

Posters from Tehran
An Exhibition of Majid Abbasi's Work

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Majid Abbasi the Composer

To call Majid Abbasi a poster designer would not do him justice, he is much more: as co-founder and co-proprietor of Did Graphics Inc. he is at home in all graphic design disciplines and produces masterly work with his colleagues in every field. He is also a networker: as a founder member of the graphic designers' group known as "The 5th Color" he makes a key contribution to the subject matter and increasingly dynamic quality of graphic design in Iran, especially in his own generation. And as co-organizer of the "Tehran International Poster Biennial" he leaves no doubt about his organizational skills.

Even though there is no Farsi word for poster, posters do play a crucial role in Iranian graphic design history. A wide-ranging exhibition called "50 Years of Iranian Graphics" was held in Tehran's Mehr Shah Gallery in 1976, organized by the Culture Committee of the Tehran Graphic Designers' Syndicate. I conclude from this that the year 0 for Iranian graphic design coincides with the year 1926 in the Christian calendar, the very year in which posters appeared on the walls of Iran for the first time. The fact that Majid Abbasi was not one of just under 300 graphic artists featured in this show can be explained only by the fact that he was born so late. He belongs to the fourth generation of graphic designers in Iran. That is also the generation that did not start working until after the Iran-Iraq war. Majid Abbasi was 23 years old at the end of the war and the start of his professional career.

At the 20th International Biennale of Graphic Design in Brno 2002 I was struck by the poster for the "An Exhibition of the Photographs of Sadeq Hedayat" in the competition exhibition. (See page 13) In this poster, Majid Abbasi brings two pieces of pictorial content together in a highly intelligent way that is anything but obvious. Nevertheless, the poster looks entirely natural, and exudes a great sense of calm. Calm is generally a striking feature of his posters - they are never noisy or restless. The exception that confirms the rule here is the "Pop Art" poster. (The first version is incidentally also calmer, as the motif was not placed obliquely.) Majid Abbasi seems to resist any temptation to make an effect quickly. His compositions are precisely considered and calculated, without losing the slightest element of emotional quality.

I had the great good fortune that Majid Abbasi was present at the Brno Biennale in person, which

meant I was able to get to know one of the most prominent contemporary Iranian designers. When visiting him and his colleagues in Tehran, I noticed how important book jackets are as a medium in Iran. If the poster is the "king of disciplines" for us, the book jacket seems to play this part in Iran. Majid Abbasi explains this circumstance among other things by the lack of places to display posters in Iran. He too counts book jacket design as one of his principal fields of activity, and his career also began in this field. If the book jacket is considered as an independent medium, and not as part of book design as a whole, then book jackets and posters are very close as media.

Presumably the works by Majid Abbasi shown here owe their high degree of strong visual quality and impact to the smaller book jackets. His posters are not overloaded, they leave a lot of space. Majid Abbasi plays in a masterly way with the tension in the "empty" spaces. He seems to mistrust a color image broken down into cmyk. He uses each color over a substantial area. Usually a single color dominates the poster, which means that they do not look colorful, and are faintly reminiscent of the first Iranian posters in 1936, which were printed in black ink on red or blue paper.

Majid Abbasi has an extraordinary love and knowledge of classical music. His posters are compositions. Anyone who looks closely can hear them.

Ralph Schraivogel, Zürich 2006

Calmly, unhasitly and thoughtfully

Majid Abbasi is one of the outstanding designers in the fourth generation of Iranian graphic design who has gained experience and has become sophisticated, like many of the members of his generation, after graduating in visual communications and during the struggle for social transformations upon the 1979 revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. His knowledge about graphic design and his activity while entering the professionals' battlefield prompted him to find his position in no time. He is one of the designers who try their hardest to achieve the highest improvement in their orders.

To him, it does not make any difference whether to test his taste in a graphic design for commercial products or commercial or cultural items. He never avoids presenting a new work on any subject and will leave a trace of his presence behind. Isn't it right that the designer of commercials and packages is one of the most influential people who elevate the visual taste in society? Believing this, he does not pay attention to any differences among his orders. He tries to do his best in order to work out all the various subjects of the orders for graphic design. In my opinion, designing a package is as important as that of a book-cover.

Producing culture and elevating the visual knowledge in the society is a principle which makes different battlefields the arena for the designer to make inroads. I don't believe that design of small pages in magazines or books or designing packages are less important than the fashionable one-print posters. However, Majid Abbasi has also displayed his capabilities in this arena with his presence in "The 5th Color".

By having a look at all Majid Abbasi's works we will find out that there is a pre-thought geometrical discipline in them which distinguishes him from the rest of the designers of his generation. For him, loyalty to the subject is still the primary principle and beautification or outlook is hidden in a form which he finds just after thinking about the subject.

In fact, he is a fan of the idea "Form follows the function", the approach which saves him from distractive statements, formalism and eventually from scattered producing without letting him forget the curiosity or innovation of contemporary graphic design. In addition, his capability to work with software, modern tools and knowledge, printing techniques and displaying reproductions as well as possible, have placed him in the professional level.