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A SEMIOTIC INVESTIGATION OF MILTON GLASER'S PORTRAIT POSTER STUDY "DYLAN"

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Abstract

Milton Glaser, one of the most important representatives of the American Psychedelic art movement, has made significant contributions to graphic design throughout his working life. So much so that by inspiring the artists of his time, he also pioneered the artists after him. Glaser's poster work "Dylan" is a highly original work with colorful and contoured hair details and a profile portrait of Bob Dylan in black silhouette. The word "Dylan", the surname of Bob Dylan, is also located in the black lower part of the silhouette. The study used black and white colors to increase contrast. The colors used in the hair are pastel shades of turquoise, orange, green, pink, yellow, brown, blue and red. The word "Dylan" is also made close to the color of tile. Even if the word Dylan was not written, it can be understood from the silhouette of the figure depicted that it is a portrait of Bob Dylan. The characteristic nose and forehead connection of Dylan, who is of Turkish origin, and his small mouth are evident. Looking at the overall work, besides the pessimistic color like black, colorful hair added movement to the work. It refers to Dylan's colorful and lively style. The aim of the study is to make a semiotic analysis of Glaser's signature work "Dylan", which has an important place in graphic design. It includes the aims of making detailed analysis, revealing Glaser's understanding of art, and guiding people who are interested in graphic art and who do it.

Keywords: Milton Glaser, Bob Dylan, Psychedelic art, graphic art, silhouette, contrast, characteristic.



Introduction

Milton Glaser has been a source of inspiration for his graphic design work throughout his art life and has shown this in all his works. He has also shown that he is a prolific artist by doing a lot of work on behalf of graphic design. In this respect, it can be said that the artist was a source of inspiration for his own period and subsequent artists with his artistic life and works of art. Semiotics is a qualified science because it is one of the most important fields of science in the 19th and 20th centuries and is a method used in the analysis of works of art. For this reason, in this study, Milton Glaser's "Dylan" was analyzed in accordance with semiotics and with Danish Louis Hjelmslev's artwork analysis method.

Biography of Milton Glaser

Milton Glaser was born in 1929 in the Bronx, New York, to a family of Hungarian Jewish immigrants. Interested in art from an early age, Glaser took art classes before going to middle school. He attended Music and Arts High School in Manhattan and then Cooper Union in New York. Located on the east coast, Cooper Union was a prominent college with many respected graduates. In the following years, he won a Fulbright scholarship and had the opportunity to study at the Fine Arts Academy in Bologna, Italy. While receiving this scholarship, she took ethical design practice lessons from the artist Giorgio Morandi (Delilovic, 2020, 11). As a talented and well-known designer in his 20s, he launched his career by founding his first company called Pushpin Studios. Pushpin Studios Graphic Communication Industry, which they established in 1954 with their friends from Glaser and Cooper Union, Seymour Chwast and Edward Sorel, had taken the brand - project works of their customers to make their name known. The "Push Pin Monthly" consisting of these works was published and became a success in a short time. After this success, they increased their colleagues and expanded their customer range in order to reach wider audiences. Glaser left the company in 1975, but Pushpin Studios still exists today. In 1968, he co-founded New York magazine, of which he was the founder and design director, with Clay Felker. The publication served as a model for other city magazines and a number of imitations were made. In 2009, he became the first graphic designer to receive the National Medal of Art award. Glaser died in 2020 at the age of 91 from stroke and kidney failure.

Milton Glaser and Psychedelic Art

Glaser made his work "Dylan" by making use of the Art Nouveau movement and the concept of psychedelic art, which he was interested in. Psychedelic art is art, graphic or visual representations related to or inspired by psychedelic experiences and hallucinations known to follow the intake of psychedelic drugs. The word "psychedelic" was coined by British psychologist Humphry Osmond and means "manifestation of the mind". According to this definition, all artistic efforts to depict the inner world of the soul can be considered "psychedelic".

"Psychedelic art" is defined as the work of art that emerges after ingestion of drugs and substances. Various studies have been conducted on more than 200 artists, writers and musicians who describe their artistic productions as "psychedelic" because it is associated with the occasional or frequent use of these substances by artists. Although there is no common point that characterizes the works of the artists, this art movement continues to exist (Krippner, 2016, 415). "Psychedelic art" refers above all to the art movement of the counterculture of the late 1960s, which featured highly distorted or surreal visuals, bright colors and animations to evoke, convey or enhance psychedelic experiences. Psychedelic visual arts are known as the counterpart of psychedelic rock music and are not just for concert posters, album covers, murals, comics, underground newspapers, etc. It reflects not only the mutable, swirling color patterns of hallucinations in the materials, but also revolutionary political, social and spiritual emotions, psychedelic states of consciousness inspired by the inner appearances derived from them. Among the artists of the psychedelic art movement, Alex Grey, Wes Wilson, Alton Kelley, Marta Minujin, Dan Lam and Scrojo have created remarkable works¹

Glaser has produced many works in the Psychedelic understanding of art. Among them, the covers of Time magazine with promotional images of California are in the foreground. By giving the complexity of this art movement in an extremely balanced way, the artist enabled the viewer to look at each corner of the painting separately in his works. His aim in doing this is to reach the whole picture from individual objects and realize the principle of induction. In Glaser's designs, the eye of the viewer moves along the design rather than focusing on one place, which reveals Glaser's originality.



