

Don't Blink, You'll Miss It: Analyzing the Poster Art
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I decided to write about the film poster for the documentary “Don’t Blink” created by New Jersey based designer and artist Yolanda Cuomo. The film documents the life and works of Swiss photographer and film maker Robert Frank, who is known for his iconic black and white imagery of American life. The poster contains a variety of elements and aesthetic choices that align with early 20th century avant-garde design movements including constructivism, DeStijl Bauhaus, and The New Typography. This essay will compare this work with these movements.

The title and credits feature a typewriter typeface in a variety of weights in black, and white. Type is set around the poster in a grid-like fashion in a flushed-ragged alignment. The

poster contains influences found across multiple avant-garde design movements, specifically the Bauhaus and New Typography.

The Bauhaus movement was founded in 1919 by German architect Walter Gropius, German architect as a school that focused on the arts, craftsmanship, design, technology, typography, and architecture. Bauhaus was iconic for its rejection of traditional values and focusing on the future. Despite its success, Gropius was forced out for being too liberal. The Dessau educational complex that provided an expansive facility, faculty and student housing and was an excellent opportunity to mass produce of Bauhaus products. Political disharmony in the socialist state (Nazi) caused backlash and caused the Bauhaus to once again relocate to Berlin. The Bauhaus staff consisted of a talented faculty of working artists including taught former student and graphic designer Herbert Bayer who believed abstract and neutral forms provided an easy-to-understand visual communication. Another key figure in the movement was Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, a multidisciplinary artist and film maker that experimented with combining photography and type coining the term “typophoto.”

The Bauhaus approach to design that rejects traditional and unnecessary “frivolous” decoration to communicate a clear message. Functional design uses necessary elements as part of the design arranged aesthetically. Other notable principles include minimal use of color (typically red), asymmetrical layouts, photomontage, sans-serif typefaces, and use of negative space.

At first glance, the prominent features include black and white photography, and use of red which aligns with the movement. The center photo column features a collage of self-portraits of Robert Frank, cropped images fixed to white board with masking tape and red vinyl or lithography tape. The collage has marks from a red Chinagraph pencil, which is used to mark contact sheets in film photography. Speaking of photography, Maholy-Nagy drew his influences from the constructivist movement which he grew up on. His experimentation with the photogram had an impact on graphic design by combining typography with photography. He along with fellow designer and artist Herbert Bayer cinematic styles of photography in their work. Bayer combined dynamic photographs, clean typography, and limited colors in his work, and the notable red pop/accent.

The typeface use is a typewriter style in various weights throughout the poster. The title is white type on a black background with two strokes off centered and is centered within the column of images. The credits and billing block are in black against the white paper medium. Although previous design movements feature sans-serif typefaces, the artist used the same typeface in different weights, a similar value to the De Stijl and Bauhaus. The directors name (Laura Israel), credits, and billing block type has a flushed/ragged alignment in lowercase. This is a notable principle in the New Typography Movement.

The New Typography movement saw the expansion of the avant-garde movement and a more of a standardized approach to graphic design. This movement has ties to previous European avant-garde movements including the Bauhaus, De Stijl and Constructivist

movements. Jan Tschischold, a young designer from Germany who was one of the main spokespersons for the movement. He was inspired after attending the Bauhaus Exhibit in Weimar and decided to change his style and reject previous formal training. He wrote the book *The New Typography* which served as a manual for theories and standardized practices in design, further streamlining ideals he learned from the Bauhaus. He was an advocate for simplicity and functionality in design, as he believed in clarity of messaging. Other identifying principles of this movement use of grid systems, asymmetry, and the rejection of traditional ornamentation. He believed ornamental designs, typefaces, and other elements did not provide effective communication of messaging.

In Cuomo's work, we see various elements that align with this movement, like the New Typography movement, this work contains what is needed and it is used as part of the aesthetic which is known as "functional design". (insert definition) All necessary elements of a movie poster which includes the title, billing, production credits, and photography and have been arranged in a grid-like fashion. The New Typography (movement) championed simplicity in design was known for using sans serif typefaces in a variety of weights and sizes. In contrast to the movement, the artist chose a typewriter typeface and used it in a variety of weights and sizes. The type elements are arranged around the poster in a grid fashion to a flush/ragged alignment. Lastly, another major element is the use of photography arranged in the center column of the grid. The artist created a collage by placing images of Robert Frank and another image from contact sheet -photomontage. This experimental use of photography was

championed by Maholy-Nagy, but further explored and used as a standard for the New
Typography.

In conclusion, this analysis of the film poster for the documentary about photographer Robert Blake "Don't Blink," designed by Yolanda Cuomo reveals a fascinating intersection of contemporary visual storytelling and early 20th-century avant-garde design movements. By delving into the poster's elements and aesthetic choices, we understand it's alignment with Bauhaus, The New Typography, and shares origins with Constructivist, De Stijl movements. Through this comparative analysis, we gain a deeper appreciation for the nuanced interplay between modern artistry and the historical roots of avant-garde design and how they inspired Cuomo's design. The convergence of these influences in the "Don't Blink" film poster serve as a testament to the impact of early 20th-century design movements and showcasing artistic continuity and evolution.

Works Cited

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