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J. Mammen



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THE AUTHORS ARE INDEBTED TO SONIA BIANCALANI LEVETHAN FOR RESEARCH ASSISTANCE; LEAH LOCOCO FOR DESIGN ASSISTANCE; LEE BEARSON FOR TYPOGRAPHIC ASSISTANCE; AND CHAWA KOSTER FOR TRANSLATIONS. THANKS ALSO GO TO OUR FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES AT CHRONICLE BOOKS: BILL LEBLOND, EDITOR; MICHAEL CARABETTA, ART DIRECTOR; CHARLOTTE STONE, ASSISTANT EDITOR; AND PATRICIA DRAHER, COPYEDITOR — AND TO SARAH JANE FREYMANN, OUR AGENT.

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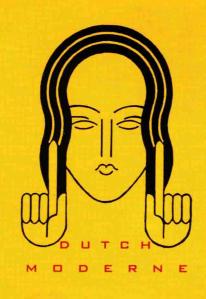
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IN THE 1920s, WHEN THE INDUSTRIALIZED WORLD ENTERED A MACHINE AGE, AN ELEGANT, STREAMLINED STYLE KNOWN AS ART MODERNE WAS ADOPTED BY DESIGNERS IN EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA, AND ASIA AND APPLIED TO ARCHITECTURE, FURNITURE, JEWELRY, CLOTHING, AND GRAPHICS.

INTRODUCTION

THIS WAS THE SECOND TIME IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY THAT A DESIGN LANGUAGE PROLIFERATED THROUGHDUT THE WORLD WITH SUCH UBIQUITY — THE FIRST WIDESPREAD STYLE WAS ART NOUVEAU, WHICH BEGAN IN THE 1890s AND ENDED BEFORE WORLD WAR I. ALLOWING FOR CERTAIN INDIGENOUS VARIATIONS IN EACH OF THE NATIONS WHERE IT TOOK HOLD, ART MODERNE BECAME THE DOMINANT INTERNATIONAL DESIGN STYLE BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS. AN ORIGINAL SYNTHESIS OF CUBISM AND ANCIENT EGYPTIAN AND MAYAN DESIGN MOTIFS, ART MODERNE SPREAD THROUGHOUT POST-WORLD WAR I FRANCE, GERMANY, ENGLAND, ITALY,

THIS BOOK EXAMINES HOW ART MODERNE (ALSO CALLED MODERNISTIC) GRAPHIC DESIGN WAS MANIFEST IN THE NETHERLANDS IN THE 1920s AND 1930s. ALTHOUGH DUTCH DESIGNERS DID NOT INVENT THE STYLE, THEY CERTAINLY HELPED TO POPULARIZE IT. AND WHILE THERE IS NOTHING INHERENTLY DUTCH ABOUT ART MODERNE, DUTCH DESIGNERS AND MERCHANTS ENTHUSIASTICALLY EMBRACED IT, NOT AS A RADICAL FORMAL LANGUAGE, BUT AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO BOTH TRADITIONAL AND REVOLUTIONARY GRAPHIC APPROACHES.

AND EASTERN EUROPE BEFORE EMERGING IN HOLLAND.

AS A MARKETING TOOL, ART MODERNE, WITH ITS STREAMLINED AESTHETIC, WAS SUITED TO AN INTERNATIONAL COMMERCIAL CULTURE THAT STRESSED THE IMAGE OF PROGRESS



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OVER THE LEGACY OF THE PAST. ART AND INDUSTRY WERE ALLIED IN A CRUSADE TO CHANGE THE POPULAR PERCEPTION OF BUSINESS FROM STODGY TO VITAL. AND ART MODERNE EPITOMIZED WHAT THE INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER RAYMOND LOWEY REFERRED TO IN THE 1930s AS MAYA, "MOST ADVANCED YET ACCEPTABLE," AN ETHIC OF PURPOSEFULLY GRADUAL CHANGE. COMPARED TO THE EPITOME OF PROGRESSIVISM — THE COLD FUNCTIONALITY OF EUROPEAN MODERNIST MOVEMENTS SUCH AS THE BAUHAUS, PURISM, AND CONSTRUCTIVISM — ART MODERNE OFFERED A BALANCE OF ELEGANCE AND SIMPLICITY. IT WAS THEREFORE NOT A REVOLUTION IN DESIGN BUT AN EVOLUTION, FROM THE CURVILINEAR DECORATIVE STYLE THAT WAS ART NOUVEAU TO A RECTILINEAR ONE IN WHICH SHARP GEOMETRIES WERE THE HALLMARK OF MACHINE-BASED RATHER THAN ORGANIC AESTHETICS.