Figure 1. Milton Glaser, "California: Here It Comes!", Time Magazine Cover, November 7, 1969.
<https://sva.edu/features/time-after-time-milton-glaser-on-his-california-themed-cover-for-the-magazine-50-years-later>

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychedelic_art.

Psychedelic art was often associated with rock posters produced in San Francisco. As a designer with a wide awareness of art and art movements, Glaser was inspired by Marcel Duchamp's 1957 self-portrait for his portrait of "Dylan". Although a similar composition is used in the work, the transformation of Dylan's curly hair into a tangled rainbow was Glaser's own original design (Nicolini et al., 2015-2016, 60). Designer Steven Brower “Islamic art Marcel” on Glaser's portrait of “Dylan” He meets Duchamp at the dawn of the psychedelic age” (Landa, 2011, 167).

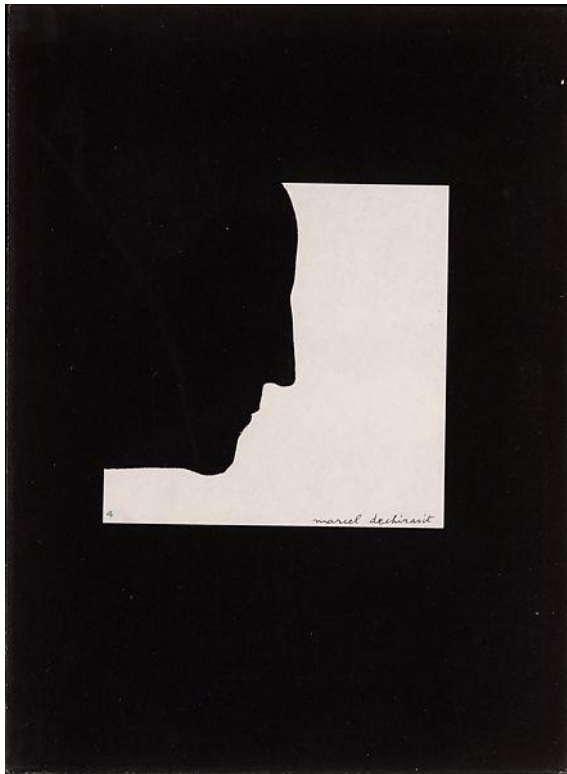


Figure 2. Marcel Duchamp “Self-Portrait” 1957, 33.7 x 24.4 cm, torn and pasted paper on velvet covered cardboard, Met Museum, New York
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/492560>

Glaser's work "Mozart Festival", which he drew artists like Mozart with the profile portrait approach of the "Dylan" portrait, is also interesting. The artist depicted Mozart walking outdoors, while he was raising his head in the fifth of the 9-frame image, while in the sixth he pointed out that he was sneezing by showing him in a staccato and vibrating manner. In doing so, he refers to the human character of the divine artist like Mozart. Glaser strengthens the meaning he wants to give by coloring the figure in the form of blocks, away from details. The aim here is to give the instant situation and to indicate the emotional state with lines and colors.



Figure 3. Milton Glaser, “Mostly Mozart Festival”, 1983
<https://www.miltonglaser.com/store/c:posters/1112/mostly-mozart-festival-1983>

The following poster series, consisting of different Shakespeare portraits, was prepared by Milton Glaser in honor of the 20th anniversary of the “Theatre for a New Audience” (Öner, 2013, 60). “Theater for a New Audience” is an organization that stages Shakespeare's plays and contemporary theatrical products². When we compare the portraits of Shakespeare with the “Dylan” poster, we see that Glaser uses his colors more freely. The fact that he paints the color of the face as he wants and comes from within, not as it usually is, shows that he paints emotions.



Figure 4. Milton Glaser, “Shakespeare”, 2003
<https://artsandfood.com/2016/12/milton-glaser-creates-shakespeare-2.html/>

² <https://artsandfood.com/2016/12/milton-glaser-creates-shakespeare-2.html/>.

Semiotic Analysis of Milton Glaser's "Dylan" Poster

The subject of semiotics gives a detailed analysis of the analysis of a painting in the field of art. The more detailed a work of art is analyzed, the more flavor the viewer will get from the work. This field has developed thanks to the work of theorists such as Barthes and Saussure, who pioneered semiotics to be a science. Both scientists have handled semiotics differently in terms of their approaches to semiotics. Barthes considered semiotics as a sub-branch of linguistics. He also introduced two new concepts to semiotics. These; denotation or meaning concepts (Bircan, 2015, 19). If we consider Milton Glaser's "Bob Dylan" design according to these two concepts of Barthes, the literal meaning in design is the portrait of Bob Dylan, which is the first thing we see and perceive. Connotation is the message that is tried to be given. That's Dylan's colorful personality and being a versatile artist.

