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Essay #1: Paula Scher's "Bring in Da Noise" and Constructivism



Paula Scher, a renowned graphic designer and artist, has left an indelible mark on the world of visual communication. Her work is characterized by a unique blend of typography, imagery, and symbolism that often challenges conventional design norms. One of her most iconic creations is the poster for the 1996 Broadway musical "Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk." This essay explores how Scher's "Bring in Da Noise" poster is closely connected to the principles of Constructivism, a design movement rooted in the early 20th century that sought to convey meaning through abstraction, simplicity, and geometric forms. Constructivism, as an artistic and design movement, emerged in Russia during the early 20th century. It was deeply influenced by the socio-political changes occurring in the country during that time, particularly the Russian Revolution. The movement rejected traditional art forms and aimed to construct new visual language based on abstraction, simplicity, and a focus on the industrial and technological aspects of the modern world.

Key principles of Constructivism include a commitment to geometric shapes, use of primary colors, and an emphasis on functionality and utility. It sought to break down complex ideas into their most essential components, resulting in clear and concise visual communication. These principles are evident in Paula Scher's "Bring in Da Noise" poster, as we will explore. Paula Scher's "Bring in Da Noise" poster is a testament to her mastery of design and her ability to convey complex themes through simplicity. The poster was created to promote the musical, which delved into the history of African American culture and tap dance, exploring issues of race, identity, and history in the United States. Scher's design captures the essence of the production while embodying Constructivist principles. Constructivist art aims to reduce complex ideas and concepts to their most essential forms. Scher does this brilliantly by using a limited color palette and bold geometric shapes. The poster predominantly features black and red, emphasizing the contrast between the two colors. The dancer's silhouette is depicted in bold black lines against a striking red background. This stark contrast not only simplifies the visual composition but also conveys the energy and intensity of the dance.

Typography is a critical component of Constructivist design. Scher employs typography in a way that mirrors Constructivist ideals. The text "Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk" is presented in large, capital letters, creating a strong visual impact. The choice of font is bold and simple, aligning with the Constructivist preference for clear, easy-to-read typefaces. The text is also placed at the top and bottom of the poster, framing the central image, which enhances the overall composition's balance and visual rhythm.

Constructivist art emphasizes the practical utility of the design. Scher's "Bring in Da Noise" poster effectively fulfills its function by not only promoting the musical but also conveying the essence of the performance. The geometric shapes and stark contrast between

colors create a visually striking and memorable image that captures the spirit of the dance and the message of the show. The poster serves as a functional piece of promotional material while encapsulating the production's themes and emotions. Constructivist design is characterized by the prominent use of geometric forms, such as squares, circles, and triangles. In Scher's poster, the dancer's silhouette is transformed into a striking geometric shape. The dancer's body becomes a triangular form, with arms and legs extending outward. This geometric abstraction simplifies the image, making it immediately recognizable and enhancing its visual impact. The use of geometric forms also adds a sense of dynamism and movement to the composition, echoing the rhythmic nature of tap dance.

Constructivist art often relies on primary colors to create bold and impactful visuals. Paula Scher adheres to this principle by primarily using black and red in her design. The stark contrast between these colors draws the viewer's attention and creates a sense of urgency and intensity, which aligns with the themes of the musical. The use of primary colors is an essential element of Constructivist design that Scher skillfully incorporates into her work.

Paula Scher's "Bring in Da Noise" poster is a masterful example of how the principles of Constructivism can be applied to contemporary graphic design. Through abstraction, simplification, typography, functionality, geometric forms, and the use of primary colors, Scher creates a visually striking and conceptually rich composition. Her poster effectively promotes the musical while conveying its themes and emotions. In doing so, Scher pays homage to the early 20th-century Constructivist movement while demonstrating its enduring relevance in the world of graphic design. This poster is not only a testament to Paula Scher's immense talent but also a powerful reminder of the timelessness of Constructivist design principles.

References

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