GIVEN HOLLAND'S SMALL SIZE AND POPULATION ITS CONTRIBUTION TO TWENTIETH-CENTURY AVANT-GARDE TYPOGRAPHY, PHOTOGRAPHY, AND GRAPHICS HAS BEEN DISPROPORTIONATELY PROFOUND. AFTER WORLD WAR I DUTCH DESIGNERS AND TYPOGRAPHERS AGGRESSIVELY CHALLENGED THE STATUS QUO BY TESTING THE LIMITS OF CONVENTIONAL VISUAL COMMUNICATION. TWO DISTINCT MOVEMENTS DEVELOPED, ONE ECLECTIC, THE OTHER ASCETIC. THE ECLECTIC STYLE WAS A DECORATIVE EXPRESSIONIST AESTHETIC ALTERNATELY REFERRED TO AS THE WENDINGEN STYLE, AFTER THE MAGAZINE OF THE SAME NAME, MEANING TURN OR UPHEAVAL, OR THE WIJDEVELD STYLE, SO NAMED FOR ITS INVENTOR, THE ARCHITECT, DESIGNER, AND EDITOR, H. TH. WIJDEVELD. IN 1918 HE FOUNDED WENDINGEN, THE JOURNAL OF A LOOSELY KNIT GROUP OF EXPRESSIONISTS KNOWN AS THE AMSTERDAM SCHOOL.

THE SECOND MOVEMENT WAS THE PURIST ETHIC OF DE STIJL (THE STYLE), FOUNDED IN 1917 BY THEO VAN DOESBURG WHO EDITED ITS JOURNAL OF THE SAME NAME. IT WAS A REACTION TO THE CHAOTIC NATURE OF ART AND DESIGN AT THE TIME, AND AN UNPRECEDENTED RATIONALIST METHODOLOGY BASED ON FORMALIST EXPERIMENTS IN ARCHITECTURE AND VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS THAT WAS DESTINED TO INFLUENCE DESIGN THROUGHOUT EUROPE.

THE WENDINGEN STYLE, WRITES PAOLO PORTOGHESI IN HIS BOOK WENDINGEN, WAS KNOWN FOR "IRRATIONALITY, PERCEPTION THROUGH VISION; DE STIJL WAS KNOWN FOR RATIONALITY, PERCEPTION THROUGH ANALYSIS" (PORTOGHESI AND FANELLI, 1988). THE WENDINGEN STYLE WAS TIED TO A PAST ERA BY ITS EXTRAVAGANCES, WHICH INCLUDED COMPLEX AND ARTFUL TYPOGRAPHICS. DE STIJL WAS DEDICATED TO A UTOPIAN FUTURE THAT REJECTED EXTRAVAGANCE FOR ECONOMY. DESPITE THESE DIFFERENCES BOTH SCHOOLS DID AGREE THAT AN UPHEAVAL OF VALUES WAS NECESSARY BEFORE SOCIETY COULD BE REORIENTED AND RESHAPED.

INITIALLY THIS PROPOSITION WAS PRESENTED BY HOLLAND'S MOST INFLUENTIAL ARCHITECT, H. P. BERLAGE, WHO AS EARLY AS 1903 BEGAN HOLLAND'S ARTISTIC RENEWAL THROUGH THE CONCEPT OF "HONESTY IN CONSTRUCTION." IN A CRITIQUE OF THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY ORNAMENTAL EXCESSES THAT WERE STILL BEING AFFIXED TO ARCHITECTURE AND GRAPHICS IN THE NETHERLANDS HE WROTE, "THE SHAM ART HAS TO BE FOUGHT.

