



## WILLIAM MORRIS

DESIGNER'S FULL NAME: William Morris

DESIGNER'S PSEUDONYM/NICKNAME: None

GENDER: Male

YEAR BORN: 1834

COUNTRY IN WHICH DESIGNER BORN: England

YEAR DIED: 1896

COUNTRY IN WHICH DESIGNER DIED: England

### 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.

Morris's political alignment affected his life. He joined the Social Democratic Federation in his later years and after that the Socialist League. Morris found the Press hostile and former friends now cold to him which in part may have been his causing. "As a socialist I stink in people's nostrils..." For example, when Tennyson found out that Morris became a socialist, he exclaimed: "He's gone crazy!" Morris's friends learned that they could no longer address politics without the risk of a dispute and that he was losing his sense of humor.

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

Morris has notable work in many other fields of art and design. Through his businesses, he was able to create works in the field of interior design like stained glass windows, textiles (carpet, tapestry, and wallpaper), ceramics, and furniture; printmaking and printing; and bookbinding (*A Book of Verse*). He is known to have one oil-painting titled *La Belle Iseult* (also known as *Queen Guinevere*) which he painted while he was falling in love with his future wife. Although Morris did not physically create all of his works, he did design them.

FOR WHAT IS THIS DESIGNER MOST NOTED? EXPLAIN.

William Morris is most noted for the start of the Arts and Crafts Movement, Morris & Co., and the Kelmscott Press. He inspired many artists during the Arts and Crafts Movement, and again during the Private Press Movement.

IS THERE ANYTHING CONTROVERSIAL ABOUT THIS DESIGNER? EXPLAIN.

Morris was a Socialist which was controversial in Britain. He worked as a campaigner, which affected how people viewed him.

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

Much of Morris's education was self-taught. From boyhood to adulthood, he was always reading. Morris went to Marlborough College in 1848 but it did not affect his method of learning much. The Tractarian school did have a religious influence on him. He later attended Exeter College, but was disappointed in the school like his former college.

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

John Ruskin was Morris's greatest influence and was the inspiration for the ideology of the Arts and Crafts movement. Morris promoted his ideologies through the process and ideology of his work and businesses. He believed that craftsmen were equal to artisans and that one should have useful and beautiful furnishings. His ideology was in response to the Industrial Revolution.

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

Morris is viewed as iconic in the history of graphic design because he inspired not just one, but two art movements. He changed the way designers view art and industry, that they could be one, not two separate things.

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

Thanks to Morris's persuasion and knowledge of textiles, the Victoria and Albert Museum purchased the Ardabil Carpet in 1893, later discovered to be one of the world's largest and oldest dated carpets.

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YOUR NAME: Brittany Waters

## 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.

William Morris was a British designer, writer, and social reformer born in 1834. He is crucial to the history of graphic design. He inspired not one, but two art movements: the Arts and Crafts movement and later the Private Press movement. Morris was a Socialist, which was controversial in Britain. He worked as a campaigner and this affected how people viewed him. Morris was mostly self-taught in design and was always reading. In 1848, Morris went to Marlborough College, where the Tractarian atmosphere left a religious influence on him. After this, he attended Exeter College but was disappointed in the curriculum like his former school.

Morris's greatest influence was John Ruskin, a writer, artist, and philosopher. Ruskin believed that "beautiful things were valuable and useful precisely because they were beautiful" (Meggs). He was the inspiration for the ideology behind the Arts and Crafts movement, which Morris helped to form. Morris believed that one should "have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful." This ideology was in response to the ugliness and mechanization of the Industrial Revolution. He believed that craftsmen were equal to artisans. His business Morris & Co. worked in the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement. He planned to make beautiful, not mass-produced furniture for all, but the furniture and books were only accessible for the affluent.

Morris, influenced by the Century Guild that was based off his own teachings, later formed the Kelmscott Press. The press then inspired the Private Press movement. In simple terms: Morris was inspired by someone who was inspired by him; so in a way, he inspired himself.

Morris loved medieval art and its style is prominent in much of his design. His businesses followed the ideology of the guild of handicraft and design for the future. He followed the printing method of early books but parts were interchangeable and followed

aspects of the Industrial Revolution. In 1859, Morris and Philip Webb built *The Red House*, where Morris and his new wife lived for five years. The house had an overwhelmingly medieval character, including stairs with turrets, embellished floors, walls, and ceilings, and a picturesque roofline. The asymmetry created by the L-shaped house was characteristic of traditional Gothic buildings and allowed for the house to hug the gardens.

Morris's drawing, *Jane Morris in medieval costume*, shows his wife portrayed as Helen of Troy. The intricate sleeve lining shows his interest in pattern. He also made tapestries, which he taught himself how to weave. One example is his *Woodpecker* tapestry that is inspired by a tale in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. His *Peacock and Dragon* design was one of his favorites and is inspired by both Italian silks and Islamic art.

William Morris has influenced me with his beautiful patterns and furniture made by Morris & Co. The combination of art and industry give us the beautifully crafted furniture we have today but is more widely available to people of different classes. With exposure to Morris's art, I will experiment with pattern and complex ornamentation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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