INTRODUCTION TO LATE MODERNISM & SAUL BASS

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INTRODUCTION TO MODERNISM

Modernism has traditionally been defined as the movement or artist style which attempts to differentiate from classical and traditional forms. Spanning the rough time period between 1900 to 1930, the modernism movement refers largely to the interest in a time period of artistic innovation; dominated largely by the arrival of new working styles, paints and other materials.

The movement largely gained traction at the end of the second world war, in a time of which graphic design garnered a sense of fruition and artistic implementation. With 'pop' art only emerging at full-front in the 1960's, the modernist movement very much pulled the idealism of materialism and mass consumerism into being ahead of the time of the likes of Warhol and Lichtenstein, at which these ideals were heavy counterparts of the 'pop' movement.

The modernistic concept refers largely to the ability to express feelings and ideas, upon construction of abstractions and fantasies; rather than representing reality on a broad compass. Largely, modernism aims for an audience to avoid coming to strict, perhaps immediate, judgement and conclusion upon an artist's work; but rather approaching focus upon an artist and the innovator's expressive intention and reasoning before moving to an assessment or evaluation of one's work.
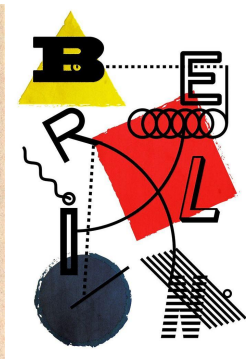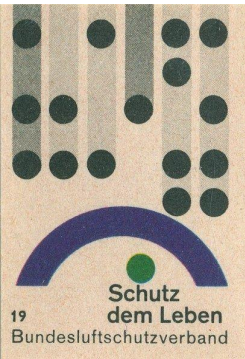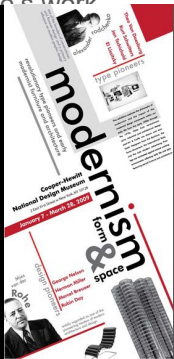
TRAVERSION TO SAUL BASS

Born into the latter half of 1920, on the 8th of May, Saul Bass defined himself as not only a graphic designer; but also as a filmmaker until his death on the 25th of April 1996. Bass was renowned for his chiefly minimalistic, iconic designs.

In 1954 he created his first movie poster for the film *Carmen Jones.* Impressed by what they saw they allowed him to design the credits for the film. Beforehand, Bass credits tended to be plain and simple and even projected onto the closed curtains before the film even started. Bass, himself, wanted to change this. He made the credits as part of the film experience. Bass would have the words dashing across the screen in his signature "kinetic type" font giving energy and life to the once boring and dull credits. A good example of this is the opening credits for *North By Northwest.*

Much of his work also involved the design of logos and movie posters most of which were rather reductionist and filled with clarity allowing his to get a clear message across to the target audience. Yet, he was able to inject enough ambiguity into his images to create more striking images in order to keep his audience captivated.
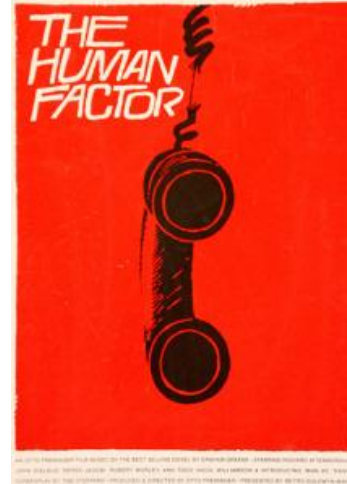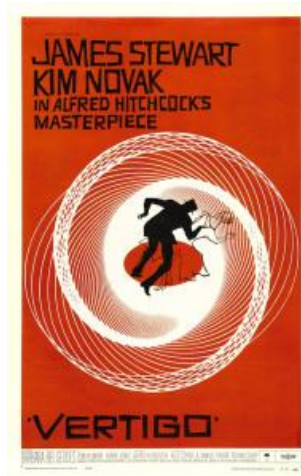
Bass' poster designs for Anatomy of a Murder (1959) and
Love in the Afternoon (1957)

Carmen Jones (1954) Bass'
first movie poster

SAUL BASS GRAPHIC ART

Saul bass kept his movie posters minimalist using bold blocks of colour. This simplicity allowed a clear message to be portrayed without it obviously giving away too much about the story. For example *The Man With the Golden Arm* movie poster has a single jagged arm coming down giving it a creepy and disjointed feeling. According to Bass this was to represent the Jarring existence of a drug addict as this is what the movie is about. Although this poster gives a clear insight into the emotions of the movie it does not give away any of the storyline and so keeps an audience curious about the film itself.