WE WISH FOR REALITY AGAIN AND NOT PHANTOMS." BERLAGE ADVOCATED THAT DESIGN OF ALL KINDS SHOULD SERVE THE COMMUNITY SPIRITUALLY AS WELL AS FUNCTIONALLY.

DELFTSCHSTUDENTENCORP
Anniversary poster, 1928
Theodoor Van Erp



ALTHOUGH THOSE WHO WERE INFLUENCED BY BERLAGE SHARED THIS GOAL, THEY NEVERTHELESS DEVELOPED HIS IDEA TO EXTREMES. "DE STIJL EXASPERATED THE THEME OF FORMAL SIMPLIFICATION AND RATIONALITY, AND ATTAINED AN ABSOLUTE ABSTRACTION," WROTE THE GERMAN CRITIC AND ARCHITECT ERICH MENDELSOHN IN 1920. "THE AMSTERDAM SCHOOL EXASPERATED THE EXPRESSIVE SEARCH, THE PLASTIC CHARACTERIZATION, THE INDIVIDUALISM, AND ADOPTED AND DEVELOPED MANY STYLISTIC ELEMENTS TYPICAL OF THE MAESTRO [BERLAGE] BUT WITH A NEW ACCENT THAT ABANDONED [HIM]" (QUOTED IN PORTOGHESI AND FANELLI, 1988).

IN THEIR ATTEMPT TO ALTER POPULAR PERCEPTION BY TRANSFORMING TRADITIONAL DUTCH AESTHETICS, WENDINGEN ARTISTS INTRODUCED APPROACHES THAT WERE OFTEN TOO ARTFULLY CONVOLUTED, WHILE DE STIJL WAS TOO RIGIDLY MATHEMATICAL. WIJDEVELD WAS OBSESSED WITH THE CLOSE UNITY OF TEXT AND DECORATION IN WHICH LEGIBILITY WAS NOT AS IMPORTANT AS GRAPHIC NUANCE OR GESTURE. GEOMETRIC LETTER FORMS MADE FROM THE LEAD SLUGS USED IN LETTERPRESS PRINTING WERE RUN TOGETHER WITHOUT LETTER OR WORD SPACING. THE EFFECT WAS VISUALLY HARMONIOUS BUT SOMETIMES ILLEGIBLE. WIJDEVELD'S TYPOGRAPHIC WORK RECEIVED SPORADIC ATTENTION "MIXED WITH IRRITATION AND JEALOUSY. IRRITATION MOSTLY FOR THE PRESUMED ILLEGIBILITY.... JEALOUSY FOR WENDINGEN'S JOYOUS AGGRESSIVENESS," WROTE GIOVANNI FANELLI IN HIS ESSAY "WENDINGEN AS A MODEL OF TYPOGRAPHIC ART" (PORTOGHESI AND FANELLI, 1988).

VAN DOESBURG AND HIS EARLY COLLEAGUES, AMONG THEM THE PAINTER PIET MONDRIAN

AND ARCHITECTS J. J. P. OUD AND GERRIT RIETVELD, AIMED AT EXPRESSING THE UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLE OF TOTAL ABSTRACTION, OR WHAT H. L. C. JAFFÉ IN DE STIJL 1917-1931 CALLS "A RENDERING OF EXACT AND EQUILIBRIATED RELATIONS" THAT RESULTED IN COOL, ANALYTICAL DESIGN FORMS (JAFFÉ, 1986). DE STIJL WAS AGGRESSIVE IN ITS ORDERLINESS AND PRECISION. BY EMBRACING STRICT MODERNIST FORMALISM AND SOCIAL UTOPIANISM, DE STIJL WAS DEVOTED TO WHAT JAFFÉ CALLS THE "COLLECTIVE IMPERSONAL STYLE," A SEARCH FOR THE PLATONIC IDEAL.

