

Asian Dialogue Japanese Design

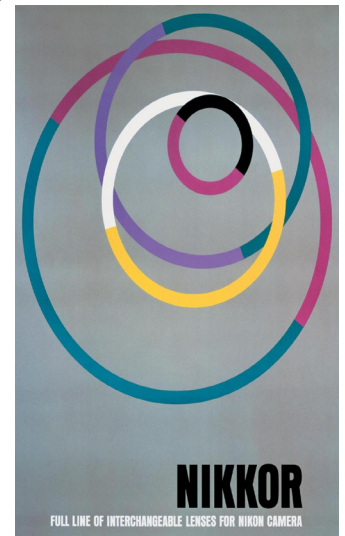
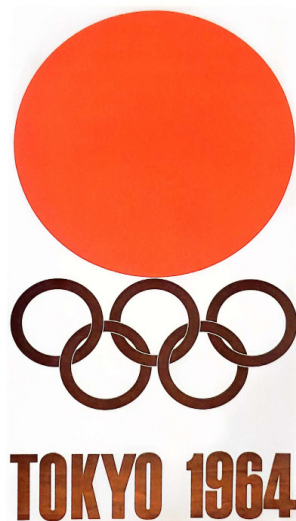
Some roots of Japanese graphic design can be found as far back as the Edo period (1603–1868 CE). They are revealed in the bold and vivid works of the Rinpa school artists and the clean lines of ukiyo-e paintings and prints which were produced for popular consumption. Despite these early beginnings, the concept of graphic design remained unfamiliar to those in Japanese society until the Second World War (1939–1945). Some of the greatest designers, such as Yamana Fumio and Kōno Takashi, emerged in pre-war Japan from Nippon Kōbō, a studio that was set up by the photographer and editor Natori Yōnosuke following his return from Germany in 1933. The designers associated with the studio displayed incredible aesthetic and compositional skills, influenced by European design movements like The New Vision and Bauhaus; however, at the time they were still described as *zuanka* ('draughtsmen') and their talents were largely unappreciated. The first generation of graphic designers to emerge after the war was led by Kamekura Yusaku, whose importance to the emerging graphic-design community led to the affectionate nickname "Boss." Kamekura's poster proposal (1967) for the Japanese World Expo '70 in Ōsaka, for example, displays his ability to combine 20th-century Modernist formal experiments with a traditional Japanese sense of harmony.



Tokyo 1964, Summer Olympics Poster, 1962. Lithograph, 102x55 cm.

Nikon Camera Poster, 1955. Yusaku Kamekura

Nikkor Lenses Poster, 1955. Yusaku Kamekura



Yūsaku Kamekura's best known work is the logo and poster series he designed for the 1964 Summer Olympics, reportedly created only a few hours before the design competition deadline. Kamekura eschewed the classical imagery traditionally associated with the Olympics in favor of a stark, modernist aesthetic, featuring the Olympic rings in simple gold below a red circle. Kamekura created a number of distinctive corporate logos, including NTT, Nikon, Meiji, and TDK. From 1935 to 1937, Kamekura studied at the Institute of New Architecture and Industrial Arts in Tokyo. The Institute was founded by Renshichiro Kawakita to bring the precepts of the Bauhaus design movement to Japan. In 1938, he began working for Yōnosuke Natori laying out Nippon, a multilingual cultural magazine. Natori's training in Germany influenced Kamekura, who became fascinated with the moderns and, eventually, Bauhaus. In 1951, Kamekura helped found the first graphic designers' group, the Japan Advertising Artists Club. He hosted the World Design Conference in 1960 but was still a trifle ashamed of the level of Japanese design. Convinced that it needed a boost and funding, Kamekura gathered the presidents of powerful corporations to sponsor a cooperative house agency: Nippon Design Center. In addition to the Bauhaus, Kamekura was influenced by the work of Cassandre and Russian constructivism.

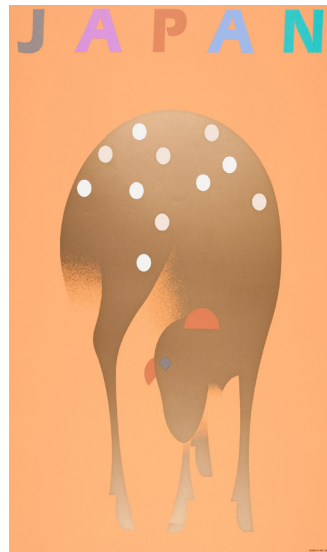


Sekai shogyo designten (World Graphic Design Exhibition) exhibition poster, 1959 silkscreen, 1030x728 Kobe Room.

Sharaku nihyakunen(200th Aniversary of Sharaku) exhibition poster,1995 offset, 1038x728, The Mainichi Newspaper.

1988 Hiroshima Appeals public appeal poster, 1988 offset, 1030x728 JAGDA(Japan Graphic Design Association).

japan Exhibition poster, 1986 offset, 1030x728 JAGDA(Japan Graphic Design Association).



Ikko Tanaka

Tanaka is widely recognized for his prolific body of interdisciplinary work, which includes graphic identity and visual matter for brands and corporations including Seibu Department Stores, Mazda, Issey Miyake, Hanae Mori, and Expo 85. He is credited with developing the foundational graphic identity for lifestyle brand Muji, emphasizing the “no brand” quality of their products through unadorned, charming line drawings paired with straightforward slogans. His use of bold, polychromatic geometries and his harnessing of the dynamic visual potential of typography are undergirded by a sensitivity towards traditional Japanese aesthetics. He was active in realms of typography, exhibition design, and book design as well, and his publication Japan Style was released in 1980 alongside the Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition of the same name. As a leading figure in postwar Japanese design, Tanaka is also credited with playing a role in the professionalization and expansion of the discipline. Tanaka is also widely recognized for his posters designs for Noh productions and other performances and exhibitions staged in Japan and beyond.

