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The Poster of the New State

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The Advent of The New State

The Twenties

In Europe, the 20's were the years of great optimism, pleasure and celebration, and its influence could be seen on consumerism and on social behaviour changes. This period was called the “crazy twenties” and France arises the Art Deco decorative style, which had its highest point in 1925 at the *International Exhibition of Decorative Arts*, in Paris. Although Portugal was living a very unstable political period, young Portuguese painters thrilled with the new artistic movements in place in big Occidental European cities, challenge the aesthetic and literary academism based on naturalist grammar inherited from the 19th century (França, 1974). In Portugal the modernism is mainly in newspapers, magazines and posters, and shows itself by its humorist side, by cartoon and the illustration. The Posters of this epoch, shows evidence of the new style and pioneer characteristics of artists like Stuart de Carvalhais, Almada Negreiros, Carlos Botelho e Emmérico Nunes.

The poster evolution is a reality pushed forward by the Suisse Fred Kradolfer who, having arrived in Lisbon in 1927 with a diversified academic background brought in the knowledge that allowed the spreading of the modern language and the synthesis spirit in graphic design (Lobo, 2002).

The New State

António Ferro and the Political Propaganda

During the 30's, the world lives the “big depression” caused by New York stock exchange crash. At the same time, the development of fascist political regimes in Italy with Benito Mussolini and Germany with Adolf Hitler is a reality with consequences in the political, social, economic, cultural and aesthetic fields.

In Portugal in 1926, Salazar's dictatorship imposes rules in a deeply chaotic country in terms of its political, financial and social context (Caetano, 1977). This was the consequence of the disturbing sixteen years of the 1st Republic.



Between 1930 and 1940, many things are confirmed by and adopted from Salazar's political message, which is consolidated by a fierce propaganda campaign, influenced by a crisis situation faced by Europe due to World War II (Ferraz, 1988). The Portuguese Department of Propaganda-SPN, later called the Portuguese Information, Culture and Tourism Department - SNI, was created by Antonio Ferro to create strategies for ideological propaganda (Ferro, 1933). The poster also has a pedagogical mission, which is to intervene in the heart of a community and alter it. It operates alongside the aesthetic image donated by visual communication (lines, colours, texture, form and structure), and marks its status as a useful and informative object (Gallo, 2001).

Political Propaganda, with ideals and aesthetics of the New State, stays under the direction of António Ferro through the SPN (1933), later called SNI (1944).

António Ferro's open mind towards the modernist language allows and is a stimulus to the graphic design, gathering several designers who against the regime take this historical opportunity to work. The group, (called Ferro's Team) of an excellent team of professionals and the fact of being extremely creativity, gave António Ferro the chance to show high quality aesthetic, modern and functional work, as can be seen in the Posters of these artists, like Fred Kradolfer, José Rocha, Jorge Barradas, Carlos Botelho, Emérico Nunes e Bernardo Marques.

Another important aspect, which entails recognizing the presence of the *Constructivism* current in some New State posters that perpetuates modernism and monumental *Neoclassicism* and recovers the hero rhetoric, which is now more closely connected to the field of more functional Design. It would also reinforce the statement that many types of lettering were created under the *Futurist* pretext and are still used today. Anyway, most posters from the 1930 to 1940 period depict each authors search for his own authentic graphic expression. However, without ceasing to be influenced by this or that aesthetic current, posters are considered a form of support capable of communicating very precise ideas, as most people were illiterate, which forced Designers to resort to simpler concepts and illustrations, thus reducing the time needed to memorize them. So, although there is still evidence of decorative elements, which mainly originate from the tradition of the *New Art* posters, there is also a clear development in communication processes, increasing the value of design elements such as line, colour, etc. The conjugation of these forms normally resulted in a final effect marked by contrasts and opposing elements, capable of attracting immediate attention.

If this State complicity to protect artists by ordering works of art from them existed, then it may be defined as an art of the regime and, in this context, the development of the propaganda poster depended upon government initiatives aimed at valuing a rapid, extremely informative and attractive means of visual communication.

This increase in activity of plastic artists, the growing orders they received from the State as well as the need for society itself to change its mentality and produce a functional art, created a different name for these people. For example, both designers at *Bauhaus* and in independent studios managed to create working methods so as



not to uproot projects from a clearly plastic and functional language. Adapting this new character to a world under construction would have been one of the last principles of this still new profession. It was sure to play a fundamental role in the construction of the image of the New State.

