



A L E K S E Y B R O D O V I T C H

GRAPHIC DESIGN PIONEER

By Jennifer Puccio





Artists

create and sometimes speak in a symbolism that others can only admire, not necessarily interpret. In Alexey Brodovitch's case, it seemed he strived to communicate and break down the process, focusing the majority of his life on equipping his protégés as he climbed the ladder of success. Success in the world's eyes perhaps since though he pioneered American graphic design while teaching at the Philadelphia College of Art and then integrated such European sophistication in his 25 year career at Harper's Bazaar, most of it as art director, it seemed there was one achievement that stood above the rest – taking first prize in a Paris poster competition where Pablo Picasso took

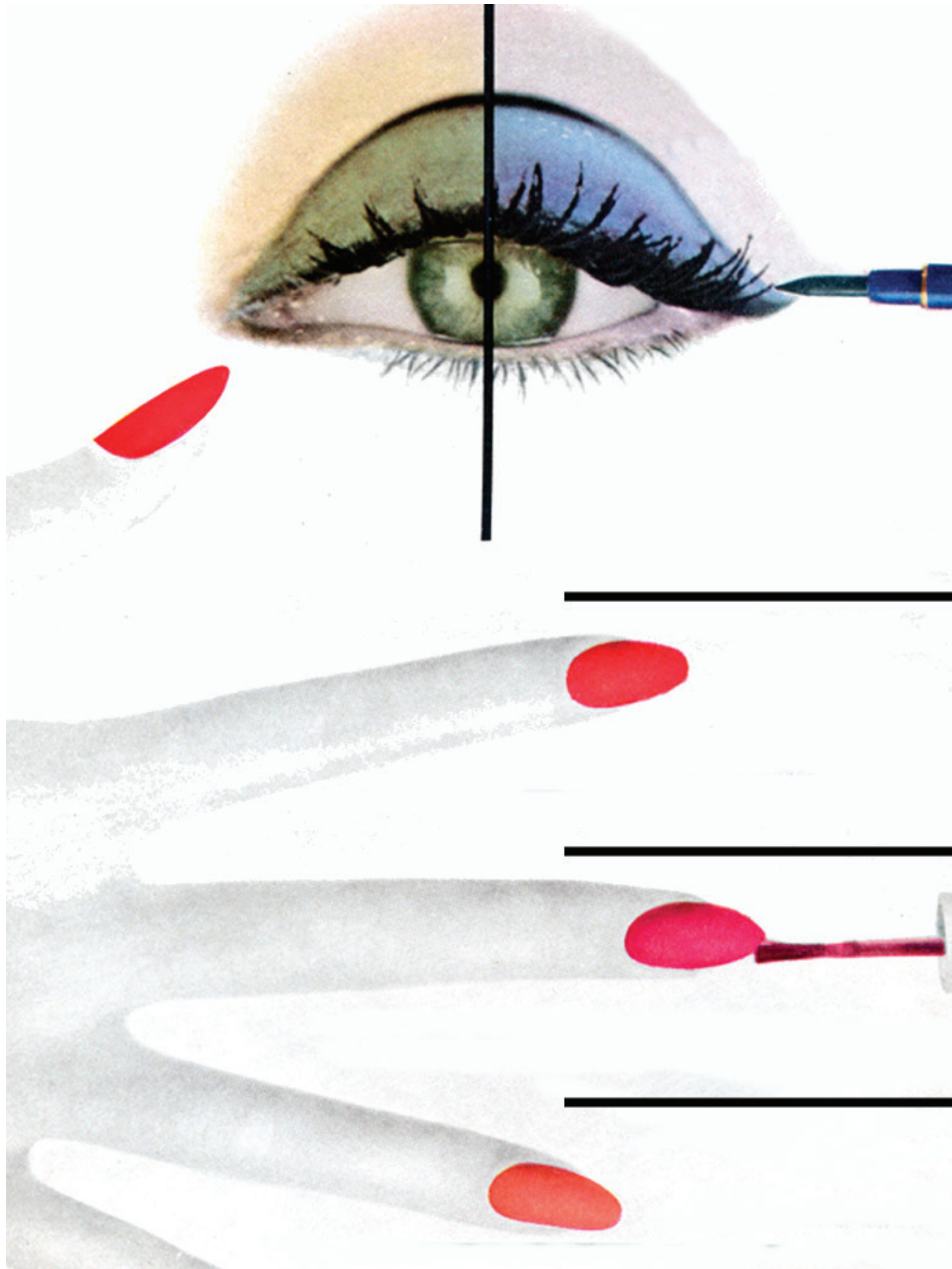


second. It launched his art career and the winning Bal Banal poster, which announced a benefit dance for Parisian artists, always stood watch with him throughout his life, pinned to his studio wall.¹²

