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Herbert Bayer: the artist from the Bauhaus

In this paper, I will be focusing on an influential European designer, visual artist and pioneer named Herbert Bayer who was born in Austria at the beginning of 20th century. Bayer spent most of his student and early career years in Germany where he attended a groundbreaking modernist art institution – the Bauhaus. Several years after the opening of the Bauhaus, he first joined the school as a student and worked with many influential architects, sculptors, and painters like Vasily Kandinsky, Moholy-Nagy, and others.

Herbert Bayer's design thinking, as well as his systematic approach to art in general, matched the ideals of the Bauhaus. He was a believer in the constructive, clear and minimalistic design devoid of all the unnecessary elements and decorations.

Right after the Bauhaus moved to Dessau in 1925, Bayer was appointed as a junior master by the school founder, Walter Gropius. Herbert started implementing the principles of modernism, design theory, typography and photography in the school where he started as a student himself. He designed many printed and advertising materials for the Bauhaus, all of which shared the modern characteristics of the design embellished with the geometrical sans-

serif fonts, often placed asymmetrically, communicating the message through the logical uses of the hierarchy and color.

It was in Dessau when Bayer created the typographic identity of the Bauhaus called Universal typeface. He called his typeface Universal for it was simple, clear and understood by everyone in the world through its soft yet functional geometry. Bayer used this typeface for almost all of his design work going forward.



Universal Typeface by Herbert Bayer (Source: www.harvardmuseums.org)

In the summer of 1923, the Bauhaus organized a major exhibition to prove to the local government that the school was making a valuable contribution to society. Bayer designed a poster, catalog cover, and many postcards for this exhibition. The catalog cover, for example, was designed with uppercase sans-serif type in red and blue, aligned in a way that the block of the type completely covered the book leaving almost no negative space except in between the letters.



Exhibition Book Cover (Source: www.dezeen.com)

This type of bold design was a good representation of Bayer's style who believed in delivering the message in the clearest way.

The postcards designed for the Bauhaus exhibition are all based on simple geometrical relationships between circles, squares, lines, and triangles defying the grid-based

layouts. The look and feel of the design of these postcards are very precise, yet unpredictable, which makes them interesting to observe. The color palettes of these postcards are mainly consisting of black, red, blue and grey colors, creating a simple design yet very well balanced.



Bauhaus Exhibition Postcard designed by Herbert Bayer (Source: www.artsy.net)

Some of my favorite postcard designs that I will be looking at are the ones designed with black, grey and white color palettes using typography and simple geometry as design elements. I find these designs particularly interesting as they are very dynamic, clear and impactful for the



Design by Herbert Bayer (Source: www.alamy.com)

viewer. With just geometric, bold sans-serifs and the most simplistic colors,

Bayer created well balanced, high-contrast, and modernist designs.



Design by Herbert Bayer (Source: www.alamy.com)

Right before World War II, Bayer subsequently left Germany for New York City, eventually moving to Aspen, Colorado. During his career years in Aspen, Colorado, he designed posters, brochures, letterhead, architecture, and books for the Aspen Institute of Humanistic Studies, and pioneered the field of corporate design.

The poster *Divisumma* for example is one of the corporate identity designs he created for his client Olivetti Typewriter. The diversity of Bayer's work throughout his career has proven him to be one of the most unconventional early modernists who was not afraid to learn, grow and experiment when the design field was not even fully introduced to the world of 20th century.



*Divisumma poster for Olivetti
Typewriter (Source:
www.cooperhewitt.org)*

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