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COMD 1112  
4/13/2020

### The Graphic Master: Ikko Tanaka

Ikko Tanaka was one of the greatest artists in Japan. A lot of his pieces were still stunning in this era. Tanaka was an artist that combines modernist principles and Japanese traditional style. All of his works showed minimalism and a sense of geometric style. Posters that Ikko Tanaka designed were very impressed, that there were a lot of new designers looked for inspiration from his works. He was also one of the directors of Muji retail company which was a famous Japanese style store. Even though he passed away in 2002, his works and designs made him unforgettable.

As one of the directors of Muji, Ikko Tanaka helped Muji turned into a successful retail store. In his career life, he followed a “less is more” rule. Muji was that kind of store that the products and decoration were simple but everything in the store was so unforgettable. Figure 1 was one of his Poster designed for Muji. The title of this piece was “The Muji Wind Blows in London and Paris.” In this artwork, there was no unnecessary element. The man which simply was used a black brush to illustrate was the main element in this poster. He carried a red book that correlated the Muji Asian word trademark. There were also simple lines



*Figure 1*  
*The Muji Wind Blows in London and Paris,*  
*2000, Ikko Tanaka*



*Figure 2*  
*Nihon Buyo,*  
*1981, Ikko Tanaka*

in this poster. All Tanaka had in this poster were basic geometric shapes and colors. We could also see that he used the grid system to create this poster. Although the format of this poster was very simple, Tanaka created a vivid geisha by how he placed the shapes and colors. In the poster, we could see the pale face with the pink blush of the geisha, and the symbolic red lips and eyeshadow.

On the other side, he had also done a very impressive job on typography. The title of figure 3 was “Typography Poster.” This poster was not only his most famous typography design and also his first poster composed of only typography. In this typography design, none of them were really a word or a complete character.

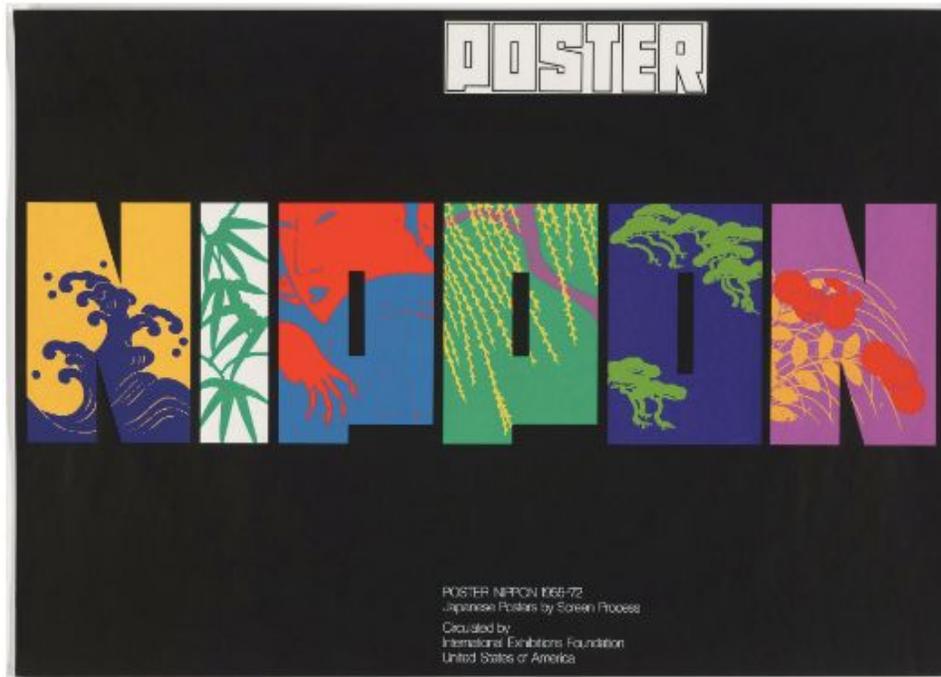


*Figure 3*  
*Typography Poster,*  
*1993, Ikko Tanaka*

behind the man shown the movement and wind by the man. In just a simple graphic, Ikko Tanaka used his simple and strong style to present the idea and the title of the poster.

As a Japanese symbolic artist, Ikko Tanaka participated in a lot of international events such as UCLA Asian Performing Art. Figure 2 was one of the artworks that were in the Asian Performing Art Festival held at UCLA. This was one of the most successful Tanaka’s posters. There was no complicated drawing or color at all

Each of them was a part of a character. In this design, we could see that Tanaka had a strong sense of composing elements. He showed the beauty of Asian words by this composition. He also used bright colors and dark colors to make more contrast to the poster which made the poster more impressive.



*Figure 4*  
*Poster Nippon 1955-72,*  
*1972, Ikko Tanaka*

Another typography poster (figure 4) that Tanaka designed was “Poster Nippon 1955-72.” Nippon meant Japan, which meant that this poster could represent Japan. As we could see that Tanaka used all capitalized letters to keep the size of the letters similar. In this case, it made the poster look cleaner. Tanaka also put several symbolic elements inside the letters, such as the wave, the bamboo, the geisha, and the pine tree. All of these were great elements in the Japanese art field. A lot of traditional artists in Japan inspired by these objects.

In conclusion, every piece that Tanaka designed had a strong idea and he did a good job on how to let the viewer understand what he wanted to present. Besides, as one of the most important directors of Muji, he understood what the customer wanted. For so many years, his artworks and Muji's style were very similar, it was modern but classic, simple but memorable.

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