CONTEMPORARY CRITICS, AND MANY CLIENTS, WERE ALIENATED BY BOTH SCHOOLS' REJECTION OF CONVENTIONAL AESTHETICS. YET SINCE THE WENDINGEN STYLE AND DE STIJL WERE PRACTICED FOR A DECADE AND A HALF, THEY EXERTED A PROFOUND STYLISTIC AND FORMAL INFLUENCE ON DUTCH COMMERCIAL GRAPHIC DESIGN, IN ADDITION TO HIS WORK ON WENDINGEN, WIJDEVELD PROMOTED HIS TYPOGRAPHY THROUGH DESIGNS FOR BOOKS AND CULTURAL POSTERS; THE STYLE WAS ADOPTED BY FOLLOWERS AND INNOVATORS WORKING IN SIMILAR MEDIA. VAN DOESBURG AND THE OTHER LOOSELY KNIT DE STIJL MEM-BERS WHO PRACTICED GRAPHIC DESIGN ALSO MAINTAINED A VISUAL PRESENCE IN THE COM-MERCIAL WORLD THROUGH ADVERTISING AND PACKAGES FOR MANUFACTURERS AND MER-CHANTS. MOREOVER, VAN DOESBURG WAS INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED FOR HIS RELATION-SHIP WITH OTHER MODERN MOVEMENTS INCLUDING CONSTRUCTIVISM, DADA, AND A RATHER CONTENTIOUS SOJOURN AT THE BAUHAUS. BY THE EARLY 1920S THE IDEAS PROMOTED BY BOTH SCHOOLS HAD INSPIRED OTHER DESIGNERS TO SERIOUSLY ADDRESS THE PAUCITY OF

SOPHISTICATED COMMERCIAL GRAPHIC DESIGN IN HOLLAND AS COMPARED TO OTHER INDUSTRIALIZED EUROPEAN NATIONS.

ALTHOUGH AN ACTIVE MOVEMENT OF DUTCH DESIGNERS REEVALUATED AND REVIVED CLASSIC TYPOGRAPHY, THEY WERE CONCERNED WITH REESTABLISHING THE TRADITIONS LOST DURING THE LATTER PART OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, WHEN THE GRAPHIC ARTS WERE AT THEIR NADIR. FOLLOWERS OF THE WENDINGEN STYLE AND DE STIJL WERE MORE INTERESTED IN CHANGING THOSE NICETIES. DESPITE THE IMPRESSIVE REFORMS OF THE TRADITIONALISTS, GRAPHIC DESIGN IN THE NETHERLANDS DURING THE 1920s WAS PUSHED IN THE DIRECTION OF TWO GRAPHIC STYLES: MODERN AND MODERNISTIC. THE FORMER WAS INFLUENCED BY EUROPE'S AVANT-GARDE, AND THE LATTER BY EUROPE'S DOMINANT COMMERCIAL STYLE.

BEFORE DISCUSSING DUTCH ART MODERNE, IT IS NECESSARY TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF AND RESPONSE TO THE MODERN MOVEMENT, FOR IT BOTH THREATENED AND REVIVED DUTCH COMMERCIAL CULTURE AND HAD BOTH A POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INFLUENCE ON THE MODERNISTIC DESIGN. BEGINNING IN THE EARLY 1920S MODERN DESIGN MADE INROADS THROUGH THE EFFORTS OF SEMINAL DESIGNERS SUCH AS PIET ZWART, PAUL SCHUITEMA, GERARD KILJAN, WIM BRUSSE, HENNY CAHAN, AND DICK ELFFERS, WHO PRACTICED A VARIANT OF CONSTRUCTIVISM THAT INVOLVED ASYMMETRIC TYPOGRAPHY, PRIMARY COLORS, AND PHOTOMONTAGE. BY THE MID-1930S, OVER A DECADE AFTER RUSSIAN CONSTRUCTIVISM AND THE NEW TYPOGRAPHY (THE FUNCTIONAL TYPOGRAPHIC SYSTEM CODIFIED IN GERMANY BY JAN TSCHICOLD IN HIS BOOK NEUE TYPOGRAPHIE) HAD PEAKED AS VIABLE