EVALUATION- SAUL BASS POSTER & DESIGN/TYPOGRAPHY

Bass had strong links to the classical avant-garde Bauhaus movement. Being very proscriptive of his beliefs, sections of Bass' latter work became political, in a protest-like nature. Heavily inspired by the Bauhaus, Bass was considerably taken aboard by the ways in which society could be transformed by his aesthetic approach. Much of this style was evident throughout portions of his conference and advertising work.

If you were to scatter through a Saul Bass archive, you would likely find a plethora of geometric esque film poster designs. As well as taking inspiration from the Bauhaus, the avant-garde movement was also a broad foundation of much of Bass' conceptual inspiration. These were key in the largely minimalist, emboldened poster designs curated for the style of film poster campaign used for 1955's *The Man with the Golden Arm,* to highlight in example.
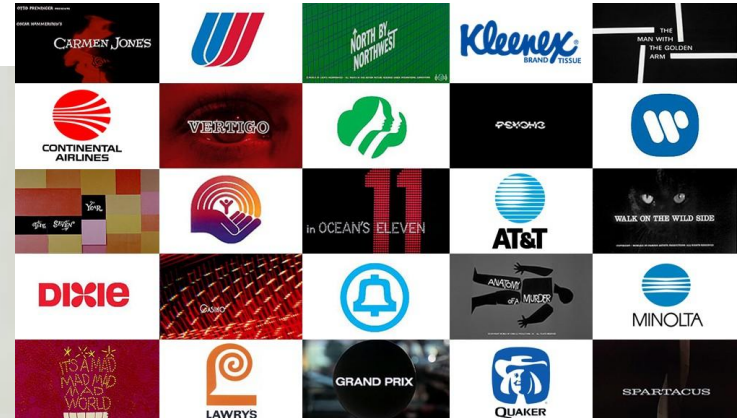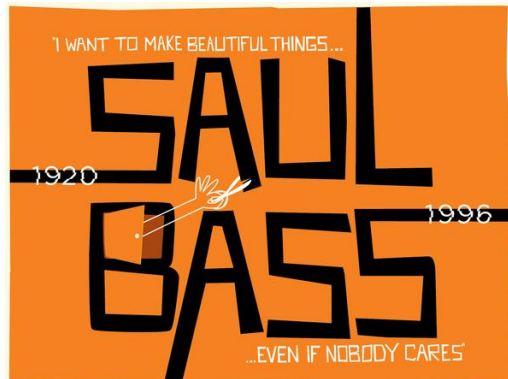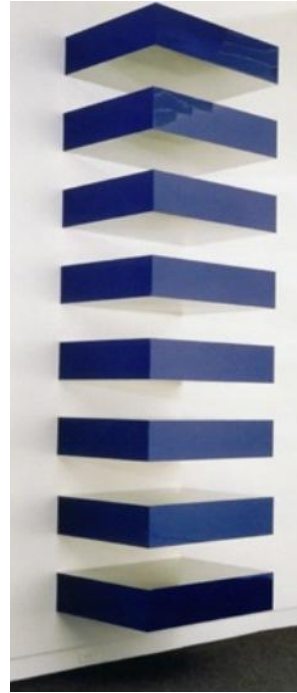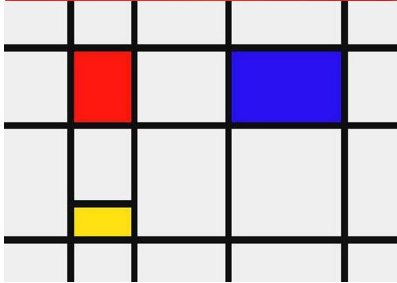
MINIMALIST GRAPHIC ART
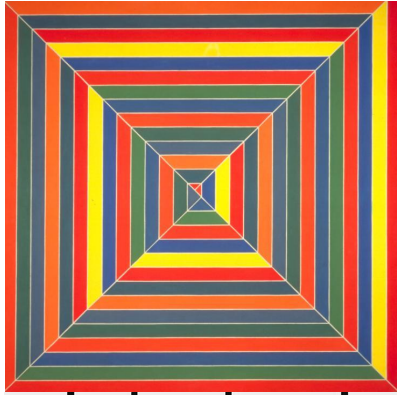
Frank Stella.
'Hyena
Stomp'. 1962
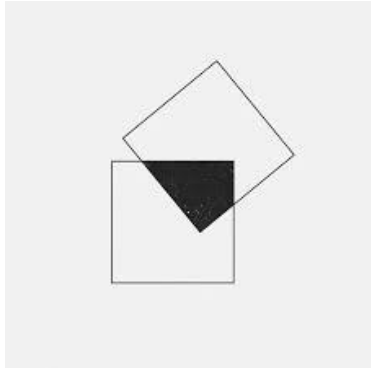
Piet Mondrian 1872 - 1944

