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BA Graphic Design

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My Key Words:

Creativity

Functionality

Expression

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In a world where Graphic Design is the soul catalyst for communicating information without the use of spoken words, through creative elements and ways of advertisement, branding or packaging, it's safe to say that it helps the world go round. With this level of importance there needs to be certain levels of artistic involvement in order for the work to be noticed by the public and spread or share whatever product or message it is. In this essay, I want to highlight how important creativity is in today's graphic design pieces and looking back at older examples in comparison to the rise in the 'modernism' art style. Through this, I will be using three key words: **Creativity, Expression and Functionality.**

Creativity, by definition, is the ability to produce an original and or unusual ideas. To be able to make something new or imaginative that no other person has thought of before. S. Cullen (2021) quoted that, 'Creativity can be described as being: the art and practice of bringing something new into the world through artistic and musical ability, the process of seeing connections and patterns between different things, the use of lateral thinking'. Then mention of 'bring something new into the world' relates to the continuous flow of ideas that build up the worlds marketing and products for others to enjoy. Creativity makes designers creations different and unique from one and other, allowing the freedom for new ideas to come in and change up the trends of modern marketing. Whether one artist prefers illustration, animation, typography or photography; they're all artistic traits that can be the baseline to forming something that can be graphically communicated.

A famous American graphic designer by the name Jessica Walsh is an inspiration to many beginners. Her work is world known and praised highly. She runs her own design firm in New York called &Walsh. I wanted to use her work as an example as I find her illustrative details and the stories behind each project fascinating and inspiring.



(Fig. 1, Zooba, 2019)

Zooba is an Egyptian street food restaurant based in Cairo and was opening their first shop in New York and so came to Walsh for their brand identity. With so much culture and history behind the restaurant, Walsh said she travelled to Cairo and was inspired by the beauty of layered visuals she was in the streets, like hand-painted typography on cart to coloured tiles and posters etc. From all her research, Walsh and her team of designers were able to create this branding project that centred around gorgeously created patterns and illustrations full of visuals she'd taken from her time in Cairo. "It's traditionally classic-", Walsh describes, with 'visual language' embedded in each little design.

Walsh had used a Cairo-based calligraphy artist to paint the Arabic type seen on the branding that links to the restaurant itself. R. Barthe's semiotic theories looked into the process of 'reading signs and focusing on their interpretation through different cultures or societies' (1915-1980), so through using Egyptian symbols as a signifier to their restaurant and the culture it's based on it's able to communicate its cultural identity and historical narrative. These symbols being a physical form of a sign that any viewers of the brand will view and understand the culture and what message it is trying to portray, like the food they want to sell.

I admire Walsh's dedication to the research behind this project and learning in-depth about Egyptian culture so it could perfectly frame Zooba's brand and what the owners wished to share with the people of New York. That level of creative inspiration that became this eye-catching brand that is unique in itself and holds so much detail that viewers have to stop and admire each element, for example the cultural patterning along the sides of the boxes, even questioning what the symbols mean or what it could represent is what Graphic Design is all about. To be a creative graphic designer is about visual storytelling and strategic thinking. A quote from a graphics blog (2023) says how it 'enables' designers to approach problems from different angles which then lead to innovative solutions. To 'think outside the box' and create visually captivating designs that bring in buyers or just an audience's attention, overall making something that will have a lasting impression to the public.

Without creative minds, graphical work would be left bleak and unoriginal with no artistic spark in any piece of work, which is why I consider it one of the most important, key words to consider when thinking of graphic design.

Expression can go far behind just human emotions. Expression can be shown through different methods which individuals can convey their thoughts, feelings, and ideas through. Expressionism through graphic design can form new life and energy into pieces of media, allowing creators to explore a wide range of visual ideas and evoke deep emotions or messages. A quote from B. Moore states, “it’s up to the designer to distil something from the project into visual form that makes a connection with people.” And connection is the important term here as designers want to invoke moods like joy, tension or urgency or using colour, typography and imagery as an emotional tool in order to express design in a memorable and persuasive way.

