

POSTER



Stiftung braunhausdessau märz

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**Past
Exhibition**

HOUSE

Designing Through The Wall:

Cyan in the 1990s

June 20–October 6, 2019

Founded by Detlef Fiedler and Daniela Haufe in 1992, Cyan is a graphic design collective that emerged out of East Germany soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

At the same time around the world, access to personal computers expanded exponentially. This unique moment in history allowed Cyan unprecedented freedom of design. No longer did they have to pass through Communist state censors or rely on third parties during pre-production; instead, they experimented with digital software to create a new kind of poster aimed at a design-savvy community.

Although they grew up behind the Iron Curtain, Fiedler and Haufe, like many artists, found access to materials from the West via the black market and friends abroad. In 1988, they were gifted a computer smuggled across the border disguised as a television.

After the Wall fell, a dealer in West Berlin offered them a Macintosh Classic and Postscript laser printer, through which they began using PageMaker and Photoshop.

These new programs enabled Cyan to experiment with tasks they previously had to outsource, such as typesetting and layout design, which made production less expensive and time consuming. It also allowed them greater control over the finished product. They developed a close working relationship with their printer, Movimento, resulting in multi-layered, complex posters.

They started with photographic source material which was scanned and transformed into a single-channel image with the help of Photoshop and then made into high-contrast films. In a separate program, they designed their lettering, avoiding the restrictions of the traditional grid. Then, transparencies were collaged together and exposed photographically onto lithoplates —one color designated for each plate. At Movimento's studio, the plates were proofed on paper; adjustments could be made so that the various layers, each a separate, often contrasting, color, would work together.

The resulting posters work on two distinct levels. From a distance, one can read the underlying layers of photographs and the overlay of vibrant colors. Up close, however, those aspects of the work become abstract, and the focus turns to precisely-placed lines of small text cutting through the visual plane.

After 100 years of poster design that relied on big text, primary images, and simple messaging, Cyan rebelled.

Their work draws viewers in with glorious color, but requires closer inspection to interpret the message.

This push-pull aspect of their posters turns the tenets of “good design” on their head. They are promoting a type of advertising that isn’t quickly understood or easily digested. Unlike traditional Western agencies, they believe the right audience for the product will be drawn to their complex designs.

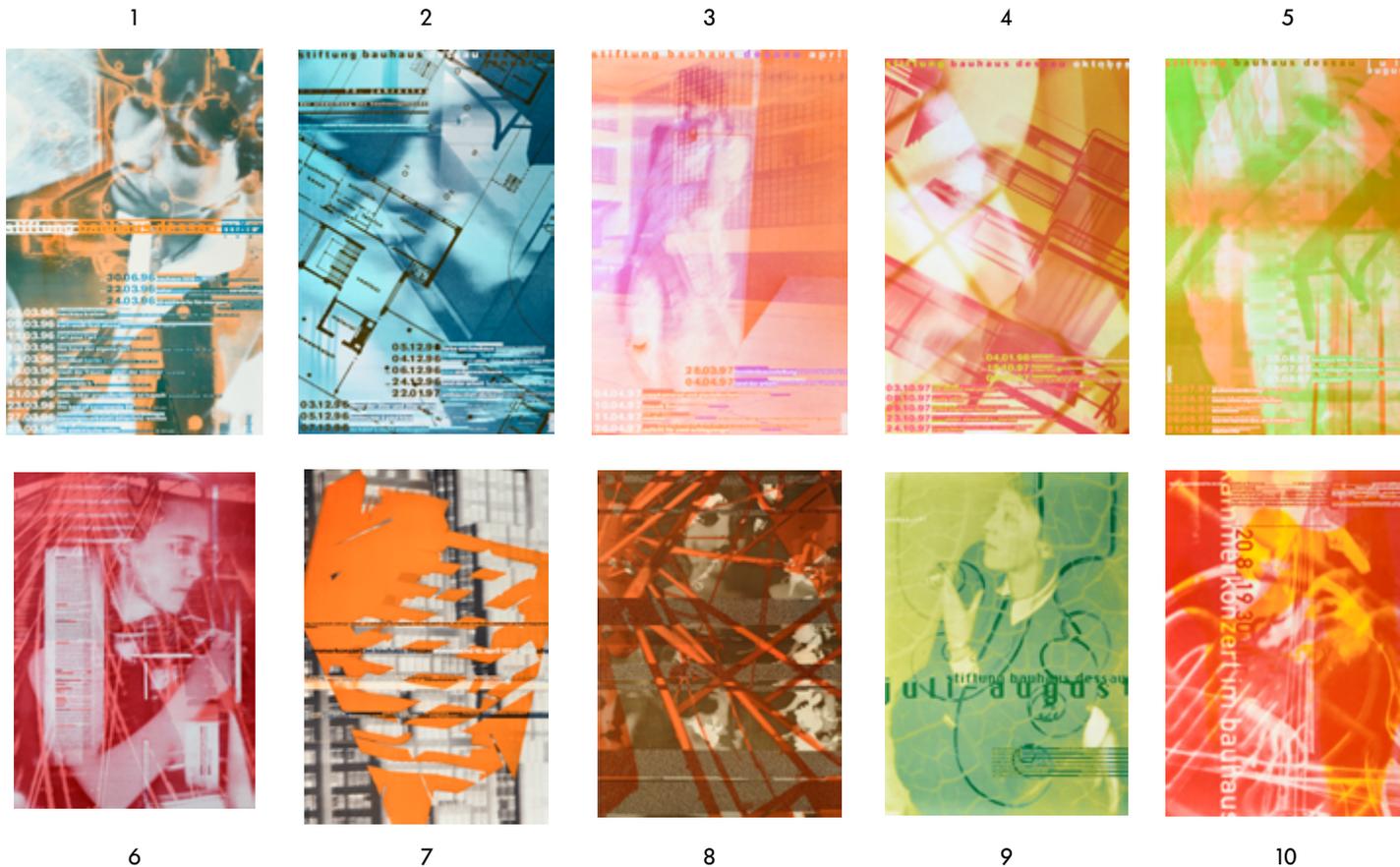
The audience turned out to be cultural organizations, and they quickly lined up for Cyan’s services. In fact, the majority of this exhibit consists of posters for the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, promoting everything from lectures to film screenings at the former location of the famous art school.

Despite their avant-garde nature, Cyan’s design aesthetic can be seen as a culmination of German art history. Their desire to constantly experiment with new technology while also creating high-quality compositions with limited means follows the traditions of the Bauhaus, while their obsession with the precision of their lithography harkens back to a rich history of Germanic printmaking beginning in the Medieval period.

Cyan represents a dichotomy of values born from a complicated relationship between East and West, capitalism and socialism, tradition and innovation. Their revolutionary posters were both loved and reviled by the public. Some historians point to them as vanguards of experimental graphic design in the digital age, while others feel they destroyed the sanctity of professional design. While many are interested in their work, very little has been written about them, and this exhibition is their first in the United States.

#PHCyan

All posters on display are courtesy of Cyan.



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Created between 1993 and 1997, these posters all advertise various cultural events put on by the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, such as concerts, forums, screenings, plays, lectures, classes, and exhibitions. The posters were issued seasonally and aimed at a design-savvy audience who would be interested in these types of activities.

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11–13, 15–17, 19, 20

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These two posters advertise sound-poetry readings in 1994 and 1996. The event took its name, Bobeobi, from the 1908 poem by Futurist writer Velimir Khlebnikov.

Press Reviews



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