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“Milton Glaser: To Inform and Delight” Essay

Right off the bat, what I really appreciated about this documentary and Milton’s art is the fact that he finds a way to connect it to music. One of the primary elements of his best artworks are the movement you can see throughout the pieces. As an artist, he aimed to evoke the same raw and strong emotion that music does for us, and it’s a testament to the fact that all forms of art are linked together in one way or another. It was stated in the documentary that Milton was very successfully capture the public sentiment behind certain notable events, and turn them into pieces of art and design, many of which defined entire eras such as the piece he made for Bob Dylan in the 1960’s. I believe that what makes a great artist is the ability to connect one’s art back to the recipient and make them feel something; and due to Milton’s strong understanding for the world around him, he was able to make things that evoked emotion and showed people a new way to see things.

The first thing I learned about design through this film is something that should be applied to all art forms; in order to create art that people can understand and resonate with, you have to put yourself in their shoes and almost if not certainly feel their pain. In order to create great art, Milton put himself in the place of others, and made art and design that spoke volumes. The second thing I learned about design through this film is not to overthink things so much when making art. The creation of the “I love New York” design was almost seamless, and not only is it one of the most well known designs in the world, but it also shows that sometimes, less is actually more. The third thing I learned about design and even really life in general through this film was that sometimes you have to look at the bigger picture when it comes to this field. Milton surprisingly state that he had made no money whatsoever from the “I love New York” symbol, but that it still brought him immense pride just from his perspective as an artist, and the fact that he was able to “shift the city’s consciousness” towards the common sentiment that us as New Yorkers love our city. Thinking like that requires a large amount/ understanding of consciousness to begin with, and it makes you appreciate the artist behind the art just a little bit more.

A fourth thing I learned about design through this film was something that I understood while learning about his works in journalism and the establishing of New York Magazine. If you want people to really understand your art and take it for what it is; don’t put a filter on it. New York Magazine kept people on their toes about what was really going on in the City, and as a response, people connected with it. If you feed people headlines and more bland consumerist news, you’ll just be another magazine sitting in a stack; but when you’re honest, people take note. This principle definitely applies to design; if you have an idea or opinion on something that’s actually honest and doesn’t just feel surface-level, even if people don’t agree with you, they’re more bound to respect it and take an interest into your work. Creating art that really aligns with what you think, and doesn’t aim to filter/ hide anything is what gets people really interested in what you have to say, and what you have to show. A fifth thing that I learned about design through this film was another thing that applies itself as a life skill along with being an art skill; go into the design process with open arms. Art has the potential of being either a lot better than you thought it would turn out, or a lot worse than you thought it would turn out, but as long as you go into it in a neutral perspective, you’re bound to learn something from it after you’re done; whether it be something you did right which you now know helps you make better art, or something you did wrong which you need to work in order to create better designs going forward.

Being a New Yorker, to me, the “I love New York” piece is the one that stands out to me the most among Milton’s work and that I find the most interesting. As a native, you do sometimes get tired of seeing it in the streets, but that doesn’t really take away from our deep-rootedness alongside it, and our love for it. Just as Milton had mentioned, it’s a symbol that represents how much we truly care about our city even if we’re complaining about it 99% of the time. As a young person specifically, on social media I often see how fast somebody will get mobbed up on for speaking badly about New York, it’s our city; and only we’re allowed to talk badly about it. That piece of design symbolizes not only the hard work that New Yorkers put in day to day to make a life for themself, but the simple things about the city we all come back to and love even if we hate it sometimes such as the trains, Times Square, street food, etc. I firmly believe that New York is the greatest city in the world, and the “I love New York” design shows how easy that is to understand.

The “I love New York” design is not only a classic piece of graphic design recognized by many, but it’s also an example of Milton’s appreciation for the use of typography and how he was able to create an entire story and legacy because of it. Aside from the aforementioned design, Milton also spoke on how his years designing logos and labels for supermarkets were essential to his career as a designer. His use of typography and simplicity in his designs helped him achieve exactly what he set out to do with his designs, and also managed to do with New York Magazine; help people. It’s almost as if his face lights up when he’s talking about this specific line of his work, and I appreciate it a lot. Even though something like supermarket logos may seem uninteresting, boring, or even insignificant to some, they reflect Milton’s hard work and the tremendous amounts of ambition he had as an artist. His use of specific styles of typography in these supermarket based jobs throughout his career made/ still continues to make life easier for the average American Joe. Although the art he was making at the time of filming was more directed towards smaller targeted audiences rather than the general population, Milton still took time to understand how fundamental his time working on things to help other common people was to his development as a designer. In terms of style, Milton’s work changed based on the task at hand, but what I understood and appreciated about the documentary was the fact that it showed that he assumed all of these assignments, tasks, and jobs graciously with open arms. His work had the potential to change drastically based on who/ with he was working with/ for, but it all evoked emotion in one way or another.

Overall, I appreciated this documentary not only as an artist, but as a New Yorker. As a designer, often it’s hard not to get caught up in the little things, but Milton Glaser showed off that even though those smaller do matter, what really shines is how people feel and what they understand after looking at your work. As long as you can be proud of what you’ve made, and know you can show it to somebody else to make them feel and understand something, you’ve achieved your goal as a designer. As for being a New Yorker, the “I love New York” and “I love New York More Than Ever” are not only perfect reflections of our love for our home as this city’s inhabitants, but another testament to the fact that even if we suffer due to unforeseen circumstances, we have the strength to come together, and more importantly heal together. New Yorkers are some of the strongest and most creative people in the world, and in this documentary, Milton Glaser not only showed off how much of an exemplary New Yorker and hustler that he was, but also that small basic ideas can touch a lot more people than creators probably give themself credit for. I learned to not only be more patient as a graphic designer, but also to love and appreciate the process more than rush towards a final answer.