It seemed a symbolic flag to his greatest success – to challenge himself and his students (“Surprise me!” was a common directive), reach for new ways to communicate. “We, in our past experiences, are too bound up to think as somebody else taught us,” Brodovitch said.³



Left: Brodovitch gained public recognition after receiving first prize in a Paris poster competition in 1924. **Above:** Brodovitch cover during his tenure as art director at Harper's Bazaar from 1934-1958.



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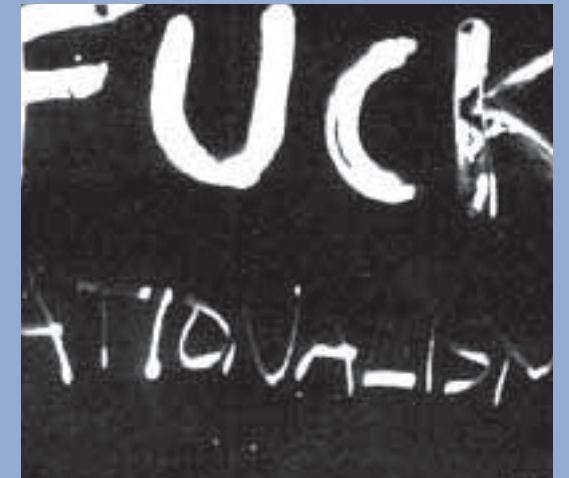
Richard Avedon. Angled fashion shot of German supermodel Veruschka von Lehndorff in Bill Blass dress. New York, 1967.



Jean Cocteau. *Palais Royal*, 1962.



Irving Penn. *Issey Miyake Fashion: White and Black*, New York, 1990.



Walter Berman, influencer of the Beat generation. Darkroom drawing, 1957.

At Harper's Bazaar, Brodovitch integrated European ideas of artists Cocteau, Derain, Lurcat, Grosz, Vertes, Fini, Steinberg, Berman, and Topolski with American talent like Irving Penn, Richard Avedon, and Sol Mednick. The most important of his visual tools was contrast, using white space, graphical and color bleeds across pages, and unique cropping to create an architectural effect.⁴



One small example of unique cropping was April 1951 issue with the cover heading: *Celebrating — the Birthday of Paris, Paris Fashion and American Beauty*. A black piano was shifted on its side to look like a ball gown while a woman showing only her face, arms clothed in white billowy sleeves against a black vested top, rested her arms over its body.⁵ I once read Russian writers wear their soul, not their heart, on their sleeve and perhaps this is the reason why Brodovitch is so admired – his study of typography during the age of Soviet propaganda artists seemed to mimic an effect these nationalistic posters



Above: Early inspirations: Soviet propaganda poster design by artist L.G. Brodaty, 1920.



achieved – a specific emotional response. He also seemed obsessed with learning and teaching, sometimes working 24 hours a day while at the Philadelphia College of Art. Perhaps it was in gratitude for his first fight for survival during the Bolshevik revolution, later surviving and thriving as an artist in Paris, working amidst new artists Picasso, Henri Matisse, Marc Chagall, and then once in America, quickly implementing design laboratories he conducted for the rest of his career life.⁶⁷



Above: With his students at The Design Laboratory. **Left:** Brodovitch's layout of supermodel China Machado, the first non Caucasian model to grace Harper's Bazaar, 1959.



Notes

- 1 *Nine Pioneers in American Graphic Design*, Remington, R. Roger and Hodik, Barbara J., Massachusetts Information Technology, 1989, pg. 37.
- 2 https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexey_Brodovitch, retrieved 11/14/16.
- 3 *Nine Pioneers in American Graphic Design*, Remington, R. Roger and Hodik, Barbara J., Massachusetts Information Technology, 1989, pg. 36.
- 4 IBID, pg. 38.
- 5 Alexey Brodovitch, Purcell, Kerry William, Phaidon Press Limited, 2001, pg. 4.
- 6 https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexey_Bordovitch, retrieved 11/14/16.
- 7 *Nine Pioneers in American Graphic Design*, Remington, R. Roger and Hodik, Barbara J., Massachusetts Information Technology, 1989, pg. 29-30, 33, 36-37.

