



Theo Van Doesburg

Designer's full name: Christian Emile Marie Kupper

Designer's pseudonym/nickname: Theo Van Doesburg

Gender: Male

Year Born: 1883

Country Born: Netherlands

Year Died: 1931

Country Died: Switzerland

Religion | Political Alignment: Although Doesburg's personal political alignments are not easily found, his close relationship with the De Stijl art movement provides insight. De Stijl was a reactionary movement in response to World War I, seeking for a more simplified representation of the world. It is safe to assume that Doesburg was not in favor of the mass bloodshed and actively sought ways to change the confusing political climate of the time with visually simple artwork.

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

The chaos and bloodshed from World War I swiftly pushed society's pendulum towards the simplicity that people craved. Van Doesburg's experience in the Dutch army between 1914 and 1916 surely influenced how he approached architecture, painting, poetry, and art theory.

Did this designer do notable work in fields other than what would TODAY be considered

graphic design?

Theo Van Doesburg also worked in poetry, architecture, writing, and art theory.

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

Theo Van Doesburg is most noted for founding the art movement of De Stijl. He took inspiration from artists like Picasso and Mondrian, but his work was strikingly unique. The discourse he created to accompany his works was innovative in art theory and drew in many artists, and repulsed even more.

Is there anything controversial about this designer? Explain.

Doesburg's passion, the De Stijl movement, caused controversy within the art world. Many rejected his modern idea of what art could be, what it could represent and convey. Nevertheless, Van Doesburg was firmly rooted in the optimism of the movement and stayed focused on discovering the truth of expression through abstraction.

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

Doesburg was trained in the theatre, but he gravitated towards painting by 1900. He refined his talents through collaborative learning with many artists such as Mondrian, Picasso, and as well as architects J.J.P. Oud and Jan Wils.

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

Theo van Doesburg was a founder and spokesperson for De Stijl, specifically Elementarism. He pushed for the integration of space and design in order to experience art instead of merely look at it.

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

Theo Van Doesburg is best remembered for the concepts of Elementarism that revolutionized and impacted the art world for years to follow.

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

No

Student: Grace Hill

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.

Theo van Doesburg is widely remembered for his innovative work within the art community in the twentieth century. He was essential in the founding of De Stijl, and brought new ideas to the integration of design and physical space in his work. The most important effect that Theo van Doesburg had on the history of graphic design was his contribution to De Stijl, specifically Elementarism. By both repulsing and inspiring countless artists, Doesburg created a name for himself that would not be soon forgotten.

Doesburg's career began with his need for art to exist beyond the boundaries of a frame on a wall. It was important for him to see the integration of space and function to create a physical and visual experience. He found inspiration in architecture and everyday design concepts because of their limitless possibilities. Geometric abstraction had developed in many different areas of Europe, and a new style evolved in the Netherlands. It came to be known as De Stijl, defined by white, grays, and primary colors arranged in squares, rectangles, and long black lines. Doesburg helped write, edit, and publish the De Stijl magazine in order to educate the art world about the concepts the movement stood for. Though the magazine met its end in 1931, the artistic approach continued on far past that. He also took part in creating works that reflected De Stijl ideals and further developed them.

Reacting against the highly adorned themes of art deco, Doesburg longed for simplified works of art that satisfied his need for pared down, universal, visual language. He wanted to see creative expression that reflected the mathematical structure of the world around him and the harmony that nature possesses. These ideas led Doesburg to become a founder of the De Stijl movement. He joined artistic forces with the like-minded Piet Mondrian, but their differences stopped their collaboration. Doesburg developed a style known as Elementarism in 1924 as a branch of De Stijl. This style featured varied, strong, and dynamic compositions with diagonal lines and subtle shifts in tonality. He formally introduced this approach to the public in the *De Stijl* manifesto. Mondrian, who strongly favored neoplasticism, was repulsed by this publication and

abandoned De Stijl altogether. Doesburg continued to refine his individual style, diving further into the ideals of Elementarism.

Elementarism was a more rigid and angular branch of De Stijl, using diagonals and triangles almost exclusively. Doesburg used the variety of overlapping shapes and contrasting values to make simultaneously intricate and simple artworks. This can be seen in his *Simultaneous Counter-Composition* of 1930, where primary colored rectangles are arranged to create a dynamic flow within the piece. He wanted two-dimensional art to have the capacity to be applied to architecture and everyday design. Doesburg's revolutionary ideas were too forward-thinking for many at the time, leading to many of his endeavors facing harsh criticism. An example of this is the redesign of the Aubette Building in Strasburg, which many people found too outlandish when it reopened. The revolutionary nature of Elementarism, while not readily accepted at the time, influenced many artists, designers, and movements that followed. Doesburg moved on to create the Art Concret group and publication, and continued to experiment with architectural design. His last project was a house designed for himself and his wife which he enjoyed until his death in 1931.

Doesburg pushed the boundaries of De Stijl with his dedication to Elementarism. Many artists and designers including Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Kurt Schwitters, and Sophie Taeubur-Arp were influenced by his work. The publications he wrote and edited continue to have an impact on the art world. Theo Van Doesburg is best remembered for the concepts of Elementarism that revolutionized and impacted the art world for years to follow.

Bibliography

Bergmann, Gustav. "Elementarism." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1957, pp. 107-114. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/2105197.

Eliason, Craig. "'All the Serious Men Are Sick': Van Doesburg, Mondrian and Dada." *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2009, pp. 50-55. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20779990.

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

NOELL, MATTHIAS. "Accrochage in Architecture: Photographic Representations of Theo Van Doesburg's Studios and Paintings." *Hiding Making - Showing Creation: The Studio from Turner to Tacita Dean*, edited by

RACHEL ESNER et al., Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2013, pp. 157–175. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wp7vb.14.

"Theo Van Doesburg Biography, Life & Quotes." The Art Story, www.theartstory.org/artist/van-doesburg-theo/life-and-legacy/.

"Theo Van Doesburg." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/biography/Theo-van-Doesburg.