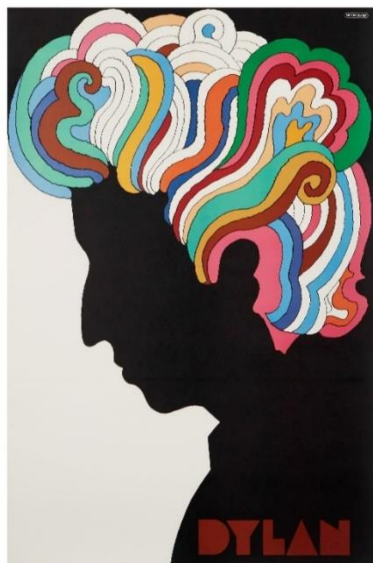


Figure 5. Milton Glaser, Dylan (Bob Dylan), 83.8 x 55.8 cm, Poster, 1966, Offset Lithography
<https://www.miltonglaser.com/store/c:posters/824/dylan-reproduction-2008>

Poster work "Dylan" by Milton Glaser was made in 1966. The piece was designed for Columbia Records for American musician and writer Bob Dylan's album "Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits". At 33 x 22" (83.8 x 55.8 cm) more than six million copies have been printed. The first edition currently resides at the Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum. A black portrait of Bob Dylan in profile is seen on the main axis, with an off-white color in the background to increase contrast. Where Dylan's hair is, it is seen that there are folds made in colored stripes. On the lower right side, it is striking that "Dylan" is written in dark red with typographic letters designed by Milton Glaser. The work was made on a piece of paper (material) held in a vertical position, so it was given as a portrait bust. The expression in the portrait is stagnant, but the structure and color of the hair have brought movement to the work. The portrait is at the center of attention of the composition.

This work is one of Glaser's important works. The artist reached a portrait by using extremely basic linear values and captured the character of the portrait he made. The method of expressing more meaning with less value, which is used in graphic arts, also showed itself in this work. We will try to analyze Glaser's "Dylan" poster semiotically, with the understanding that Danish Louis Hjelmslev, one of the founders of the Copenhagen Linguistics Circle, analyzes his works of art. There are four areas that Hjelmslev mentioned, these are; form of expression, essence of expression, form of content and essence of content. If we examine the work in this context, it is necessary to mention the compositional elements about the form of expression. The composition in the work is in a vertical position, it is thought that the figure is standing. It is not easy to talk about light and shadow in the work, but because the figure is black and the background is white, it is possible to talk about contrast. The colors show themselves mostly in the hair and are made in pastel tones.

If we come to the subject of the substance of the narrative, the area where the figure is placed on the paper is a limited area. But that doesn't stop us from seeing Bob Dylan's features. The profile is given very clearly. Since there is no light-shadow, perspective is not mentioned. Aesthetic elements are evident in the form of the content. The poster has been depicted with a very simple yet aesthetic point of view, especially in accordance with the psychedelic art of the hair. The color harmony in the hair does not stand in the way of each other and has been made tremendously with values evenly distributed throughout. For the final analysis step of Hjelmslev, which is called the substance of the content, Glaser has made the design simple and understandable in order to strengthen the meaning he wants to give, by getting rid of unnecessary details to strengthen the meaning.

Conclusion

Semiotics is an extremely important method in graphic design. This is also considered as the most appropriate method for the analysis of expense designs. Being a modern science of semiotics, the signs, symbols, signs and plots used in the actuation operator are not resolved. For example, the heart symbol in the work "I love NY" created by Milton Glaser is a universal symbol and refers to the same meaning for everyone, namely love and affection. There are many different and many symbols related to love, but Glaser used the simplest, plain and understandable one in his design. This allows the heart symbol to be substituted for love in other designs. Likewise, the drawing of the white dove symbol for the peace frame consists of an idea as in the heart symbol.

Detailed pictures and drawings in the classical period components can give the feature of being different in meaning or interpretation in terms of semiotics. For example, the owl image in a painting refers to both reason and drunkenness. In order to cause such confusion, the meaning and the message must be clear. This may be enough to cause some deficiencies in the analysis of classical period objects. At these ends, modern art works and graphic design studies are more suitable for semiotics. All of these classical period objects do not make sense in accordance with semiotics, but the meaning of many

elements, the meaning that the artist wants to give, the meaning in the symbols and books and the meaning that the audience analyzes may be different from each other.

Milton Glaser's autumn design named "Bob Dylan" features a very plain and understandable look. A face in profile is complemented by colorful and wavy Psychedelic art styled hair elements and a plain background. It also includes the words "Dylan" in an appropriate font that they wrote. Black and white colors are used a lot in graphic design. In this design, the contrast of black and white is at the forefront, and a little bit of simplicity is allowed to seep in with the colorful hair details. The face of Bob Dylan, depicted as a profile in the design, also refers to an optical illusion-like shield. When the face slope is corrected and the same face is added parallel to the opposite, the white floor in the middle turns into a vase. It is possible to see this in this design as well. Even this is spent on the fact that Glaser's design work is multifaceted. The power of design can make us different interpretations from different angles and develop the imagination of the audience.

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