

Analysis of Posters for a **Gunter Rambow** Retrospective Exhibit at the Museum Weisbaden

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俐源 章



Gunter Rambow is a prominent German designer, who utilizes the design to communicate his personal ideas or political stance. He represents European visual poets, emerging in the 1960s and continuing into the 1990s. He rejects traditional and conservative designs but instead regards designs as poems that are highly free and individual. After the Berlin Wall was built in 1961, Rambow chose to study in West Germany to further his artistic career. He established his design philosophy during his study at Kassel University, whose founder, Hans Leistikow, denied dogmatism and encouraged personal styles [1].

Rambow's poster style can be classified into three stages, monochrome paintings in Kassel, Photographic pictures from the 1970s to the 1980s, and simple symbols in the 1990s [1]. In the monochrome period, Rambow's works were influenced by Baroque architectural style, which opposed Classicism's elegant purity and stability, but exhibited a elastic dynamic of rectangles and ovals. From the 1970s to the 1980s, he changed from monochrome paintings to photographic pictures. As Rambow said, he was impacted by photomontage, which regarded "our surroundings as a social and cultural space to explore". At this period, he tended to use photography to probe the relationship between the virtual and real world, and to understand the comprehensive interactions of "objects, photos and abstract concepts" [1]. In the 1990s, computer technology changed Rambow's style from freehand sketch or photography to computer design. He tended to utilize simple figures as symbols to express his meditation on the society.

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This poster was created by Rambow to advertise his 1988 retrospective poster exhibition in the Wiesbaden museum in Germany. It belongs to the second period of Rambow's artworks. As you can see, he chose a photo of spirally peeled potato's skin as the dominance of the poster. The reason why he selected a potato was because of his personal sentiment for it [2]. Rambow spent most of his childhood in World War II, where food was always in short supply. Starving Germans then turned to potatoes as they were edible only twenty days after being planted [3]. Therefore, potatoes saved Rambow's life as well as the whole nation. Rambow considered potatoes as an indispensable part of German culture.

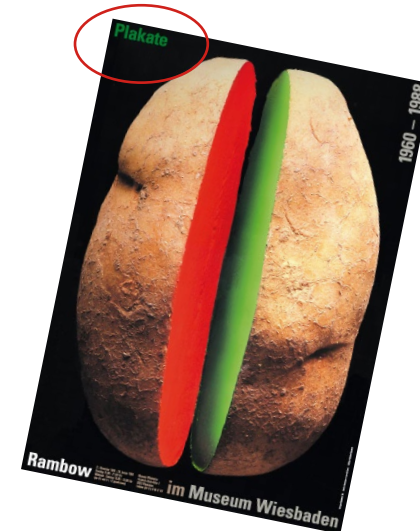
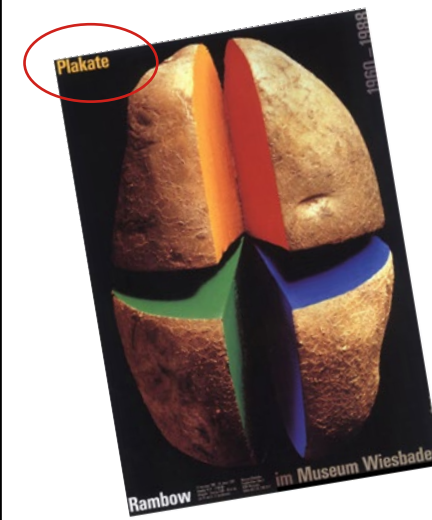
For this poster, colors were employed creatively. Red, green and blue, the three primary colors, provide a focal point of the poster. Those colors are repeated in various layers: The strip of blue at the bottom resonates with that in the middle as well as the top; The yellow at the bottom reflects with that at the top. The balancing and complementary colors endow the whole poster with unity. More interestingly, some colors were painted to seem smooth while some were painted to reflect the potato's coarse skin. For instance, blue at the bottom and green in the middle reveal the rough skin while red and yellow cover it. This coloring technique makes the poster three-dimensional.

