



## ALEXEY BRODOVITCH

**Designer's full name:** Alexey Brodovitch

**Designer's pseudonym/nickname:** None

**Gender:** Male

**Year Born:** 1898

**Country Born:** Russia

**Year Died:** 1971

**Country Died:** France

**Religion | Political Alignment:** Brodovitch was Jewish. He fought in the Russian military during World War I, and was also a part of the White Army which was an anti-communist military against the Bolsheviks in Russia.

---

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

Because of World War I and the Russian Civil War, Brodovitch had to relocate to France, which is where his artistic career took off.

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

Brodovitch excelled in photography, creating an exclusive book called *Ballet*, which showcased his photographs of multiple ballet companies. He also used his skills as a graphic designer to teach students.

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

Brodovitch was most notably known for simplicity and the large amount of white space in his work in *Harper's Bazaar* magazine. His style almost always focused on a photograph of a figure "floating" in white space on one page, while the next showcased his typography skills.

### **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.**

Brodovitch started his artistic endeavors as a house painter, which eventually led him to be a set painter for Diaghilev's Ballet Russes. This brought Brodovitch into the right direction, however he did not become a graphic designer until he started working for the ad agency *Maximilien Vox*. There, he explored many different styles of design until he found his own, resulting in a high demand for his work. Later, he began working for *Harper's Bazaar*, where his work shines the brightest.

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

Brodovitch's work stemmed from the ideology of the avant garde, experimenting with his ideas and creativity using photography, typography and illustrations.

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

Brodovitch is viewed as iconic due to his work in *Harper's Bazaar*. Unlike many designers in his time, Brodovitch played heavily with the white space on a page, giving it just as much importance as the actual photograph and typography. His page layouts are simplistic, yet very creative in the execution.

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

Brodovitch had a sad, unfortunate life. During his life, he was hit by a truck, broke a hip, and had two homes destroyed by a fire along with his paintings and archives.

---

**Student:** Catherine Finne

**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.**

The nature of typography is best conveyed through the words of Massimo Vignelli; "In essence, it's like music. It's not the notes. It's the space between the notes that make the music." Alexey Brodovitch's designs resonate with this statement. Brodovitch, a Russian-born designer, spent most of his career in the United States working for *Harper's Bazaar* magazine. His personal and commercial work in the fields of photography and design explored the combinations of art and design within modern media.

Brodovitch excelled in photography and was known for extra projects outside his job, including his book simply titled, *Ballet*. Brodovitch took photos of ballet dancers in New York from backstage against harsh lighting using slow exposure time. The blurs of the dancers brought movement to the book, inspiring many photographers during the 1950s-1960s. However, it was his work in the fashion magazine *Harper's Bazaar* that endowed fame in the design world.

Brodovitch experimented with photography layout and composition in *Harper's Bazaar*, creating successful unique pieces. In the spreads from the June 1938 issue of *Bazaar*, Brodovitch played with both arrangement and texture. Instead of the photographs of the models being on the side of the text, they were placed in the middle of the page as if tearing through the text. This work was a breakthrough in modern thinking of photography at the time.

Brodovitch is widely known for his iconic art direction in *Harper's Bazaar*. Unlike many designers in his time, Brodovitch played heavily with white space, giving it as much importance as the actual photograph and typography. He included a Surrealist style in his layout, almost always focusing on a photograph of a figure 'floating' in white space on one page, while the next showcased his typography skills. In his two-page spread in the November 1951 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*, he placed the figure as if standing on a giant harp, while the other figure on the page is floating near the cello, further displaying his expertise in design. Brodovitch

cleverly combined photography, white space, and typography. In "If you don't like full skirts..." of *Harper's Bazaar*, Brodovitch took the shape of the model photographed on the left page and transformed the text on the right page into that shape. The curvature of the typography along with the white space was unlike any design layout of his time. His style was a landmark in the history of graphic design.

Brodovitch's design work is heavily appreciated due to his clever use of white space and the photography and typography that surround it. His iconic work was and is an inspiration to many.

## **Bibliography**

Alexey Brodovitch. Accessed September 25, 2020. [http://www.iconofgraphics.com/Alexey Brodovitch/](http://www.iconofgraphics.com/AlexeyBrodovitch/).

"Alexey Brodovitch." Encyclopædia Britannica. Accessed October 25, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alexey-Brodovitch>.

Grundberg, Andy. "Alexey Brodovitch." AIGA. Accessed September 22, 2020. <https://www.aiga.org/medalist-alexeybrodovitch>.

*Helvetica*. Directed by Gary Hustwit.

Meggs, Phillip B. and Alston W. Purvis. *Meggs' History of Graphic Design, 5th Edition*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012.

"The Art Institute of Chicago." Alexey Brodovitch. 2013. Accessed September 22, 2020. <https://archive.artic.edu/irvingpennarchives/resource/1973>

Westerbeck, Colin. "The Sylphs (Les Sylphides)." *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 29, no. 2 (2003): 42-43. Accessed September 23, 2020. doi:10.2307/4121049.