

# Graphic design as it relates to constructivism



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Graphic Design as it Relates to Constructivism “ We do not need a dead mausoleum of art where dead works are worshiped, but a living factory of the human spirit - in the streets, in the tramways, in the factories, workshops, and workers’ homes.

” — Vladimir Mayakovsky (Russian Futurist-Constructivist poet) 2 Modern Graphic Design is the result of the nurturing of many past art movements. The Constructivist movement played its part in contributing to today’s graphic design and continues to foster creative expression in modern graphics, architecture, sculpture, and interior design. Three Russian artists, Vladimir Tatlin, Alexander Rodchenko, and El Lissitzky, played prominent roles in the building of the Constructivist movement and in doing contributed much to modern graphic design. Constructivism was a movement consisting of works that moved away from the abstract. The artists believed in trying to link art with concrete ideas. They were optimistic, looking towards a new order in art and architecture that dealt with the social and economic problems of the day.

They wanted to convey the idea that the zenith of artwork does not revolve around fine or high art, but instead focuses on the idea that some of the most invaluable artwork can often be found in the nuances of practical art. Constructivism was an invention of the Russians though it later found members across the continent. The artists mainly consisted of Russians depicting art that portrayed their patriotic and societal beliefs. It is this component that has changed modern graphic design the most. Modern graphic designers base their art around the practical and tangible needs of today’s society as well.

For today's society art is primarily valued for its usefulness, as in marketing, rather than its aesthetics. Vladimir Tatlin was one of the most important names in the Russian Avant-Garde arts of the 20's. As a young Russian art student he traveled to Paris and became so inspired by the work of the Cubists he became a sculptor. His work took the form of a loyal patriot of the Communist regime and was politically centric. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Tatlin worked under the employment of the new Soviet Education Commissariate who believed that the intended use of art was to educate the public.

It was while working here that he was commissioned to build a monument that was to be symbol of Russian power. He called this work Monument to the Third International. Tatlin's design " was for a huge glass-and-iron symbol building that would have been twice as high as the Empire State Building" 2. Though this project was never completed it did inspire the Constructivist movement in architecture and design. Tatlin influenced many with his work including Alexander Rodchenko who went on to propagate his ideas about art and politics.

Alexander Rodchenko was completely dedicated to the cause of the Soviet way of life. He preached that all art should be used as a way to promote the ideals of Soviet Society. He worked as an " advertising constructor" for State-run businesses. He helped develop a style of advertising in which clamorous slogans and hostile compositions with strong diagonals and color became iconic of the revolutionary poster and magazine cover.

This pared down emboldened style is still employed in graphics today.

Rodchenko also worked in the mediums of painting, typography, photography, collage and montage. He took his artistic talent and transformed it into a useful tool to fulfill his supposed calling—to be a vessel for the government's agenda. His simple yet bold designs, large wording, and photographic images communicated well to an uneducated Russian common man. He worked to design a model workers club at the Worlds fair that was “ dedicated to the proper training of the Communist mind” 1.

Every aspect of his art was reigned in to fulfill Soviet agenda. Not all of the Constructivists were as zealously adverse to classical mediums and felt that high art could also be an effective agent of political messages. El Lissitzky was a very important distributor of Russian Constructivism to Western Europe. Yet he refused to abandon the “ High Art” forms completely. He attempted to take Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist formalism and apply it to the new concept of an art serving the society. Before the First World War, Lissitzky studied engineering at Darmstadt in Germany.

After the Bolshevik Revolution, Lissitzky taught alongside Malevich and Tatlin at the Vitebsk School of Fine Arts. He produced Constructivist pictures and in some cases “ spaces” that he called Prouns. The name Proun comes from “ the Russian word prounovis, which loosely translated, means ‘ towards a renewal of art’” 3. However, El Lissitzky eventually left the formalist arts behind due to their inability to communicate significantly to the average Soviet citizen. He turned to more functional medium like propaganda posters and photomontages in order to reach the masses.

In the 1930's Lissitzky " worked for USSR in Construction, a magazine meant to give its foreign readers a positive impression of Soviet society" 1. Without the work of these Constructivists would modern graphic design be where it is today? With a resounding no we can point to the strong yet simple design elements, the focus on functionality, and above all the subjection of creative expression to a message meant to communicate an ideal to the masses. In the graphic design world today we are faced with the same dilemma; how to use fine art to reach the common man. Our designs must communicate the message of our clients.

If we are able to design the most intricate and artistic website the world has ever seen but the common man cannot navigate through the site with ease or the message is lost in the art itself, then we have failed as graphic designers. While it may seem like these Russian Constructivists sold their souls as artists, they were really just trying to bridge the gap between art and mass communication. This is something successful graphic designers must do everyday. As we move forward toward new successes in graphic design let us not forget our Constructivist comrades who forged ahead toward the true goal of graphic design, communication. Bibliography 1

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