



## LUCIEN BERNHARD

**Designer's full name:** Emil Kahn

**Designer's pseudonym/nickname:** Lucien Bernhard

**Gender:** Male

**Year Born:** 1883

**Country Born:** Germany

**Year Died:** 1972

**Country Died:** United States

**Religion | Political Alignment:** Bernhard declared himself to be apolitical, however he created several propaganda posters for the Central Powers during World War I, and created a poster promoting the first German election that would allow women to vote. Religion Unknown.

**How did any of the above affect either his/her life experience or work because it/they provided a challenge at the time?**

**None of the above qualities of the designer provided a challenge for the time.**

**Did this designer do notable work in fields other than what would TODAY be considered graphic design?**

After moving to New York City from Berlin in 1923, Bernhard tried but was unable to appeal to American audiences with his highly modern takes on design. During that time he worked in interior design until the American Type Founders contracted him in 1928.

**For what is this designer most noted in relation to design? EXPLAIN.**

Bernhard is responsible for the Plakatstil design school of early 20th century Europe. This style was signified by bold shapes, colors, and type, with imagery - if present - that was largely reductive and stylized. Plakatstil was a union of text and imagery in which the use of typography held as much importance as imagery; rather than type being used to support the image, the type and image work in cohesion.. It was a massive influence in the design world, pushing the standards of design closer to simplification of forms.

**Is there anything controversial about this designer? Explain.**

There is nothing notably controversial about this designer.

**Explain this designer's education/training, including academic, apprenticeships, and /or mentorships.**

The 1898 Munich Glasaplast Exhibition of Interior Decoration was Bernhard's catalyst into the world of design; he was described as being "drunk with color" and eagerly sought out to create with the ideas of design he was introduced to.

At 15, he entered a poster contest hosted by Priester matches - his entry, 2 simplified matchsticks with the word "Priester" in bold text above it on a dark background, was initially tossed out into the trash as a losing piece. However, juror Ernest Growald noticed it and salvaged the piece, exclaiming that this work was the winner. This quick action spurred the beginning of Bernhard's success, and as a result, the progression of graphic design as a whole.

A Berlin lithography firm recognized his work as an important step in design that grabbed the attention of viewers, and hired him to design advertisements.

In 1910, the Berthold Type Foundry in Berlin created a sans-serif typeface based on Bernhard's typographic style.

In 1928, 5 years after moving to New York from Berlin, the American Type Founders contracted him, where he went on to create numerous new typefaces that were more widely used.

**Did this designer promote a specific ideology in his/her work? Explain.**

During World War 1, Bernhard designed several propaganda posters for the Central Powers. He chose a very different design approach for these compared to his standard Plakatstil style. Opposed to his usual blunt approach to design - broad text, sometimes including simplistic but bold imagery - he opted for very medieval influence for these posters: often depicting armor or other scenery which echoed those used in art of ancient times. These posters used bold text, and the imagery was detailed, lithographic prints.

In 1918, Bernhard designed a poster promoting the first election in Germany that allowed women to vote. It was a purely typographic design featuring highly stylized, bold type on a black background. The poster read "Frauen! Sorget für Frieden und Brot! Wählet und werbt für die Wahl! ("Women! Ensure peace and bread! Vote and campaign for the election!"). "Frauen" is written in large, blue type with white strokes within the letters to act as highlights. The rest of the statement is written in a smaller size in black text on an orange square, whose top is framed on the top by "Frauen" left framed by the descender of the F, exaggerated to hang very low from the letter.

**Why is this designer viewed as iconic in the history of graphic design?**

Bernhard revolutionized the world of Graphic Design in Europe, due to his development Plakatstil, which resulted in a lasting influence of simplified imagery and elevation of the status of type in graphic design.

**Is there any other important information to know about this designer?**

No.

**Student:** Brittany Smith

**State and explain the one most important effect that your assigned artist and the quality/importance of his/her work had on the history of graphic design.**

Bernhard revolutionized the world of Graphic Design in Europe due to his development of Plakatstil, resulting in a lasting influence of simplified imagery and elevation of the status of type in graphic design. This occurs during a point in time in which consumerism and industry were increasing in society. With increased business comes increased competition, raising the need for a new form of advertisement that would quickly grab the attention of busy viewers.

As a young artist, Bernhard was heavily inspired by the Munich Glaspalast Exhibition of Interior Decoration, which he attended at fifteen years old. The exhibition featured colorful and experimental designs of home furnishings such as furniture, wallpaper, etc. He returned home and painted the interior with the bright colors he saw. As a result, he was kicked out and disowned. He later entered a poster contest hosted by Priester matches - his entry, 2 simplified matchsticks with the word "Priester" in bold text above it on a dark background, was initially tossed out into the trash as a losing piece. However, a juror noticed it and salvaged the piece, exclaiming that this work was the winner. This quick action spurred the beginning of Bernhard's success, resulting in the progression of graphic design as a whole.

Prior to Plakatstil, the standard of graphic design was illustrative and largely interpretive. Bernhard's style was bold and to the point; it grabbed the viewer's attention, a much-needed function in the growing society. Advertisements had been highly illustrative, but in a busy social culture with a steady increase in businesses, there needed to be a bolder way to grab the attention of viewers. Bernhard's style appeased that need as bold blocks of colors caught the eye, with the product and brand name taking the front stage on the page. Bernhard also elevated the status and use of typography in graphic design, having it integrate with the image, unifying the design. Plakatstil was a union of text and imagery: rather than type being used to support the image, the type, and image work in cohesion. Bernhard adapted and reinvented how designers were able to reach audiences.

Bernhard's style became enmeshed with the design world as well as the public culture. Plakatstil was a strong force of spreading support and wartime effort in Europe during World War I, for European countries in the Allies as well as for the Central Powers. Although Bernhard himself (designing for the Central Powers) opted for a traditionally "German" approach to his posters - emulating the look of illuminated manuscripts with texture and illustration - other designers had fully integrated the bold, blunt nature of Plakatstil.

As a subcategory of Pictorial Modernism, Plakatstil celebrated the accomplishments and future of a mechanical, machine-driven society. Through the effective use of white space, bold colors, reductive imagery, and strong text that unified the design as a whole, Bernhard laid a strong foundation for what we know of as graphic design today. Plakatstil changed the course of graphic design, beginning the path towards High Modernism.

## **Bibliography**

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