

Great Lives: Herbert Fredrick Lubalin

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Herbert Fredrick Lubalin was born in New York City on March 17, 1918 and lived there all his life. He became one of the most influential American graphic designers in history. He attended Cooper Union for college. His education at Cooper Union was unusual because he was not only ambidextrous but was also color blind (Forde, 2010). These two factors would seem to impact an individual in this field negatively, but Lubalin was able to use these characteristics to his advantage and create a new typography that is still in use today.

Lubalin, during his career, had exhibits at the American Institute of Graphic Arts in New York, the Philadelphia School of Design, Gallery 303 in New York, and his collections are included in the Museum of Modern Art in New York and at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. This indicates that Lubalin was recognized as one of the greatest graphic designers, particularly to want to have his work shown at such prestigious institutions. Lubalin's work was so influential that after his death, friends and others from Cooper Union created The Herb Lubalin Study Center at the school. The Study Center was designed "to preserve an unprecedented resource" (The Herb Lubalin Study Center, 2019, p. 1). Clearly, this free and open to the public art center is a place to view his works, and art work of other prominent designers.

There were several issues and organizations that Lubalin championed during his lifetime. Lubalin was able to launch three magazines during his lifetime. These include *Eros*, *Fact*, and *Avant Garde* (Forde, 2010). Each of these magazines helped to advance the field of typography and allow others to have their work shown across the U.S. In addition, Lubalin worked for one of the most famous advertisement companies in New York during the 1960's and was considered a trailblazer in changing advertisement to include radical ideas. For example, Lubalin created the NBC peacock logo in 1957, and the PBS logo in 1971 (Christof & Gilkey, 2016). His early work

in advertisement allowed Lubalin to continue to have strong relationships with those in the field and helped to publish his work.

One example of how Lubalin was interested and involved in the issues of his time is how he became a part of the Black Power movement. He hired an African American woman at a time when this was not a common practice. Lubalin was also responsible for an art advertising campaign in the magazine *Ebony* “that exposed discrimination amongst U.S. corporations, reluctant to spend ad dollars in a magazine for black readers” (Unit Editions Studio, 2019). He was a man who was aware of the issues and problems of his community and he was able to contribute to supporting the solution to these issues even when his ideas may have seemed radical to many.

Lubalin was also known to have a political conscience. Although he was not a man to put himself in the front of the crowd and shout his beliefs and views, he added to the discussion his own political views. For instance, when George McGovern was running for president, Lubalin co-created a publication known as The McGraphic, which was a pro McGovern and anti-Nixon was, anti-Vietnam War publication (Unit Edition Studios, 2019). He used his artistic talents to demonstrate his political views.

It is also very interesting that Lubalin had made many connections with others both in and outside of his field. One of these associations was with publisher and editor Ralph Ginzberg, who was also the editor of the publications that Lubalin designed. When Ginzberg was convicted for an obscenity charge (the magazine published a picture of a black man and white woman, nude, and embracing), Lubalin thought he too, should have gone to jail (Unit Edition Studios, 2019). This seems to indicate how deeply Lubalin was connected to his friends and would stand by them with their beliefs.

There is a great deal of evidence that exists that Lubalin did something new, different and impactful. It seems that Lubalin was an individual, although considered a quiet and reflective person, would share his ideas and works with others so that they too would earn credit and recognition. He created new concepts in typography that he called “graphic expressionism” which was “the use of letterforms as another creative way of expressing an idea, telling a story, amplifying the meaning of a word or phrase, to elicit an emotional response from the viewer” (Unit Editions Studios, 2019, p. 7).

Another way in which Lubalin was impactful in the field of graphic design was how he established the International Typeface Corporation in 1970. This organization allowed typeface designers to earn royalties for their work and licensing and making the fonts they created to all manufacturers of typesetting equipment (Contemporary Designers, 1977). For the designers, this opened a new way of advancing their careers because they could now make money for their designs and have it licensed.

In January 1981, Lubalin won the prestigious AIGA award, which is given to an artist in the field of graphic design who had demonstrated that he/she had distinguished themselves in their work and contributed significantly to the field (Brown, 1981). The board of directors had described this moment of receiving the field's highest award as only a matter of time for Lubalin (Brown, 1981). His followers have described Lubalin's work as “raising typography from the level of craft, to art” (Brown, 1981, p. 3). This shows the level of art his work had become to others who admired him.

Lubalin demonstrated a very eclectic way to use typography. However, it was not until after his death that his wife, Rhoda, described how it was a secret desire of Lubalin to be a

painter (Unit Editions Studios, 2019). He wanted to not only change the field of graphic design but wanted to earn a place in the world of artists.

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