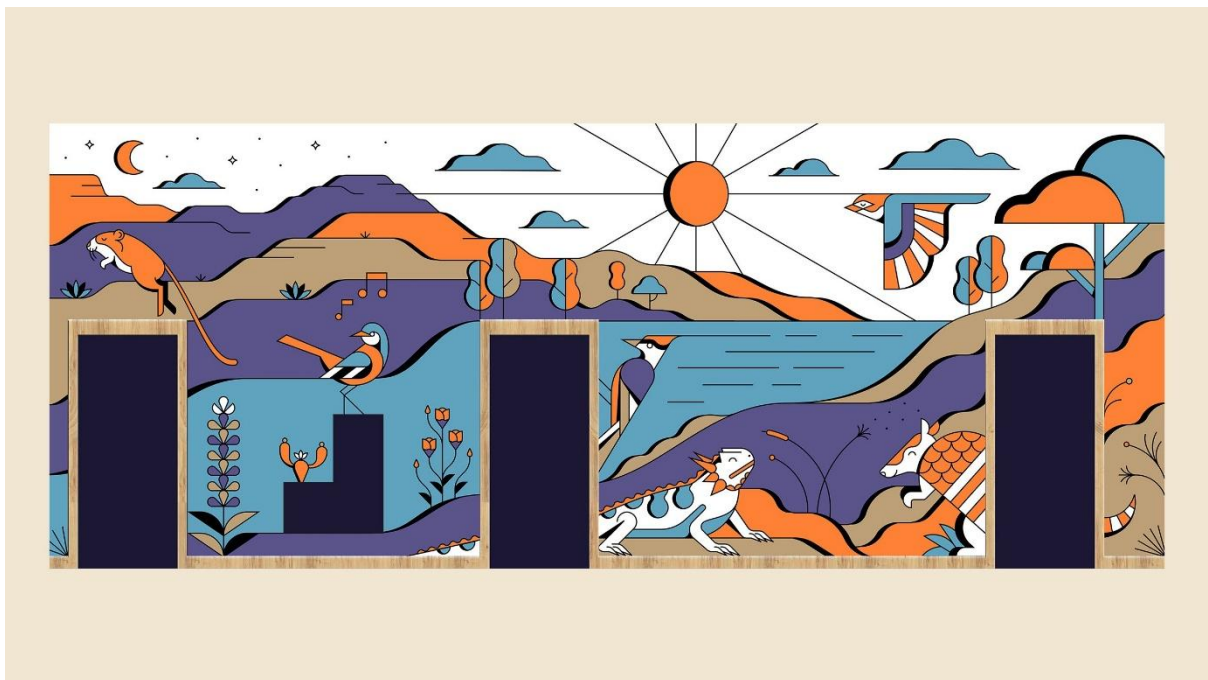
An example I’ll use to show why expressionism in design is important is this billboard design made by an advertising company called Amelie Company for the Colorado State Police.



(Figure 2, Tailgating isn't worth it! August 2010)

Straight away from this image, the message is clear to visualise. The 3D image of an automobile colliding with the back end of a truck that fills the display space, with a unique design choice of [pieces of the billboard face pleated and torn at the centre of impact as if it has been scrunched and smashed by a real like collision force. This design in itself has used an innovative advertisement technique such as impactful visuals to result in an eye-catching campaign to spread a very important message about road safety. According to an article linked to the billboard, 'over 3,500 deaths and 100,000 injuries are attributable to unsafe driving involving cars and trucks on the nation's highways.' Such a dangerous issue portrayed with the raw reality of what could happen to the viewer if they are not careful. Without the expressive design that's portraying a harsh reality to the public, how else would it send a message? If it were just a billboard with plain text stretched across it with an image, it was be easily missed by drivers as it's not interesting enough to catch their attention.

Another great example how expression within graphic design work is from the artist and designer Pavlov. He's based in Texas and runs his own client-based company where he focuses on his love for illustrative pieces to bring creativity into the graphic design world.



(Figure 3. Patagonia Dallas Store Mural, by Pavlov & J. Rogers. 2023)

This project of his was to create this wall mural for the inside of a Patagonia store. Patagonia is a clothing brand whose purpose was to 'save our home planet' and were committed to environmental activism. They use sustainable materials and encourage customers to repair and reuse using specific programs that specialise in stop fashion waste in order to combat the climate crisis. Pavlov created the mural with what Patagonia is most passionate about, creating a scene of North Texas species that are native to the land. It also brought awareness to the Texas Conservation Alliance that focused on protected the rivers, forests and wildlife of the land around them. The mural was meant to embody that, expressing the beauty of the Texas wildlife and how important it is to preserve it. It enlightened Patagonia's beliefs and the company where able to express that more clearly to viewers through the mural Pavlov designed.

Functionality ensures that a piece of design work has effectively communicated its purpose or message to those viewing it. A visually appealing design that fails to convey its message is ultimately ineffective; a good design provides information and or prompting an action. In summary of the term, the design's functional efficiency allows the viewer to grasp key information within seconds. Quoted by J. Howard Bear (2019) 'Function is the purpose of the piece whether it is to sell, to inform or educate, to impress, or to entertain.' Which I want to relate to the figure below.



