



Lucian Bernhard

DESIGNER'S FULL NAME: Emil Kahn

DESIGNER'S PSEUDONYM/NICKNAME: Lucian Bernhard

GENDER: Male

YEAR BORN: 1883

COUNTRY IN WHICH DESIGNER BORN: Germany

YEAR DIED: 1972

COUNTRY IN WHICH DESIGNER DIED: United States

RACE | ETHNICITY | RELIGION | POLITICAL ALIGNMENT

IF ANY OF THE ABOVE AFFECTED EITHER THE ARTIST'S LIFE EXPERIENCE OR WORK BECAUSE IT/THEY PROVIDED A CHALLENGE AT THE TIME, PLEASE EXPLAIN.

Bernhard was born Jewish in Germany, however he wasn't as affected by this as you might think, since antisemitism really only became popular during the Great Depression, when he had already moved to the United States. The most we can say that it affected him was that it made him change his name when he moved to Berlin, and even saying that would be pure conjecture. His Jewish heritage didn't even make him especially liberal like you would think, he was "avowedly apolitical" according to his own account, and this can be seen by the variety of work he did for different political groups. Bernhard Gothic was banned in Germany when the Nazi's took power. His apoliticalness allowed him to move to the United States after World War I without a second thought.

DID THIS DESIGNER DO NOTABLE WORK IN FIELDS OTHER THAN WHAT WOULD BE CONSIDERED GRAPHIC DESIGN TODAY? EXPLAIN.

Bernhard designed Pianos for Hardman, chairs for Grand Rapids, and package and poster design for Rem, Ex-Lax, White Flash Gasoline, and Amoco.

FOR WHAT IS THIS DESIGNER MOST NOTED? EXPLAIN.

Bernhard is most known for creating the Plakatstil style of poster design. In a competition for the Priester matches company, Bernhard made a very conventional poster and then took away details until nothing was left but the matches and the name Priester. This style of stark color and simple forms to depict a product and then paired it with handmade typography. This style was stunningly modern for German advertising and started the movement away from Art Nouveau.

IS THERE ANYTHING CONTROVERSIAL ABOUT THIS DESIGNER? EXPLAIN.

He is known for embellishing certain details of his life, making his personal history difficult to know.

EXPLAIN THIS DESIGNER'S EDUCATION/TRAINING, INCLUDING ACADEMIC, APPRENTICESHIPS, AND /OR MENTORSHIPS.

Studied at Munich Art Academy.

DID THIS DESIGNER PROMOTE A SPECIFIC IDEOLOGY IN HIS/HER WORK? EXPLAIN.

Bernhard claimed to be a "doer" not an ideologue, he did not align to any ideology and instead did what he thought looked good. He shunned Bauhaus and anyone who promoted an ism. He is quoted as saying, "You see with your eyes, not with your brain. What you do with your hands should express the physical process and should never be mechanical."

WHY IS THIS DESIGNER VIEWED AS ICONIC IN THE HISTORY OF GRAPHIC DESIGN?

Bernhard is iconic because he made an entire style of graphic design, a feat few get to claim.

IS THERE ANY OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO KNOW ABOUT THIS DESIGNER?

No.

YOUR NAME: Daniel Greene

GIVE YOUR EDUCATED OPINION OF THIS PERSON AND THE QUALITY/IMPORTANCE OF HIS/HER WORK. EXPLAIN WHAT INFLUENCE – OR LACK OF INFLUENCE – THIS WORK HAS HAD ON YOUR OWN.

Plakatstil is a school of design that emphasized reductive forms, flat colors, and large blank space. Lucian Bernhard invented this style when he was fifteen in 1898. Inspired by the works of art nouveau Bernhard moved to Berlin in 1898 to become a successful designer. He entered a poster design contest for the Priester Match company and won while accidentally causing a design revolution. Plakatstil would become the harbinger of modernist design. This style of poster was the official style of World War I propoganda in Germany. The simple forms were incredibly utilitarian, and devoid of the emotion that American illustrative style succeeded in. Plakastil was the base on which a german design revolution was founded. Although inspired by art nouveau, Bernhard and everyone else was sick of it, even if they didn't know it. When Bernhard initially designed his Priester Match ad he used the illustrative style that was normal at the time, he painted the matches, the wordmark, a couple of cigars, and two beautiful women. In a moment of inspiration, he painted over the cigars and the girls leaving the matches and the word mark. This combination of a stark, simple image of the product combined with a hand lettered word mark would be the defining elements of Plakatstil. Bernhard won the contest and created a style thar would become so popular that it would define a war. More important than that is that Plakatstil would bridge the gap between art nouveau and art deco, getting us ever closer to modernist design which can be seen in the simple forms and stark colors, as well as the use of blank space.

While Bernhard did start a design revolution at 15 he would spend the rest of his life attempting to live up to that success, never quite being able to capture the serendipitous nature of the Priester Match ad. He isn't even claimed to be the leading artist of the Plakatstil movement, that would be Ludwig Hohlwein. Bernhard is undoubtedly important as far as the history of design goes, in a brief moment of inspiration he broke down the design traditions of an entire nation. He was sent to the United States to preach the virtues of modernist design but to no avail, it would be many decades until America would move away from its illustrative style. But in an indirect way he would succeed in that mission.

Bernhard has not had a direct influence on me, much like his aforementioned relationship with American design. However I certainly identify with his disdain for isms and shoehorning yourself into one style, and merely going with what I think looks good, though that hasn't caused me to accidentally start a design revolution. The modernist movement he started definitely has had an influence on my style, simple forms and stark colors are something I use in my work all the time. In a round about wat Bernhard has influenced my work, much how he indirectly started the entire modernist design movement.

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