

The 1920s saw a major change in the ideation of graphic design. The process behind creating a design shifted from illustration to the collation and assembly of pre-existing images and works. This shift was especially prevalent in the USSR as the communist rejection of the fine arts lined up well with the rejection of illustration in the wider art movement (MoMA). This shift was precipitated by a new style of art in the USSR called Russian Constructivism. Russian constructivism began after a visit to Picasso's studio in 1913 by Russian artist Vladimir Tatlin. Tatlin noticed Picasso's experiments with paper collages and used them as inspiration to create his own collages in different mediums. Later that year, he showed his collages at the "Last Futurist Exhibition" and the medium immensely grew in popularity (Wolfe). In 1921, a collective in Russia called the "Group of Constructivists" decided on three central tenets of the style: "tectonics", "faktura", and "construction", meaning structuring, handling, and organizing material (Fer). Two members of this group and movement were Vladimir and Georgii Stenberg, known as the Stenberg Brothers.

"Ours are eye-catching posters which, one might say, are designed to shock ... In short, we employ everything that can make a busy passerby stop in their tracks"

Vladimir Stenberg (1928)



The Stenberg Brothers were born in Moscow. Vladimir in 1899 and Georgii in 1900, to a Swedish father and a Russian mother. They were close since childhood and that did not change when they worked on projects. They would simultaneously work on the piece and take turns to complete the project. In 1981, during an interview Vladimir speaks on his childhood with Georgii: "... When my brother entered school we sat together at the same desk. It was that way until the end." They designed together up until Georgii's untimely death in 1933 from a motorcycle accident (Mount). The Stenberg Brothers dabbled in many different forms of designs, including projects like railway cars but they hit their stride in 1923 as movie poster designers for Russian cinema. Between 1923 and 1933 the Stenberg Brothers produced more than 200 movie posters, most notably for the Russian director Sergei Eisenstein (Tillberg). The posters would be put up as advertisements but instead of their posters showcasing a dramatic scene from the movie (like many that did during that time and even today) they tried to capture the overall tone of the film (Mount).



They would start their projects by watching the film. After watching the film, they would take a still that they want to use for the poster and utilize a projection machine to distort the still and get the desired effect. This also gave them a high-resolution still from the movie because at the time photographs did not transfer well to the larger medium of posters (Glenn Horowitz). Their posters primarily used reds, yellows, and blues, following the RYB color model. The contrast created by these colors makes the posters stand out without the harsh mood created by complementary colors. The typeface they used in their posters was very bold and geometric and is commonly associated with the Russian Constructivist movement. A great example of these characteristics is their poster designed for the silent film *Bronenosets Potyomkin* (Battleship Potemkin) pictured below. The red and blue contrast with each other but do not overwhelm the poster in color. The bold typeface draws your attention not only to the name of the film but the cannons which are the focal point of this design. The people in this design are stills taken from the film. This poster is on display at the New York Museum of Modern Art.



The Stenberg Brothers, while not the progenitors of the movement, helped popularize the Russian Constructivist movement and how it is interpreted in the present day. Their use of bold contrasting colors and distorted imagery can be seen in the work of many contemporary designers. One of the typefaces used by many current day Constructivist designers is named ITC Stenberg, showcasing the impact and legacy these brothers left on the art and design world.

# POSTER BROTHERS

Vladimir  
Georgii  
Stenberg

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