



Graphic design and the world of graphics that we know today has highly revolutionized throughout the years. Over the years there have been many influential designers that help the transition of the fine arts era into an era where graphic design is depicted as a communicative art. “The Diva Dismissed” which was designed by Paula Scher and dated in 1994 is the design poster to which I chose to be the focus of this paper. This piece is currently housed in the Cooper Hewitt Collection at the MoMA Museum as it highlights the graphic design work of Black playwrights and composers that address their history, oppression and culture.

Its medium is screenprint on paper, but more importantly is the expressive manner in which the information is approached. The background is a flat yellow color, with the text colored in black. The typography in the design is illustrated in a dynamic fashion; very energetic, the type is shooting out the page in different angles; this gives it a feeling of life and movement. In the middle of the design there is an image of a diva’s face which is in the likeness of Jennier Lewis. The typography is expressed in a manner that visualises the letter “x” across the diva’s

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mouth; which can be understood to be a visual termination or exclamation relating the diva. The poster was most fitting for its time; a time when the New York Public Theatre was challenged in creating a new visual identity for theatrical performance. The Diva Dismissed and others similar prints were created to raise public attendance and reach a more diverse crowd. In order to further explore the design concept that helped shape Paula Scher's poster "The Diva Dismissed" for what it is today we have to look at its influences. In this paper we will explore through the lens of three influential designers namely; Aleksander Rodchenko, El Lissitzky and László Moholy-Nagy and furthermore how her design poster embodied many of their design theories whether directly or indirectly.

The first designer we saw was Lazar Markovich Lissitzky, better known as El Lissitzky, was a Russian constructivist/ engineer who is a big inspiration for many graphic designers to come. As a constructivist one of the areas he inspired young designers is to not be selfish and create art that has functionalities; for constructivists believed that fine arts was not the future, art and design should be about sharing a message and helping the evolution/advancement of the world. Taking a look at Paula Scher's "*The Diva Dismissed*", I believe this design indirectly embodies Lissitzky theory that artwork should be more than just fine art. Scher's design is used in a way to communicate with society, it is conveying a message. "By contrast with the American poster, created for people who will catch a momentary glimpse whilst speeding past in their automobiles, ours was meant for people who would stand quite close and read it over and make sense out of it" (Lissitzky 4). From here we can gather that El Lissitzky's beliefs were strong when coming to the aesthetics of fine art compared to design which is made in a way that relates an idea or helps society move forward. I believe it was indirectly because constructivists

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like El Lissitzky, were able to instill fundamental skills in the design world; where it now comes natural for young designers to create work that communicates to the world.

Another great influence behind Paula Scher's "*The Diva Dismissed*", was a Russian designer named Aleksander Mikhailovich Rodchenko. Rodchenko was a painter that became a constructivist; he was one of the founders of constructivism and Russian design. Rodchenko was a big believer that technology was going to help the world of engineers and that excellent design was going to help the world move forward. The way Paula Scher's poster "*The Diva Dismissed*", displayed the placement of text in various styles and unique angles incorporates Rodchenko's constructivist style. We can tell that she was influenced by his theory in a design aspect; geometric letterforms, flat colors and diagonal composition. "We didn't create technology. We didn't create man. but we, Artists yesterday constructors today, 1. we processed the human being 2. we organize technology 1. we discovered 2. propagate 3. clean out 4. Merge" (Rodchenko 1). As an agent of social change Rodchenko made it his goal to study society, search for new ways to help society evolve and observe the way design influenced/helped it. I think Rodchenko was able to create effective designs that helped the world move forward because he analyzed and took into consideration the needs of human society. Paula Scher's design was similar, in the way that it was also communally effective; being a constructivist, she related strong ideas and messages into the world using a distinct art style.

Paula Scher's design poster mentioned above encompasses and is a great example of László Moholy-Nagy typophoto. Typophoto was invented by Moholy-Nagy, he was a Hungarian constructivist who went to the Bauhaus to study in 1923, he was also a big believer of technology and did a lot of experiments with photographic images. Typophoto is the combination of images and typography working together in the same artwork. As a constructivist

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Moholy-Nagy considered typography; as a service art, a form of “communication composed in type”, while photography; was “the visual presentation of what can be optically apprehended”. The union of the two created “the visually most exact rendering of communication”, otherwise known as typophoto (Moholy-Nagy 2). From this we can gather some of Moholy-Nagy’s concepts and ideologies towards his invention.

Taking a deeper look at Paula Scher’s “*The Diva Dismissed*”, her use of energetic typography combined with photography is evidence that Moholy-Nagy typophoto impacted her graphic design style. “The integration of word and photographic image, in his mind, was a powerful antidote for the slippery nature of text. Each time we merge image and text in our own layouts, we reference his typophoto” (Moholy-Nagy 1). Here, I believed that Moholy-Nagy wanted typography to flourish in a new light; because type had exceeded itself and to some point hit its peak, he wanted to experiment to make communication even more effective. The invention of typophoto allowed one to view visual communication in a new way, making it significantly easier to communicate with the world. Paula Scher’s “*The Diva Dismissed*”, is an indirect tribute to Moholy-Nagy invention and his investment and dedication towards the field of graphic design.

In conclusion, Paula Scher’s design poster “*The Diva Dismissed*”, is highly influenced by the works of constructivism, her work also embodies the idea that art/design should be more about communication and helping the world move forward. She believes that it is up to the next generation of designers to strive and take design to the next level. For we are only here today thanks to great designers like Aleksander Rodchenko, El Lissitzky and László Moholy-Nagy. Who paved the way and influenced established designers like Paula Scher and young aspiring designers like myself.

Work Cited

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