CHAPTER 17

The Modern Movement in America
Modern European design did not become a significant influence until well into the 1930s.

Up until this time, American graphic design was dominated by traditional illustration.

A small number of American typographers were very excited after seeing Jan Tschichold’s Elementary Typography insert recognizing the functionality of his new ideas.

Once Futura and Kabel became available in the US, the modern movement of design began.
Walker Evans

- untitled, 1936
- Evans’s Atlanta photograph contrasting decaying homes and Depression-era movie posters documents a chasm between reality and graphic fantasy
BOOK DESIGN

William Addison Dwiggins

- title pages from *The Power of Print and Men*, 1936, designed for the Alfred A. Knopf publishing company.

- title shows Dwiggins’s ornaments, his Metro and Electra typefaces, and his passion for subtle color combinations.
S. A. Jacobs

- title page for Christmas Tree, by e.e. cummings, 1928
- typography implies an image, which joins with rules and ornaments to suggest a landscape
Merle Armitage

- title page for *Modern Dance*, by Merle Armitage, 1935
- sans-serif capitals are letterspaced and separated by hairline rules
Poster Design

Lester Beall

- Native of Kansas City who later moved to Chicago to study art history.
- Designed this poster for the Rural Electrification Administration, c. 1937
- Benefits of electricity were presented through signs understandable to illiterate and semiliterate audiences.
**POSTER DESIGN**

Lester Beall

- Followed Tschichold’s new typography and combined it with the Dada movement’s random organization of elements.

- His posters promoted bringing electricity to rural areas for the Rural Electrification Administration, a federal agency.
Erté

- Russian designer who started as an influential Paris illustrator working in the art deco style.

- Signed an exclusive contract from 1924 - 1937 to create fashion illustrations for Harper’s Bazaar.

- Covers, 1929-1935

- Erté’s covers projected a sophisticated, continental image on the newsstand.
Martin Munkacsi

- editorial photograph from *Harper’s Bazaar*, 1934
- rejecting the conventions of the studio, Munkacsi allowed outside locations and the natural movements of his models to suggest innovative possibilities
Alexey Brodovitch (art director) and Man Ray (photographer)

- pages from Harper’s Bazaar, 1934
- the figure’s oblique thrust inspired a dynamic typographic page with several sizes and weights of geometric sans serifs
**Magazine Design**

Alexey Brodovitch (art director) and Man Ray (photographer)

- pages from *Harper’s Bazaar*, 1934

- forms and texture of the experimental photograph are amplified and complemented by the waved typographic design
POSTER DESIGN

Joseph Binder

- poster for the New York World’s Fair, 1939

- America’s embrace of modernism, technology, and global power is signified in this layout
A. M. Cassandre

- cover for Harper’s Bazaar, 1939
Jean Carlu

- poster for the Office of Emergency Management, 1941

- visual and verbal elements are inseparably interlocked into an intense symbol of productivity and labor
POSTER DESIGN THE WAR YEARS

John Atherton

- poster for the U.S. Office of War Information, 1943
- the placement of the two-part headline implies a rectangle; this symmetry is animated by the off-center placement of the white cross
E. McKnight Kauffer

- poster promoting Allied unity, c. 1940
- Intended to boost the morale of the Allied nations.
- Portuguese headline translates, “We Fight for the Liberty of All”
Ben Shahn

- poster for the U.S. Office of War Information, 1943
- represented political and economic injustice during the depression
- the poster reached a larger audience about Nazi brutality
ADVERTISING AFTER THE WAR

Herbert Matter

- advertisement for CCA, 1943

- unified complex of images suggests global scope, paperboard boxes, and food for troops in harsh environmental conditions
ADVERTISING AFTER THE WAR

Herbert Matter

- Photographed many of the layouts for the Knoll Furniture company in the 1950s
Herbert Bayer

