modernist product design which was highly influential around Europe.

Designer unknown

As the hardships of post war Europe started to diminish, the ideas behind American consumerism began to take hold. With it came a new art movement called Pop Art that overtly drew on the graphic design, packaging and imagery of the period to create work that celebrated the colour, sounds and politics of the age. It was during this period that the idea of the teenager, youth and pop music cultures really took hold in Europe.
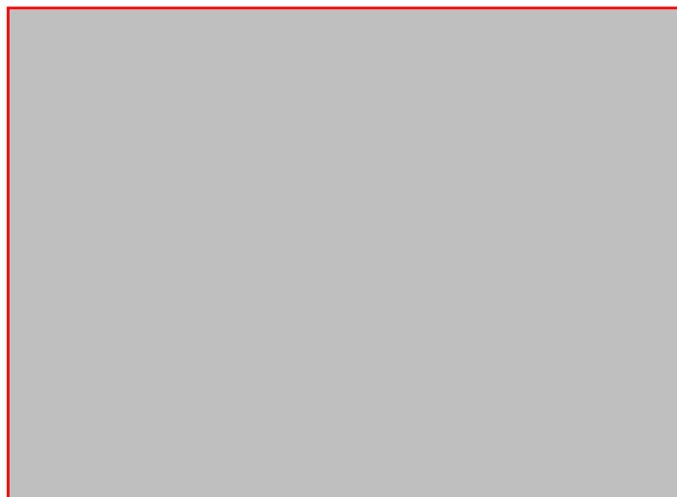
Image Roy Lichtenstein