(Figure 4. Summary of Pepsi Logo Evolution, ZenBusiness 12th March 2025)

Everyone knows and love the fizzy drink brand 'Pepsi'. Since 1898 it's been around and slowly been developing into the drink we know today. It started off as intricate typography of the products name- Pepsi Cola, before developing the styles over the next couple years. The earlier iterations of the logo had a strong sense of creative identity by using expressive typography and dynamic shapes that reflected on the refreshment and youthful energy they wanted to cater towards. According to ZenBusiness (2025), in the early 40's, the CEO had come up with the idea to turn the logo into the bottle caps used for the products before cans were introduced and added blue to the once straight red logo. It wanted to use the colours of the American flag during WW2 as a way to support the war effort, the design was highly praised and remained with that colour scheme to this day. A perfect example of how functional the logo came to be, becoming a supportive element to the ongoing war at the time.

However, I believe that the functionality has been lost with the modernisation of the logo. The oversimplification has lost any and all creative spark and lead it to be a flat, plain circle that in turn; yes, is functional and easily recognisable but is no longer eye-catching or unique. As part of a blog published by DesignCloud (2023) they stated that 'When creating your visual brand identity, it's important to consider your target audience and the message you want to convey.' The message Pepsi wants to sell to people is that it's got youthful energy, and target consumers who are 'young at heart'. Past logos had captured the blissful spark they want their buyers to have with the fun, bold typography and the quirky bottlecap design. Yet it's now been stripped down to the point its generic and flattened. The earlier logos have created nostalgia and youthful rebellion, the current feels more corporate and less functional to its original purpose and message Pepsi wished to spread.

By creating something, the designer will want to consider the needs and goals of what they are designing and to consider what the viewer's thoughts and perspective will be of it. Effective and practical will create functional designers but making it to 'simplistic' in order for its purpose to be obvious to the viewer, it then lacks creative spark and motif. For instance, a well-designed, functional product increases the user's confidence in the brand, so by having something unique and functionally closer to what image a brand wants to paint for themselves, it keeps people engaged and provides that sense of boldness and energy, standing out amongst the wave of modernism and simplified logos and help stand out against the competitive marketplace.



(Fig. 5 Bite Me. Z. Schneider, 24th December 2019)

Another perfect example to follow up on my statement, a graphic designer by the name Zoe Schneider created a unique gum packaging that involves each piece of gum looking like a tooth, followed with an 'insult' on the inside of the packaging as the mouth like casing slowly looks like it's losing teeth with each gum piece taken. This has formulated a proactive message that creates emotional responses from buyers, with fun and colourful packaging to stand out amongst others on the shelf. However simplistic the design may look at first, its quirky functionality has engaged buyers and has initiated a feeling of fun and playfulness. A quote from a blog (Icons8 Blog) highlighting these products says, 'When your packaging makes customers laugh, they're not just buying your product—they're buying into your brand personality.' So having these fun designs that tick all the boxes of spreading a message, having character and also a personality to it is what should make something properly functional in graphic design.

In summary, even if my three key words could fall under the same categorised umbrella, they have been distinguished differently with different points and topics to highlight them. I have chosen artists and images I like and found interesting, pieces of work that inspire me and what I think are unique to the world of graphic design. The mural painted by the artist Pavlov for example was one of his artwork pieces that stood out to me the most, mainly because of the story behind it all. How Patagonia has such a big message they're trying to spread around the world, and he was able to capture that in a mural that was just decorating the inside of the store. But it encapsulated all the things Patagonia stood for, like preserving the wildlife in the Texas deserts. Another example is how I wanted to link the evolution of the Pepsi logo to the key word Functionality, as the beginner stages of the design itself embodied everything Pepsi wanted to stand for as a brand, but then how minimalism eventually made it more efficient, but plainer. Which in turn felt like it lost its functionality in a graphical sense.

I wanted to highlight around what I deem is an issue in modern day design work or otherwise known as modernism. I wanted each keyword to highlight how importance of being independent with each design and making sure it got character and something unique and creative about it. How everyone in modern times has become bleak and 'easy' but in the end makes packaging and logos look corporate and lacklustre. There's a big different between being simplistic and effective versus simplistic and easy. Choosing the more dulled down version of a logo where are it could have been more captivating and different with a more bold design choice. It leaves me with a good couple question ideas that I can use in the future, highlighting on how; has modernism's emphasis on minimalism drained creative expression from graphic design.

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