

A look into the colliding worlds of Photography and Graphic Design

Introduction

Being a graphic designer myself, I wanted to merge my roots of being a designer together with photography itself as both of them are a form of visual art. I felt that it would be very interesting to explore and see exactly how the two worlds collide. I aimed to understand more about how photographers with a core background in design would approach the art of photography, then finally merging and translating it with my own conviction as a designer to create my own series of photos.

The Bauhaus Photography

It was with that thought that I began my research. What I found astounded and excited me at the same time. Personally, I would consider myself an efficient designer as I do not believe in using too many elements to express an idea. Everything that I put into my work has a meaning – each shape, each object and even each colour. I discovered this relatively unknown photographer, Iwao Yamawaki, an architectural student of Bauhaus who ended up switching over to photography. His photos are heavily influenced by a movement called New Vision, which is described in *Photospeak* as ‘plunging views, dizzying upwards perspectives, close-ups, and emphasis on photographic materials.’¹ These traits are evident in his Iwao’s photos as his works do not feature any subjects in particular, but rather the shape of it.

¹ Gilles Mora, *PhotoSpeak: A Guide to the Ideas, Movements, and Techniques of Photography, 1839 to the Present*, 1st ed (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1998), 134.



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Iwao Yamawaki, Untitled (Modernist Architecture),



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Iwao Yamawaki, Set of Bowls

² Iwao Yamawaki, *Untitled (Modernist Architecture)*, Photography, accessed November 14, 2018, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/yamawaki-untitled-modernist-architecture-p79893>.

³ Iwao Yamawaki, *Set of Bowls*, Photography, accessed November 14, 2018, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/yamawaki-set-of-bowls-p13184>.

I explored further into this style of photography and discovered that every master/photographer of this movement had their own twist to it. For example, another Bauhaus teacher, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, chose to exploit the sense of light and shadow. He strongly believed that ‘Art is experiencing a sense of space⁴’. This really intrigued me as it relates closely to one aspect of design that I absolutely love – typography (more on that later). Moholy-Nagy wants to change the perspective of how we see things. His photos offers a unique perspective – angle to which we can see the world. Some of his photos that I am particularly interested in, focuses not on any subject or mood, but rather in shapes and forms.



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Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Xanti Schawinsky on a Bauhaus Balcony*

Even though we clearly know that this is a photo of a building, yet our eyes cannot be helped but to be drawn by how straight and triangle this photo is. It keeps our eyes moving upwards until we reach the top of the photo towards the negative space.

⁴ Eric Kim, “LEARN FROM THE MASTERS: László Moholy-Nagy,” *Eric Kim Photography* (blog), accessed November 15, 2018, <http://erickimphotography.com/blog/2017/08/12/learn-from-the-masters-laszlo-moholy-nagy/>.

⁵ Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Xanti Schawinsky on a Bauhaus Balcony*, Late 1920s, Photography, Late 1920s, <https://www.atgetphotography.com/Images/Photos/Moholy-Nagy/nagy-28.jpg>.



Laszalo Moholy-Nagy, *Bauhaus Balconies*,

This photo also emphasises on the non-human aspect of photography, choosing to focus on the shape and form over anything else. The perspective that he offered in this photo can be a view that we often see, yet never captured in our minds.

Some might say that this style of photography is cold and emotionless, that there is complete lack of human touch. I mean, how interesting or exciting can shapes be? In my opinion, his photos are more than just aesthetics or shapes. He may or may not have known at the time, but his photos are a way of sharing a different way to look at the world, to take something currently existing or even boring, and package it in a new way for people to rediscover the world. This is what design to me is all about, to visually communicate what I want people to see, to understand and to experience. My role as a designer is to create an experience, be it through my design digitally or through the space that I created physically.

On to Typography

The reason why ‘creating a sense of space’ hit me so strongly is because I believe that typography is not just designing or using fonts. Typography to me is the art of controlling. Space. It deals with not just just spacing from one word to another, but space between each

⁶ Laszalo Moholy-Nagy, *Bauhaus Balconies*, 1920s, Photography, 1920s, <https://designhistoryresearch.wordpress.com/category/laszlo-moholy-nagy/>.

character as well. It is the art of kerning, where spacing between each letter is adjusted for the best optical balance.



As you can see from the image, a well-kerned word looks a lot better and polished than the one that is not kerned. It's not about giving an equal mathematical number to the amount of spacing between each letters, as each letter is shaped differently and thus it reacts differently to different letters that comes before and after it. Kerning, for example, is not a problem that can be easily solved by science and math. It is something that can only be solved by the eyes, by feeling the space between each letter. One way to help with kerning is to flip the word upside down, so that you are not distracted by the letter itself. Rather, you would see the letters as shapes. Look at the image below.



Do you see the space?

⁷ “Typesetting,” Blog, *Typesetting* (blog), accessed November 17, 2018, <http://facweb.cs.depaul.edu/sgrais/typesetting.html>.

⁸ “Typesetting.”

This study of space in typography, about seeing things in shapes and form than what it is, brings a different perspective of what design and photography can be. Too often we are too focused on what is there but we do not see what's around it. There can be beauty and art in the absence of things as well – we just need to change the way we look.

Conclusion

Overall, with together with my set of photos, I tried to approach photography with eyes of a designer by looking at forms and space in a different way. There are more than one way, or one angle to look at the same scene. Each way of looking gives an entirely different look, possibly even giving old photos new life.

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