

Josef Müller Brockmann

Biography

Early Life

Josef Müller-Brockmann was born in Rapperswil, Switzerland on May 9th, 1914. He studied architecture, design and history of art at the University of Zurich. His career began as an apprentice to the designer and advertising consultant, Walter Diggelman (A History of Graphic Design). In 1932, Brockmann broke off from the apprenticeship and audited courses by Ernest Keller and Alfred Willmann at the Zurich School of Arts and Crafts (Josef Muller-Brockman 1914-1996). In 1936, Brockmann established his own Zurich studio. His studio specialized in graphics, exhibition design and photography.

Swiss Style

Josef Muller Brockmann was the leading pioneer of the Swiss Style. He found and edited Neue Grafik, a Zurich published Journal. He was concerned with objective and functional design. Brockmann had many skills, such as letterpress, silkscreen and lithography. “Musica viva”, was a concert poster series for Zurich Tonhalle in 1951. This poster series, some of his first typographical posters, demonstrated his geometric style. He restricted elements in a typographic grid for posters, advertisements, brochures and exhibitions, creating a shift in focus of image to the basic message. The composition is displayed in a clean and geometric manner using a grid. The grid defined dimensions of the design space, where elements could be placed with precision so that every piece was integrated. The objective was visual communication, information one could receive easily and retained. (A History of Graphic Design)

Later Life

Josef’s life was not all about design. From 1939 to 1945, Brockmann served as a lieutenant in the Swiss army. In 1943, he had married Verena Brockmann. Verena was a violinist with whom he had a child in 1944, Andreas. After the war he continued his design work, creating exhibitions and working as a set designer. In the 1950’s Josef left the theatre to concentrate on graphic design and expand his studio. He traveled around the world and founded the magazine “New Graphic Design”. His wife died in 1964, due to an accident. In 1967, Josef Muller Brockmann became a European design consultant for IBM. Brockmann wrote books such as The Graphic Artist and his Design Problems (1961), History of Visual Communication (1971) and History of the Poster (1971). Regardless, his work was rigid. He won the Brunel award in 1985 and 1987. He was nominated for “Honorable Royal Designer for Industry” in 1988 and awarded the Middleton Award of the American Center for Design in 1990. His son died in 1993 and he died three years after on August 30th 1996 in Zurich. (Josef Muller-Brockman 1914-1996)