LATE MODERNISM, POST MODERNISM & GRAPHIC ART

The Late Modernist movement spanned from the end of World War 2 to the 1970's. Despite this description, art in the 1950's period was often known as 'contemporary art'. Art produced after the turn of the 1980's period is often referred to as 'contemporary art', often providing a platform to mirror upon contemporary society and issues relating to current affairs.

However, this latter proscribed 'late modernist' movement was very much dominated by the ongoings of the post-war period upon which there was a need for increased promotion and packaging.

Late modernism is rather minimalist with a focus on using simple geometric shapes combined with organic shapes. It is often distorted with an informal layout. However this is usually contrasted with a bold yet simple type font.

There is largely a distinction between late-modernism and post-modernism, with the former said to be a range of components arisen upon reaction to some aspects of modernism; whilst both developing and maintaining traditional modernist components and philosophy on approach. The latter is often, in many extracts, referred to as either a continuation movement of 1950's contemporary art; or by it's own definition, a comprising period of art.

Although not strictly his own undoing, the movement was heavily inspired by designer Saul Bass, of whom was also renowned for his corporate identity designs in the field of aerospace branding. With his logos still around today such as the *Kleenx* logo and *AT&T* it is clear that has has made a huge splash in the late modernist movement.

MINIMALIST ART - A DEFINITION:
AS PROSCRIBED BY SAUL BASS AND THE LATE-MODERNIST MOVEMENT

Both minimalism and conceptualism were heavily tied on approach. The two arose most notably in the 1960's period and are still prevalent today through modern interpretations such as through the work of artists such as Dan Flavin.

Despite the heavy geometric components of minimalist art, the minimalist movement looked to break down artistic interpretations of sculpture, as drawn upon through the sculptural forms of art evident in the Abstract Expressionist campaign. A key objective of the minimalist movement was, as an outcome, to erase the barrier between painting and sculpture.

Saul Bass was again renowned for his minimalist style of artwork. Bass was known for his film poster designs and adaptations seen throughout the 20th Century in big-name blockbuster hits. In addition to his neat and precise style, original typography and graphics were used in addition to reinforce the foundations of his artwork.


Classic Saul Bass movie poster design

Traditionally in the field of late-modernist art, Saul Bass was known largely for his style of work; particularly his use of typography and graphics to reinforce the foundations of his artwork.

His highly illustrative artwork and style, alongside his strong concept is demonstrative of the strong concept seen in many modern movie posters across the minimalist field of art.
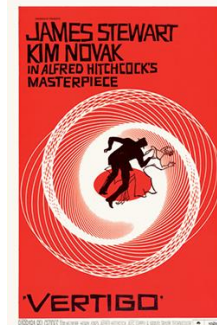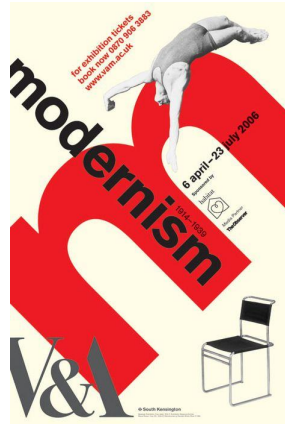
MINIMALISM => LATE MODERNISM - ARTISTIC EVALUATION

The artistic ideal of minimalism in the 20th Century forged strong links to the Late Modernist movement. As seen throughout the artistic style of innovators such as Saul Bass and Frank Stella; late modernist work incorporated an abundance of shapes and distortion into the unstereotypical attractive nature of design, with strange, emboldened, off centre designs conforming a typical late-modernist layout.

The primary approach of minimalism was largely to break down visual artist work by eliminating features of work which are deemed to be unessential. As a result, this concept tied in hugely to the late-modernist movement; of which was often viewed as political, with a propaganda like approach. Linkage between the two concepts meant that the latter movement was highly effective upon simple, eye-catching political campaigns in a way of which mirrored upon contemporary society.

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Lana

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