

# Industrial and graphic design

[Design](#)



Everything man made, whether or not industrial processes are employed, it must have first been designed. Even if it only exists in the mind of the maker, it is a design. To qualify as a 'design' an object must, be useful in a practical sense in addition to having artistic or symbolic qualities, and also it must be functional and have good aesthetics. Design includes the whole spectrum of subjects like; aesthetics, semiotics, color theory in order to create an effective communication tool. A designed object shouldn't only fulfill technical and material function, but also the medium of communication, 'methods from psychology, semantics, and other area of communication science need to be employed in order to investigate and describe the symbolic character of a designed object' (A concise history). For example a chair is not merely a chair that functions as a sitting agent, it can also speak a distinct and universally understood language.

The two design disciplines industrial, and graphic design are concerned with three basic functions; first, its practical, technical function, second; it's aesthetic function and, thirdly; its symbolic function. However throughout the centuries form and function have been subjected to numerous constraints and influences such as economics, politics, law, environment, society and one such element in particular is that of ornamentation. Ornamentation has been at the centre of good and bad design for centuries. Art Movements thought out the eras endeavored to introduce it as they believed that patterns and motifs had political messages, and excessive decoration placed on an object was thought to make a product more expensive. Through the industrial ideals we saw the elimination of this ornamentation as it made mass production easier. Although with each art

movement we saw various design ideals arise predicting the change in the designs direction and the hope for social reformation, resulting in today's designers still adopting and regurgitating the past in their designs.

## Evolution

Paleolithic to Neolithic periods which is thought to be around 200,000 years ago, saw the first recordings of human markings. Africans and Europeans left painting in caves creating the dawn of visual communications. 'Abstract geometric signs, including dots, squares and animals were used to document events and tell fictional/ and mythical stories'(History of Design p: 10). These early pictographs as they are now evolved in two ways; first they were the beginning of pictorial art; second, they mark the evolution of the written form. The images became symbols for the spoken language.

This here was also the beginning that saw the artist and designer develop tendencies towards simplification, stylization and the illumination or ornamentation. 'Figures became increasingly abbreviated and were expressed with a minimum number of lines' (history of graphic design). Pictographs then were used for record keeping as the human memory was found to blur over time. They were also used by societies as a writing form to stabilize themselves under rule and law.

The manuscripts is seen here as the next evolutionary step in design, also seeing another communication method evolve. It is known as 'the objective integration of word and image to communicate a message of immediacy.'(concise \_design). Ornamentation was included extensively within these manuscripts often making them very costly and extremely time

consuming. Sometimes they required three hundred sheep to produce them, along with raw elements to make the colours, which included gold and silver. Illustrations were ornamented extensively with intricate detail and were owned only by the wealthy. 'Ornamentation as a rule makes the product, or in this case, the manuscripts, more expensive' (a concise history: 13). Patterns were also thought to promote political messages, so they were extensively used on manuscripts and other such printed material. Society repeated ornaments on objects as they believed it promoted the program of socialism among the uncultured workers.

### Industrialisation

Designers across the various disciplines searched for new forms of expression. 'Technological and industrial advances fed these new ideals of expression' (graphic design history p: 210). Design seemed to be moving beyond the threshold of pictorial imagery and pictographs into the invention of the pure form. 'Ideas about form and composing space from paintings and sculptures were quickly being applied to problems in design' (graphic design history p: 262). Industrialisation was beginning however it wasn't to be mistaken as a step child to fine arts, but more so as a modern painting consciously focusing on plastic volume and the geometric form, in an energetic, challenged notion with form and function.

Pattern books were being printed and widely distributed in order to solicit and to secure orders. What once was ordered and finished individually was being produced in bulk. (A concise design p: 21) Objects were no longer intended to serve only the demand of the aristocracy, but also to a wider market among the middle class. The people concerned with Industrialisation

had opposing views in regards to the use of ornamentation. Rather than conforming socialism through segregation, they felt that with the elimination of excessive ornamentation would allow all of the population to afford all objects. 'Ornamentation was believed to decrease production time and a raise wages... ornament is wasted work effort and therefor wasted wealth' (Adolf Loos).

This moral and social aspects of serial production also led to an aesthetic definition of design, arrived at especially through the theory of functionalism. These activists of industrialisation assumed, first, that the form of an object had only to suit its function, and must not include any superfluous ornamentation, and second, that the industrial conditions of production demanded a standardised, simple, geometric language of form in order to be able to produce good-quality and durable products inexpensively. They believed that this was necessary for social reform.

### Reform Movements

Between 1870 and 1885 a second wave of industrialisation spread through great economic crisis. Cheap Mass-produced wares were in demand as money was scarce. A backward-looking movement named historicism arose during this period, with a search for styles with historical influences from Romantic era and from the Middle Ages. It arbitrarily mixed together these plus other art movements obtaining results that were cheap machine-punched lead casings decorated with elaborate ornamentation. This excessively ornate furniture and ordinary goods were sought out by the lower classes. They were no longer to differentiate themselves from the aristocracy but rather 'imitated the upper- class with feudal lifestyle and

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living arrangements' (history of design). These articles, mass produced for the masses, were often poor in quality, impractical and ill suited to the conditions of the people it was intended. For most of the middle class, they had cramped living environments, so oversized, over decorated furniture was simply inappropriate.

