

Contemporary Influences of Design.

Minimalism

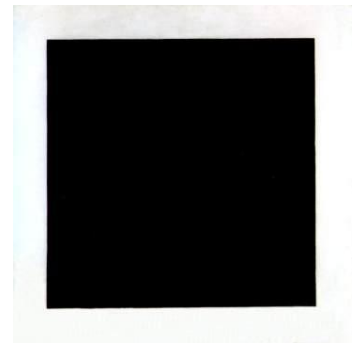
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This essay intends to explore the progression of the art movement, Minimalism, through an investigation into its origins and main protagonists alongside other contributing factors.

Minimalism is a term loosely used to describe a post-war art movement in which designers and artists alike chose to reduce the 'media' and 'means' used to a bare minimum; only the essential. There has been much debate as to the exact definition of minimalism with scholars describing it as a style in which "organising principles" were "the right angle, the square.....", for instance; the view proposed by Colpitt presented by Meyer (2001 p.3), and "Minimalism presents the viewer with objects of charged neutrality: objects usually rectilinear, employing one or two materials, one or two colours...", Craig-Martin (1989, p.7).

It can be argued that the first recognised instance of minimalism was produced in 1912 by Kasimir Malevich who "placed a black square on a white ground" Craig Martin (1989, p.7). An image of this can be seen on the right, ABC online (2008) . Malevich identified this piece as a 'void', Rose



(1989, p.9), and in an attempt to describe this, reporter Barbara Rose, stated with reference to the viewer that, "In the face of so much nothing, he is still experiencing something" Craig Martin (1989, p.7), suggesting that art needn't be "visually complex" to provide the viewer with a "visually complex experience", leading to a new outlook on the way in which art in general was perceived.



In succession to this, Marcel Duchamp claimed just one year later that his piece, a standard metal bottle-rack which he called "ready-made", was an original work of art. A replica model can be seen to the left, The Norton Simon Museum (2008). Much to the dislike of spectators, Duchamp seemed to dismiss the outlook that there need be uniqueness to a piece of art. He also believed that "art is itself a context were seeking to demystify art and to create an art directly accessible to the viewer without the need of intermediaries", Craig Martin (1989, p.7),

thus he made his art both recognisable and simple. The mode of production that was used is another instance whereby the use of the word minimal is appropriate; the new movement "evinced a

minimum of artistic labour”, Meyer (2001 p.3), reducing each aspect of manufacture and production to only that which is necessary.

During his career, Duchamp also found that there was an “Acceptance of meaning latent in different materials and in the process of making; openness to the use of any and all materials”, Craig-Martin (1989 p.6), meaning that any material could be used and still be considered minimal.

Arguably these two ideologies may have been ‘before their time’ and were perhaps too radical for that era having come from the very decorative and detailed art of the 19th century; these examples seemed to inspire a later generation of artists as is elaborated further on in this report, and examples of minimalism plays a prevalent role in modern day art and design.

For several decades Malevich and Duchamp’s work “marked the limits of visual art” and there was much resistance to this movement with critics speculating that “the artist has not worked hard enough or put enough effort into his art”, Rose (1989, p.9). However, alongside pop and conceptual art, minimalism was characteristic of the sixties emanating simplicity, clarity and directness.

The simplicity of the art movement gave visually engaging results which were initially considered ‘shocking’ and ‘unconventional’; it was an art that challenged the original conceptions of the already established market since it did not comply with the “accepted notion of authorship”. Sequentially, minimalism took a significant step in challenging the convention that “an author must personally manufacture the work of art and establish a new status for the object as art”, Serota (1989 p.5), contradicting Duchamp’s attitudes.

German industrial designer, Dieter Rams, was a keen follower of the thesis, “less is more”, declaring as his 10th ‘commandment’ that “good design is as little design as possible”. By employing a minimalist attitude and applying them to his designs throughout his career he became internationally renowned for his products. He was best known for his time spent being the Head of Design at the company Braun and designed a vast array of products including the radio which can be



seen to the left, Design Mare (2008). The radio exemplifies minimalism: the design minimises the amount of materials used; and the amount of colour, which can be asserted to the definition of minimalism presented earlier in the document,

“Minimalism...employing one or two materials, one or two colours...”, Craig-Martin (1989, p.7). The form is also geometric and overall it is a clear and direct design.

It is obvious that Dieter Rams products were a direct influence on the current and successful designs of Apple such as the iMac and iPod. Both these products reflect a minimalistic style both internally and externally using basic geometric shapes and only the necessary and wanted components; the basic navigation of these products improves the functionality and thus the relationship with the consumer is improved. Though indirectly related, this coheres with Dunchamp’s view that art should be “directly accessible to the viewer without the need of intermediaries”, Craig-Martin (1989, p.7).

Minimalism can also be applied to fashion, products and art and seems to play a prominent role in today’s society: representative of the minimal style are distinguished designers such as Jonathon Ives of Apple Inc and Donna Karan of DKNY, see picture right: Lee, J. (2008). Rather than showing a lack of effort as critics have previously mentioned, these instances seems to emanate a sense of simple elegance and are considered prestige brands.



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