Inspired by the seminal “Graphic ‘55” exhibition held at the Takashimaya department store in Tokyo, which featured several leading first-generation graphic designers including Yusaku Kamekura, Yoshio Hayakawa, and Ryuichi Yamashiro, Tanaka moved to Tokyo in 1957 and took up a position at advertising agency Light Publicity. With the support of critic Masaru Katsumi, who coordinated many large-scale domestic and international graphic design exhibitions, Tanaka gained access to important platforms such as the World Design Conference, and received widespread exposure after being selected as the cover artist for the inaugural issue of Graphic Design in 1958.

Tanaka also produced promotional graphics for art exhibitions, music performances, and numerous cultural and industrial expositions, including Expo ‘70 in Osaka, Expo ‘85 in Tsukuba, and the World City Expo Tokyo ‘96. He designed the main logo of Osaka University and created notable posters for Hiroshima Appeals (1988) and Amnesty International.

In 1975, Tanaka was appointed creative director of the Seibu group, a holding company that encompasses railways, department stores, real estate, and numerous other industries under its umbrella. As creative director, Tanaka was involved in a range of design projects that defined the company’s visual presence: he produced iconic graphic designs including the green and blue target pattern used on the wrapping paper and shopping bags of the Seibu department store while also participating in the interior design of exhibitions, window displays, lobbies, and restaurants.

Typography figures prominently in Tanaka’s work, and his engagement with the medium fell in line with a growing interest in the visual potential of text among young Japanese designers in the postwar era. This impulse was in part shaped by the influences of Swiss and American typography. Prior to the 1950s, typography in Japanese graphic design was largely hand-lettered, either by compass and ruler or by brushwork. Designers including Tanaka sought to establish “nihon moji,” a lettering aesthetic that would be recognized as uniquely Japanese and systematically standardized. In one piece he makes use of archaic pictogram characters, printed in white with a chalk-like texture against a black background.

Eiko Ishioka

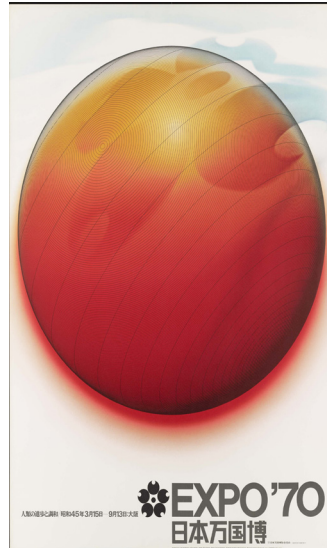
Was a Japanese art director, costume designer, and graphic designer known for her work in stage, screen, advertising, and print media. Born in 1938, Ishioka grew up in uptown Tokyo, raised by her father, a self-taught commercial graphic designer, and her mother, a housewife. After earning a degree in design at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, Ishioka began her career as a designer working in the advertisement industry, but throughout her wide-ranging career, she moved effortlessly between the roles of graphic designer, art director, and an Oscar-winning costume designer. At 22, Ishioka joined the advertising department of cosmetics company Shiseido, at a time when the importance of design in Japan was beginning to be recognized. In a male-dominated team, she spent her days subverting the male gaze, and presenting a new, more confident image of a woman.



Eiko Ishioka, Art direction for the poster, Can West Wear East? (Parco, 1979)
Eiko by Eiko: Eiko Ishioka, Japan's Ultimate Designer, 1973.

"Shiseido Honey Cake" magazine ad (1964) / Art Director: Hisashi Miyagawa/ Designer: Eiko Ishioka/ Photographer: Noriaki Yokosuka.

EXPO '70 Official Poseter, 1970



Just when color photography was being introduced to graphic design, Ishioka created an advertisement for the brand's "Honey Cake" soap, which featured a knife cutting through a luminous, jewel-like bar of soap. The visuals were bold and sensational, and the posters were such a hit, people began stealing them from the streets where they hung. Underscoring all her work, was also her love of a very specific shade of red, almost verging on maroon, that to her signified elegance, intelligence and perhaps something dangerous or forbidden.

Moving away from Shiseido's tradition of using Art Nouveau-style illustrations, Ishioka chose a photograph of the product that took centerstage. At a time when cosmetic products were presented as pristine and untarnished objects, her decision to put a knife through the soap accentuated its texture, creating a hyper-realistic image of the product; it was unlike anything Japan had seen before. In another advertisement for Shiseido's "Beauty Cake" and "Sun Oil" products, Ishioka showcased model Bibari Maeda floating in blue waters or stretched across a sun kissed beach, shattering the conventional image of a beautiful woman as "gracefully neat and doll-like," as Ishioka would later describe.

Ishioka's impulse to challenge what was perceived as "traditionally Japanese" developed during her childhood, when she was introduced to the beauty of both the East and the West. The color appeared in her ad for Parco "Can West Wear East?," which featured Ishioka's nieces in red dresses that slightly reveal their nipples, tucked under the wings of Faye Dunaway's kimono. In conjunction with the image of her advertisements, Parco grew to become one of the centers that led women to live mature lives, as an introducer of not only fashion, but also diverse cultures such as theater and music.

The official poster for EXPO '70, which Eiko Ishioka was selected to design. EXPO 70', also known as the Japan World Exposition, was a world fair held in Osaka in 1970. Ishioka described the poster as "a red circle that represents the nation of Japan and the sun, a sphere that signifies the earth and civilization, and the official flag of the EXPO, overlaid upon one another in the printmaking process."

Citations

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