

Early graphic design

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Early Graphic Design The great English architect, artist and designer Augustus Welby Pugin (1812-1852) is thought to be the chief promoter and proponent of the Gothic-style revival in England and is credited with many outstanding buildings and cathedrals, including such features as the interior design of the Palace at Westminster, the Houses of Parliament and the famous Big Ben clock tower. This period is considered as a counter-reaction to the newer neo-classical style in architecture spawned by the advent of the Industrial Revolution. It was actually an attempt to revive an art that was considered more superior to the newer style which some thought lacked artistry and depth compared to the old Gothic style of the late medieval period and prior to Renaissance.

Artistic Factors – the Gothic style in architecture and design was thought to be a bit crude or even barbaric; only later did it develop into a distinct artistic style that people considered far superior and desirable to the new neo-classical style. The Gothic revival used finer, physical details in design combined with religious themes, in consonance with the times back then in a medieval period characterised by the predominance of religion in the lives of people, who did not have high levels of literacy, a period marked largely by ignorance and superstition.

Social Factors – the rise of the Industrial Revolution with the invention of the steam engine in many ways brought about disruptive changes to society, in which the previous agricultural or feudal system gave way to industrialisation due to a new economic system of capitalism. It gave rise to urban slums where family members were separated, an exploitation of labour and the rise of a new wealthy class of capitalists, in addition to landed

aristocracy and royalty.

Economic Factors – capitalism is enhanced by the new economic system of industrialisation, in which goods were mass produced for consumption, unlike the previous production system of individually-crafted products made by skilled artisans and their guilds. The sheer number of new products on the market required a new way of marketing these products to people and one way to distinguish one product from another is the use of graphic design to entice buyers.

The mass production of goods caused the birth of graphic design as a form of advertisement, but this kind of new art was considered a poor imitation of the earlier Gothic style of designs. The Gothic or medieval style was more detailed and thought to be real works of art borne out of the dedicated and loving work of artisans who produce these art works for only few people but not for the mass market. The Gothic style, according to Pugin, represented religion and it was also considered to be English, in contrast to the classical style which he thought as pagan and worldly, while Gothic borders on the spiritual (Cluckie, 2008: 25). Some good features he found in the medieval art style are intricate designs, finer details and artistic ornamentation, a labour of love. Bad features of the nineteenth century artistic designs were its shallowness, crassness or art work that seemed to be made in a hurry for a mass market intended for profits only. Art in this period can be described as commercial and not truly artistic in the true sense of the word. Art is no longer for art's sake, but intended to sell something or some products. A Gothic art design is unique while the neo-classical nineteenth century Industrial-style is often indistinguishable, a case of “ you've seen one, you've

seen them all.” Gothic art is good as it ennobles through religion while nineteenth century art is materialistic (Cheshire, 2004: 29).

References

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