



## Lazar Lissitzky

DESIGNER'S FULL NAME: Lazar Markovich Lissitzky

DESIGNER'S PSEUDONYM/NICKNAME: El Lissitzky

GENDER: Male

YEAR BORN: 1890

COUNTRY IN WHICH DESIGNER BORN: Russian Empire

YEAR DIED: 1941

COUNTRY IN WHICH DESIGNER DIED: Soviet Union

### 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.

El Lissitzky was a supremacist, likely influenced mostly by Malevich. Most of his graphic design work was propaganda posters and magazine covers for Russian supremacy. Lissitzky used well known Russian supremist symbols (such as The Red Square) to give his posters an immediate correlation to communism before the viewer even had to read the poster itself. The challenge came from his personal life. He was caught between the Civil War and the tearing of social fabric to the fact he was a Jew. Lissitzky's work is a statement of the hardships he experienced expressed visually.

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

Lissitzky also painted quite a bit. Using a combination between minimalism, cubism, and constructivism, he was able to create works he called "Prouns" (more information below).

FOR WHAT IS THIS DESIGNER MOST NOTED? EXPLAIN.

Lissitzky is most famous for his works he called "Proun." For Lissitzky, a proun was a mixture of real-life objects in a spatially aware plane of existence. Using a 2D-surface, Lissitzky would place 3D objects, such as cubes, around a grid, but from an odd perspective. These works had a sort of mathematical approach. His work with Proun was likely brought on by another artist named Vladimir Tatlin, one of the forerunners in Russian Constructivism and Supremacism.

IS THERE ANYTHING CONTROVERSIAL ABOUT THIS DESIGNER? EXPLAIN.

Even if he did not realize it at the time, Lissitzky had created his own delineation of constructivism by definition. While most artists at the time felt constructivism was the idea of constructing (either from pre-made or handmade) art, Lissitzky felt it was more than that. He thought utility was necessary to create new forms. Both constructivism and supremacism were the same to him.

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

El Lissitzky trained under Joseph Olbrich as an architect from 1909 to 1914. He was also known to walk many miles around Italy and other parts of Europe drawing architecture. Some sources claim Malevich and Lissitzky worked alongside each other but others

say Lissitzky was Malevich's apprentice. Either way, Malevich had a profound impact on Lissitzky's thoughts and creation of work through the eyes of a Supremacist.

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

Lissitzky believed that there was no such thing as a barrier between art, science, and math. His work with Prouns attempted to blend everything in the world, which he believed is inter-connected in ways we cannot see or imagine. Lissitzky also used Prouns to define Supremacism. He believed that a ratio of proportion and dependence existed to in his art and Supremacism.

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

Lissitzky is iconic in the history of graphic design because many elements he used in his designs are still prevalent today. For example, in 1924, Lissitzky made a cover for a magazine called Merz using meticulous layout and large blocks of color with attention to all the negative space being created. It is very clean and straight to the point. His work blends the ideas of art and math to create a proportionate, balanced, and informational design.

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

Lissitzky could be considered a renaissance man considering all of his past achievements. His training as an architect gave him a great sense of perspective while his skills in typography, photography, and illustration gave his work balance.

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YOUR NAME: Sabrina Sturtevant

#### 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.

Lazar Markovich Lissitzky, also known as El Lissitzky, was a designer from Russia whose work as a graphic artist is just as prevalent as his work in sketches/paintings in today's world. His social stance as a supremacist makes his graphic work somewhat controversial to view, yet interesting to study and evaluate.

I believe El Lissitzky's work known as Prouns is much more interesting to view. To him, Prouns were a mixture of 3D and 2D forms on the same plane of existence. This is seen in his graphic art and paintings, yet his paintings captured a much rawer aspect of the physical idea he was trying to show. His exploration of simple lines, shapes, and colors gives his work a surrealist viewpoint in a minimalist setting. His work is very metaphorical and one needs a sense of the social order at the time to truly understand it. His work with prouns is the reason I think he is so famous now. His work as a graphic designer was important and influential, yet his work in prouns contains so many hidden clues to decipher and understand.

The time he spent working as an architect led him well into the his proun paintings and sketches. The understanding of perspective he gained gave him the skills he needed to produce work that could exist in two states at once. His forms existed in a 2D and 3D space. Most of his work did not contain shading, rather it was large blocks of color. The grids and twisting forms in his work create

a sense of balance, space, and surreal images. Somehow, he is able to take a foreign concept, or a metaphorical idea, and turn it into something tangible.

El Lissitzky's work is some of the best use of 3D planes and simplistic, minimalistic forms I have ever seen. The way his typography becomes shapes and colors while maintaining legibility is amazing to me. The black/white/red aesthetic seen in most of his work is recognizable even to this day. El Lissitzky is able to capture concepts and ideas that become impossible to represent with simple words, which is why I think his work is so successful.

As I stand right now, I do not think any one artist has had a major influence on my work. The minimalist style is one I have always enjoyed because of its attention to detail and negative space; therefore, El Lissitzky's work has influenced my work recently. I created a deck of cards for my typography class which was interpreted as a minimalist style in most of my cards. The "ALERT" card specifically was white, black, and had a triangular red form. This is exactly like something El Lissitzky would produce, considering his piece, "Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge" from 1920. I think as I continue my career as a graphic artist, I will find his work more and more relevant. This style has been repeated thousands of times and will probably continue to be reproduced for as long as minimalism continues.

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