- poster supporting polio research, 1949
- diagonal shaft of the test tube leads the eye from the red and blue headline to the flowing yellow light that is beginning to dawn, linking the elements in the same manner as the thick black bars of Bayer’s Bauhaus work.
Joseph Binder

- recruiting poster for the U. S. Navy, c. 1954

- echoes of Cassandre’s steamship posters remain, but the strength expressed is more powerful and forbidding than Cassandre’s steamship posters.
Alexey Brodovitch

- Russian designer who immigrated to Paris after WWI.
- Director of Harper’s Bazaar from 1934-1958
- Used lots of white space with crisp type on clear open pages.
Alexey Brodovitch

- Became the preeminent designer for magazine layout.
Alexey Brodovitch

- cover for *Portfolio*, 1951, a short-lived visual arts magazine

- screen tints produce the illusion that translucent rectangles of pink and blue-gray have been placed on the stencil logo slashing down the back cover
Alexey Brodovitch

- insert for *Portfolio*, 1951

- masterful scale shift occurs in the transition from the small, scattered cattle brands around the bull to the large cattle brands of the portfolio’s first page
Richard Avedon

- Brodovich often with two influential and iconic portrait and fashion photographers...
Irving Penn

MODERN MOVEMENT IN AMERICA
“Many of the immigrants who brought European design concepts to the United States armed with talent, ideas and a strong belief in design as a valuable human activity that could contribute to the improvement of human communication and the human condition. The American experience was greatly enriched by their presence.”

- Lester Beall
- Erté
- Alexey Brodovitch
- Herbert Bayer
- Herbert Matter
- Richard Avedon
- Irving Penn
KEY TERMS

Armory Show
the 1913 art show in New York City that exposed Americans to modern art for the first time. It generated a storm of protest and provoked public rejection of modern art and design.

Rural Electrification Administration
a federal agency charged with bringing electricity to the less populated areas of America, which effectively reduced pro-electrification messages to elemental signs in posters by Lester Beall.

Works Progress Administration (WPA)
Direct relief for the unemployed was replaced by work opportunities, and billions of dollars were infused into the economy as an average of more than two million workers were paid from fifteen to ninety dollars per month from 1935 until 1941. Launched in the fall of 1935, the WPA Federal Art Project enabled actors, musicians, visual artists, and writers to continue their professional careers. A poster project was included among the various cultural programs. Sculptors and painters joined unemployed illustrators and graphic designers in the studios. As many designs were by artists, it is not surprising that the project took a strong aesthetic approach to typography, which was used as both a compositional element and a message communicator.
**KEY TERMS**

**Federal Art Project**
From 1935 until 1939, when the Federal Art Project was abolished, over two million copies of approximately thirty-five thousand poster designs were produced. Most of the designs were silk-screened. Silk-screen printing’s characteristic flat color combined with influences from the Bauhaus, pictorial modernism, and constructivism to produce a modernist result that contrasted with the traditional illustration dominating much of American mass-media graphics of the era. Government-sponsored cultural events, including theatrical performances and art exhibitions, were frequent subjects for the poster project, as were public-service communications about health, crime prevention, housing, and education.

**Container Corporation of America (CCA)**
The nation’s largest producer of packaging materials in the 1930s, led by industrialist Walter P. Paepcke. He was unique among the large industrialists of his generation, for he recognized that design could both serve a pragmatic business purpose and also make a major cultural mark on behalf of the corporation. His interests were inspired by his wife, artist Elizabeth Nitze Paepcke (1902–1994), who prompted her husband to hire perhaps the first corporate design director in America: in 1936, Egbert Jacobson was selected as the first director of CCA’s new department of design. CCA’s new visual signature (and its implementation) was based on two ingredients: the vision of the designer and a supportive client. Jacobson had an extensive background as a color expert, and this knowledge was put to use as mill and factory interiors were transformed with bright colors from traditional drab industrial grays and browns. A new trademark was applied to stationery, checks, invoices, vehicles, and signage. A consistent format used sans-serif type and a standard color combination of black and shipping-carton tan.