The application of vivid colors inside the potato expresses Gunter's design ideal: in-depth division [3]. Two pairs of complementary colors, red and green as well as yellow and blue, split the potato's internal space strikingly. However, the contrast between the colorful skin and the black background unite the potato. It strips the potato from the plate and connects disparate colors as a whole. This internal division and the external unity endow the poster with strong and novel visual impacts. It completes the process of deconstruction and reconstruction of a potato.

To reduce the intensity of the huge dominance and full saturated colors, the texture of the skin is half-illuminated with the right half much brighter than the left half. Unlike the traditional use of negative space, Rambow adopted this internal negative space to balance the intense dominance, which left audience much space of imagination.

"The application of vivid colors expresses Gunter's design ideal:

in-depth division "



Words around the potato act as a frame, with vertical letters aligned on the right and horizontal ones on the left and bottom. The yellow color of "Plakate" on the top left reflected the yellow strip at top. The colors of most words are grey and white, which would not be noticed until the audience finished admiring the attractive potato. But those first unnoticed words are even more memorable, because with huge interest intrigued by the unique potato, people would look for relevant words initiatively and then memorize it well. This layout breaks the design of normal posters, where informational words always strike out. Rambow showed us that, we could hide our purpose (advertising) first and induce people to look for it initiatively by fantastic designs.

This poster is one of the series of four potato posters. In that series, Rambow adopted the same plate as well as the words, but employed different ways to divide the potato. Rather than peeling the potato, Rambow cut the potato into pieces or piled the pieces. He also implemented his design ideal, in-depth division, through the series. For instance, in the quartered potato, Rambow applied complementary colors diagonally to split the potato's internal space, but united them by the contrast with the black plate.

Interestingly, the colors of the word 'Plakate' differentiate from each poster. For example, in the bifurcated potato, 'Plakate' is green, resonating with the same color in the right half of potato. In the quartered potato, 'Plakate' is orange, reflecting with the color of top left part. It reveals Rambow's design philosophy, color balance in every detail. With the common design ideal and unique characteristics, this series of posters cast beautiful reflections with each other. They are dancing together with poetic rhythms.

Those peeled, cut or piled potatoes implied sprout of surrealism in Rambow's works [4]. The way Rambow presenting the potatoes resembled the way that the influential surrealist designer, Dali, segmented or transformed objects. They both utilized deformation to express their reflection on time, love, life or the society. Rambow did not realize his application of surrealism at first. As he said, when he grew up, he was mostly affected by Abstractionism. Until very late did he realized surrealism in his works. He owed this breakthrough to his habit of design: always mock his own work and remould them repeatedly.

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---- Gunter Rambow

"We could seek the depth of originality from our own ethnic culture."

Rambow's posters chiefly taught us two significant design lessons. Firstly, by breaking people's original understanding of ordinary potatoes, Rambow told us that design was not something that is super fancy or unrealistic. They originated from people's daily life. As he usually told his students, "Poems, arts and literature can be felt anywhere and anytime. Once you learn to observe, you can find them" [3]. We could look for inspiration in daily life, and "played" with ordinary things in a creative way. The most familiar things might contain fullest potential to explore.

On the other hand, through presenting potato as a symbol of German culture, Rambow told us that we could not only extend the breadth of design by professional techniques, but also seek the depth of originality from our own ethnic culture. Through Rambow's posters, People either had experienced the World War II or not would recall or imagine the miserable scene that starving people were munching potatoes in the dark corner. The German culture of perseverance and reflection of wars were disseminated among people across the world. Design becomes an effective way to facilitate thinking and understanding among people with different backgrounds.

References:

- [1] Chang kun, Yihua Xin, 2013, The power of graphic: analysis of Gunter Ramow's posters, Arts and Design, vol. 10, pp: 55 - 58
- [2] Herausgegeben von Heinrich Klotz and Allain Weil, Rambow 1960-96, 1996, pp: 9
- [3] Liao Qiong, Wei Wu, 2008, Research on works of German Poster Master Gunter Rambow, Newspapers of Hu Nan University of Technology (social science), vol. 05, pp: 111-113.
- [4] Xu Xiaoting, 2013, The impact of surrealism on poster design, Master's

Description of yeface:

I chose Adobe 宋体 as the typeface of the main body. It is the most common font of Chinese characters, just as Times New Roman to English. It would be interesting to apply Chinese typeface to English words, which resonates with Rambow's idea that we could find originality from our own culture.