



Graphic Design in Turkey

Türkiye’de Grafik Tasarım

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foreword, High achievement in the fine arts

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Foreword

“High achievement in the fine arts is the most decisive proof that all reforms have succeeded. What a pity about those nations who fail to accomplish this.”

“I would like to point out with special emphasis that one of the historical characteristics of the Turkish nation, which is a society composed of worthy people, is to appreciate the fine arts and to advance in them as well. Therefore, it is our national ideal to support and to develop the worthy and noble character of the Turkish nation, her industrious quality, her intelligence, her dedication to science, her love of fine arts, and her feeling of national unity always and with every available means and measure. This aim, which is one very suited to the Turkish nation, will make her successful in fulfilling her obligation to cultivate real peace in the entire world.”

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

from his speech on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Turkish Republic
Ankara, October 29, 1933



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1. Historical synopsis

The Turkish Republic was established in 1923. When it was established, it was vital for it to emerge fresh from the ashes of the old Ottoman Empire with a new identity. The Caliphate was abolished; a secular and democratic state was founded. The canonical legislation of Islam was replaced with law mostly borrowed from the West, the fez replaced with the hat, traditional garments with suit and tie. Modernization of the country was associated with Westernization; at the same time, the West was embracing Modernity. Therefore the project of Modernization had imported into Turkey the idea of Modernity and the notion of Westernization without any differentiation being made between them.

As regards graphic design, the most drastic transformation was experienced in 1928 when the Arabic script was replaced with the Roman alphabet. As a result, graphic practice – however limited it was – would change irreversibly. The new alphabet had the dual mission of introducing itself as much as introducing the project of modernization, a project within which German influences were prominent. The well-acknowledged graphic designer – or, using the expression of the time, the commercial artist, İhap Hulusi (1896-1986) – was instrumental in the introduction of German graphic design. He appears to be the most important name on the Turkish graphic design scene until the late 1950s.

After the war, in the 1950s, the Democratic Party took power.

In 1960, 1970 and 1980 Turkey experienced three Coups d'état. Although each of them had its own social, political and economic consequences, it is widely accepted that 1960 was the turning point for many developments, including graphic design. Again, Sait Maden stresses that “an intense and qualified application of graphic arts in every branch took place after the 1960s”. In the late 1950s two designers, who would be amongst the leading names later, were already practicing: Mengü Ertel and Yurdaer Altıntaş, both of whom had graduated from the Istanbul State Academy of Fine Arts.

Graphic design education was introduced at the Istanbul State Academy of Fine Arts in 1927. Later, in 1957, the State School of Applied Fine Arts was established. Both schools benefited from German expertise, whose contribution to Turkish higher education, design and architecture was considerable in the early years of the Republic.

The proliferation of political posters, leaflets and publications played a significant role in the rise of graphic design. In the 1970s, graphic practice in Turkey began to change. The establishment of the Higher School of Applied Industrial Arts and its policy of employing professional and practicing graphic designers also had an important impact on the rise of the profession. Whilst today's graphic designers are operating in a great range of fields and the number of designers and design schools has grown considerably, the gender balance has also changed positively and women designers are taking their place in the frontlines, with great success.

Contemporary graphic design in Turkey appears to be already part of global culture. The Turkish Society of Graphic Artists was established in 1968 and regularly organizes annual exhibitions, publishes catalogues, awards designs in categories such as poster, book cover, logo, promotional material, letterhead, press campaign, website and so on. There are designers exhibiting and getting published abroad and receiving overseas awards. Indeed, many works produced in Turkey are no less valuable when judged at world standards. The problem, however, is to what extent they can be close to the cutting edge on the international scene or whether they are doomed to disappear within the market after completing their missions locally.

The last three decades have witnessed the rise of advertising agencies and the commercialization of graphic design, a tendency against which a few independent designers have produced high quality work exploring the boundaries of the discipline.



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1.1 Realistic and representative

The visual image is realistically rendered and depicts what the text says. The image is subordinated to the text and the text is explanatory, making a clear statement about the message. The attraction of the graphics is not the graphics itself but what it depicts.

1.2 Symbolic and illustrative

Images are mostly symbolic representations and in many cases they may stand on their own, with their own merits and independently of text. Strong emphasis is put on representation, while the text is either not important for the design or secondary to it, as if it were an addition to the image. In many cases one could easily say that letters are inserted afterwards and placed in the appropriate part of the illustrations. Sometime the illustration is so powerful and the meaning so obvious that no letters are needed.

The main success of the work derives from the artistic and drawing abilities of the designers, or so-called “graphic artists.”

1.3 Abstract and integrative

The major characteristic of this new generation of work is identified by emancipation from the illustration/typography duality that had dominated the previous period. Designers here begin to use various techniques and media to convey the message. The unity between image, message and typography becomes highlighted.

