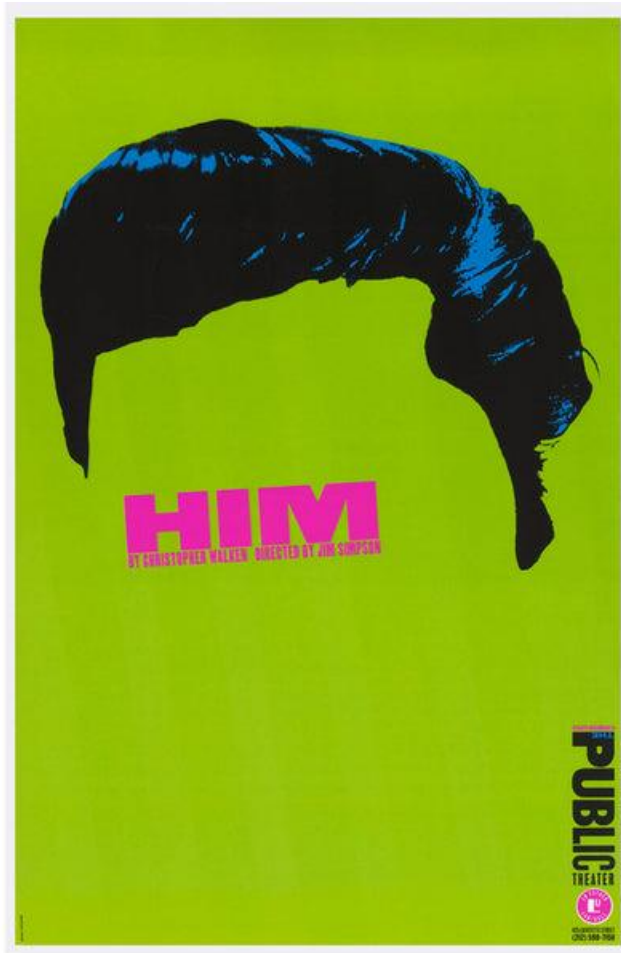


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“Him” poster was designed by Paula Scher in 1994. It is part of the redesign of the visual identity and advertisement for New York’s Public Theater. This poster in particular was created for a play about Elvis Presley which is here represented by his hairstyle alone accompanied by a bold and bulky typeface for the title. The layout is minimalistic and neat. The use of loud colors and the open space that leaves the design to breath makes her poster very eye catching without being overwhelming.

The challenge of the new campaign for The Public Theater was to engage the new generation catching their attention and bringing them to the theater, which in the past was considered a boring and elite activity. In fact, the most loyal audience was from the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and it was white, liberal, wealthy, and over fifty years old. The Public Theater was instead presenting innovative new plays that could become Broadway shows. Paula Scher was hired to reestablish contact between the art (in this case the theater) and the public, as Munari would say “the designer is called upon to make a communication (called a poster) to inform the public of some new development in a certain field”. She created not only a work of art (design as art) but also, she helped to solve the problem of the client which was to position the institution as an affordable and accessible venue for everybody with a new modern identity and catching the new generation attention. As Munari affirms “the designer knows about printing, about the techniques and knows the use of the forms and colors according to their psychological functions”, Scher came up with a poster that would present the information in a dynamic and innovative way with catchy typefaces and colors on point, to break with the past old-style designs, but also introducing a new identity. Using a combination of bold, sans serif type and a simple image the poster perfectly reflect the energy of the city and the dynamism of the Public Theater productions. The combination of typefaces and weights came from the street typography and were very New York style, as we can mostly see in the logo where she arranged type to make it more readable and appealing. Well known for her use of uncommon and historic typefaces, she redefined typography which, thanks to her, started being associated with art and visual and it was not just informative or carriers of information. In totally opposite of Beatrice Ward idea of the use of type (“The Type well used is invisible as type, just as the perfect talking

voice is the unnoticed vehicle for the transmission of words, ideas.”) Paula type is loud, playful, and scream the urgency of the piece.

As Rodchenko and El Lissitzky wanted their poetry to express the excitement, and the energy of the new revolutionary movement to destroy the religious and traditional ideas of their time, the same did Scher in her design using bright colors, a slightly diagonal composition and leaving a lot of space to the audience imagination and associations to promote a new identity for the theater. The entire play is about Elvis Presley's life until his lonely death, a see through (through Elvis' eyes) that shows what he went through his entire life. Maybe for this reason Scher decided to make only his hairstyle visible and placed the title “him” where the eyes are supposed to be. In this case we can see that “Typophoto is the visually most exact rendering of communication.”(Moholy-Nagy) in which photography and typography working together are communicating what is the play about. The arrangement of the photograph and the typeface shows the influence of the constructivism in Scher's work, as in Rodchenko poster “*Books (Please)! In All Branches of Knowledge, 1924*” where the screaming type complements the photo. With the purpose of bringing art to the masses Rodchenko produced abstract paintings, concerned with the placement and movement of objects in space and using dynamic diagonal compositions. Moreover, he used photographs which captured not only a shape, but also gives a meaning, tells a story as in the hairstyle of Scher's poster.

What makes this poster interesting is that at first look, especially for young people who don't know Presley, it might represent the story of a male character, as presented by the blue hair and the generic title. Moreover, the use of a male hairstyle might recall the Saussure signifier, which evokes in our mind the figure of a man which is stylish and young. However, the use of a bright, almost acid pink for the title typeface drives our mind to something deeper, probably

hidden in the main character private life. Through this contraposition of colors, the eye is left moving down and the around and then down again the poster to look for more information (in this case the location and the date of the play).

In conclusion, Scher's poster being a part of a series of dynamic modern posts that gave a new identity to The Public Theater, represents the break with the traditional use of the typography, the past classical layouts and blend color palettes creating emotional responses and personal associations in the observer.

### **Sources:**

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