The Exhibition of the Portuguese World

In 1940, António Ferro organizes the *Exhibition of the Portuguese World* (Castro, 1940) proudly exhibiting Salazar's Portugal to a Europe at war. It is an eclectic event, due to invitations to all sorts of artists, like Almada Negreiros, Fred Kradolfer, José Rocha, Jorge Barradas, Carlos Botelho, Emérico Nunes e Bernardo Marques, Tomás de Mello (Tom), Maria Keil, Paulo Ferreira, Manuel Lapa, among others, existing at the same time several types of expression, like regionalist and futurist ones.

The Forties and the National Style

During the 40's there was a desire to create a general Art, Interior Design and Graphic forms, the Portuguese 40's style expressing a "great civilization documentary", engendered by the power of order and the empire. The New State included the fatherland as if it were an organism, strictly establishing the presence of a strong State, bound by the idea of treason and progress in an attitude of national renaissance that showed pride in its heroic past. Indeed, discipline and the impulse to work and create was enriched by the presence of a vanguardist spirit. Portuguese society was concerned with a concept that was based on spiritualistic realism, giving the family primordial power followed by organized professions and religion. This sequence shows that usually actions are based on morals, which encourages a regime of authority and freedom, discipline and purity of ideals. This whole humanistic discourse on the New State regime is examined through "*Mind Control*".

Everything that was constructed then was monumental and the State was interested in maintaining all areas of art united according to a propagandist strategy, which was also an attempt to maintain in unison a people whose "past history" was worth remembering, especially during the era of the Discoveries. Influences from Europe, as well as Modern Art brought by artists and António Ferro, joined together the most popular tastes, creating what one could call a *National Style*, as a symbiosis between Modern Art experiences and Portuguese cultural traditions.

Posters are by far the best way for the New State to divulge the Nation's new directives to the entire population. Therefore, practically the whole country witnessed the retention of the New State's idealists through propaganda posters (Clark, 1997). The graphic designers are searching for the most universal language possible that is easy to read and leaves no doubts. However, it was normal for these authors to design posters in the form of illustrations rather than words to provide people with the information they were so avidly awaiting. The Outlook for Design, which was still considered a minor art but because of the extraordinary progress made due to transformation industries, was to register a favourable practical development. So, work launched by some artists of the era who lacked talent for designing stands for international exhibitions: Paris (1937) and New York (1939) was highlighted in decorative arts, which is now known as Interior, Industrial or even Equipment Design (Acciaiuoli, 1998). This was the way of life of many Designers who were divided



between projection work with architects and engineers on the one hand as well as composition and graphic design on the other, and were technically accompanied by composers and printers.

The poster with the aesthetic image, which was the main element used to divulge the regime, became an integral part of the propaganda objectives of the New State.

Conclusion

The end of the twenties in Portugal, saw the emergence of several and ephemeral visual communication means, as opposed to what has happened in the past, when was difficult to impose aesthetic and artistic vanguards on a Portuguese context very much academic and formal (França, 1974).

The Poster of the New State represents a tradition in transition. The posters of the 40's illustrate the "*National Style*," relying heavily on composition, typography, and clear communication (Ferro, 1970). This "style" had international influence, and the Portuguese Poster of this time came to be regarded as a model in this country. In the 1940s, however, Portuguese graphic design and poster art began to change - not only in quality but also in direction and vision. It exists many factors for the future changes, like the rising quality in other countries, the changing tastes, the declining of artistic personalities and the commercial influence.

What is clear, however, is that the New State poster art of the 30's and 40's remained at a high level of quality and expressive force and continues to attract our attention.

The concerns about function get stronger in design, which results in quality, rational and economic answers, which are "Good Design" parameters. The USA, stronger due to economic and political power, develops along the 40's the American Way of Life, exporting and revealing new demands and needs (Meggs, 1998).

In Portugal, the modern movement in the graphic design get stronger after the *Exhibition of the Portuguese World* and the posters of the New State could be seen either as street art or as excellent example of graphic design, showing effective use of form, color and image to communicate an idea.

The Portuguese Posters of this epoch are a superb illustration of the ability of the graphic design to shape and transform content through a formal expression.



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