1.4 Conceptual and referential

To resist the visual pollution created by the tabloid press, mass media and the dominance of advertising agencies, references to history, ideas and movements are here part of multiple readings, pluralist attributes, post-modern metaphors, irony and identity. Even a journey into wilderness, a passage to the unknown requires a known referent.

2. Contemporary design education

I believe that education is a process of living, and not a preparation for future living. It is important for society that school be a place for experimentation. Students should not be given irrevocable truths or absolute values, but instead should be guided in developing their abilities to independently search for knowledge and personal values.

May inter-disciplinary & intra-disciplinary cross-pollination continue to enlighten our search for meaning and relevance in the arts and sciences.

Everything is okay in the end. If it's not okay, it's not the end.



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3. Magazines, the Bak case

Bak Magazine (or in Turkish, Bak Dergisi) is the first magazine in Turkey that gives real visual arts content. Before we start publishing Bak, there were only some magazines that are owned by art galleries whose only purpose is to sell the artworks they have. There were also some photography and fashion design magazines but finding something about graphic design was almost impossible. I started to work on November 2005 and the first issue of Bak Magazine were released on January 1st, 2006.

It was a nice Christmas present for Turkish graphic designers and artists.

After Bak is released and it broke visitor records in its category, people started to create some publications. Afterwards, the first printed graphic design magazine is founded. Its name is “Grafik Tasarım” (“Graphic Design”), this name ironically shows the lack of our periodical art publications. Then the international magazine Icon came to Turkey and some e-magazines appeared.

Bak’s main mission is to make people who are interested in visual arts (as artists or viewers) come together. Art is a common language and we are using this. A Brazilian artist submits his or her work to Bak and a Zimbabwean art lover finds it very attractive while an American short film director occurs to a new idea for his new work and a Turkish designer leaves his boring corporate works and starts to draw for himself. I think this is an unbelievable energy.

Bak has another aim which is more local. In Turkey, you cannot find a good visual arts magazine (especially about graphic design) although there are a lot of talented visual artists. We want to change this, too. I hope Bak will help people to be motivated.

You don’t need to go to a bookstore to buy Bak. It’s free, it can be downloaded in only twenty minutes, you can archive it easily, share with your friends... Its only aim is to make artists and art lovers come together and nothing is being done for money, it’s more sincere. While creating a project, thinking about the money first is one of the biggest mistakes in my opinion. First, you must be sure about the high quality. If you have a good vision and do your best, money will not be a problem. Therefore, I never think about selling Bak. But I would be very happy to see it printed one day.

Graphic design in Istanbul is a mainstream thing, underground philosophy is not that developed in Turkey yet, when it comes to art, in my opinion. There are a lot of major advertisement agencies here in Istanbul. Most of them have international partners as usual. You can work for world famous agencies like Young & Rubicam, McCann, BBDO, Leo Burnett, Lowe, Radar in Istanbul, if you are able.

Unfortunately, art education in Turkey is neither qualified nor sufficient. We can say that there are five major fine arts universities; Mimar Sinan University (Istanbul), Marmara University (Istanbul), Anadolu University (Eskisehir) and Bilgi University (Istanbul), which is a private college. Mimar Sinan has a spectacular Bosphorus sight and that’s all! I didn’t see anybody who is very glad to study there but it’s still famous. Another popular school Marmara has a nice interior design and gives more practical education when compared to Mimar Sinan which says “art for art”. But it’s not enough, too.

I don’t know much about Anadolu University, if not that it’s the only college that has animation arts department. Bilgi University gives great opportunities, it has a very big and nice library, gorgeous interior design and more sufficient education program. But it’s very expensive to study there without a scholarship.

If we talk about the most popular government universities, which are almost free, Mimar Sinan and Marmara, we can easily say that people don’t do anything to correct the mistakes in the system. Most teachers are only working for saving the day. It’s very shameful but if you know about their salaries, you may understand them. Therefore they always want to work for private universities to earn more and everything goes worse and worse...

“I think technology will continue to be something that seems to improve the quality of our lives and, simultaneously, threatens to destroy us.”

Ozan Karakoç, editor of Bak Magazine



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4. Typowiki entry

<http://typophile.com/wiki/Turkey>

Alessandro Segalini: <http://homes.ieu.edu.tr/~asegalini>
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Ediz Pinar: <http://www.edizpinar.com>
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Emre Senan: <http://www.yahsiworkshops.com>
Eray Makal: <http://www.12punto.net>
Esen Karol: <http://www.vcd222typography.blogspot.com>
Fulya Ince & Cengiz Gürer: <http://gra401.blogspot.com>
Grafik Tasarım magazine: <http://www.grafiktasarim.org>
Onur Yazicigil: <http://cons27.blogspot.com>
Ozan Karakoç: <http://www.bakmagazine.com>
Özlem Özkal: <http://www.ozlemozkal.info>
Özlem Yalim: <http://www.ozlemyalimdesign.com>
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6. Credits

Text & Samples

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