In revolt movements like Art nouveau, and the Arts and craft movement, arose to combat the negative results of industrialisation and the struggle with historicism. Each movement shared similar goals, though where they differed was with their political, aesthetic and economic methods. The arts and crafts movement and the Art nouveau rejected the historicism and sought for simpler, more honestly constructed forms in the patterns of nature. They both found expression in organically flowing lines, stylized plant design, flower stems, and tendrils.

The new ornamentation was carried out through all design disciplines transcending what they thought was the boundary between fine arts and applied arts. 'A room was not just a room in which one placed art, but was considered a total work of art, to which ornamentation served as a linking member, not just arbitrarily employed, but organically arising from the construction and function of an object' (Concise p: 45). While artists through these movements rejected industrial mass production and thought that they reformed handwork and the handicrafts, by replacing patterns with their vegetation they were merely artists that were just as extreme in their application and positioning, as the historicism had been. These movements were simple a 'replacement of one kind of ornamentation with another' (concise p: 52). The designs were expressive and artistically excessive,

mostly created by hand however once again affordable only by the upper class.

## Graphic Design

During WWI, along with Industrial design, Graphic design needed to be addressed. Pictorial modernism was needed to be reinvented to communicate and express the age of machine and the advances that visual ideas had made. Similarly the decade after WWII saw the development of the conceptual image in graphic design. Images were not conveyed as merely narrative information like in the prehistoric eras or in the manuscripts, they were portrayed as ideas and concepts as. 'Mental content joined perceived content as motifs' (history of design). The illustrator or what we now call graphic designers interpreted the writers text, creating a graphic image that portrayed a statement- thus forming what we know today as graphic design. The graphic designer was the new breed of image makers. Rather than filling a whole page with images, they focused their concerns on the whole design. The elimination of excess images or ornamentation was enforced and the focus on the design space and the integration of word and image was paramount.

Graphic designers had all the art movements history to draw influences from. Design elements and principles like spatial configurations of cubism; the juxtapositions, dislocations, and scale changes of surrealism; the pure colour loosened from natural references by expressionism and fauvism; and the recycling of mass media images from pop art. This allowed for greater opportunity to create their own self expression and eliminate excess ornamentation by using only the relevant and effective images and text to

construct a conceptual image. Designers then and still today believe that this can be achieved by focusing on the image as the primary means of communication. This usually means the text or verbal content is reduced. The image is a universal language understood by most of the world, 'images have a more direct fluid meaning than text' (Pederson, 1988), making it the most effective way to communicate a message.

At the same time graphic design focused on the conforming to space and form in order to create good design. This became known as a design process. That needed to be completed by all designers in order to know the products competition. Regardless of the type of design this process can be applied, of course with slight alterations.

- To begin with the designers need to recognise the problem
- Then to analyse the existing situation, process or product in order to ascertain the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) that exist in the current market sector
- From this the problem is analysed and defined with the creation of a formal brief
- Allocations of tasks are made
- Exploration is continued with more extensive research
- Conceptual stage by designer is started
- Refining of ideas and reference to original brief is made to ensure design meets requirements
- Construction and testing of prototype is commenced



- Revaluation
- Final release of product, process or situation

### Today design

Unfortunately art movements through the 1940's to the 1970's continued their fight against industrialisation and ornamentation, introducing more ways to portray 'good design'. Among consumers diverse aesthetic influences had continued to generate broad spectrum of tastes, creating an environment marked by a flood of different styles that continually contradicted and negating the solipsistic claims of good design. It was seen in the late 1970's and 1980's that there were no simple divisions between the three social classes- working class, middle class, and upper class. They realised that taste and style among all of society was very different. All individuals have completely different perceptions on what makes good and bad design. Designers saw that rather than protesting against what not to do and use when creating something graphical or industrial, they chose to create designs that are salable and different from the others out on the market. The challenge became in today's society to produce something that stands out from the rest. What makes a design strong is the originality, memorability, restraint and context, however the main factor to a strong piece is a great idea. All strong design pieces are created from a concept that is strong and powerful.

Designers of today do not hesitate when borrowing elements from the past design styles, like streamlined dynamic lines, organically formed handles, chair legs, that are reminiscent of Art nouveau. They have chosen to depict

their art and design as fashion rather than making this the rule that insists all design conform to. Socialism can not be changed by conforming a culture to sets of rules. Design rules are not like that of the law, rather they are an act of individualism, whether its mass produced or a one off, they originally stemmed from a designers idea. Designers follow the rules of design elements and principles only to ensure that each design is of 'good design' and exceeds its market sector.

### Conclusion

Each decade we encounter a new design movement endeavoring to restructure design ideals with the design elements and principles. Designers today have sought not to conform society with design laws but rather to focus on regurgitating past design ideals to create new 'good design'. With each movement, designers should be endeavoring to create designs that are successful, visually powerful, elegant, timeless and immensely exciting. A successful design is the result of research and careful planning, it must be semantically correct, syntactically consistent, pragmatically understood by the user but in all it needs to evoke feelings. Each design can be perceived to house excessive ornamentation, which can be unnecessary graphic structures on buildings, or excessive images within a poster, but whatever the design, it can mean all sorts of things to others and absolutely nothing to the rest of the population. This is due to all individuals having natural prejudices and preconceptions to their approach to design (Powell, 2000). Each designer whether they are working on the same brief will produce different resolutions. Design is an idea derived from another idea, it is everywhere in life due to everything being designed. Therefore

standard design principles and elements can be enforced however today's designers are not molding the whole of society to conform to a set of rules.