

ART AND PACKAGING

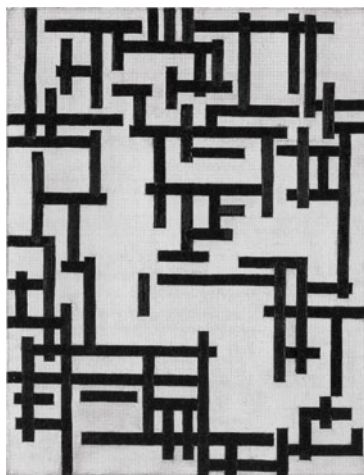
By Luca Desiata, professor of Corporate Art at the Luiss Business School in Rome.



“Good business is the best art” - Andy Warhol
 Art has influenced the world of advertising ever since the inception of placards and posters in the last decades of nineteenth century, when the impressionist Toulouse-Lautrec was commissioned by the Moulin Rouge to design a series of posters promoting the Bohemian nightlife in Paris. Over a century has gone by since Tristan Tzara maintained that “advertising and business are poetic elements” in his Dada manifesto. The contest of those years was permeated with an enthusiasm for the rising consumer society and for the surge of creativity that advertising was introducing into the art world.

The origins of the relationship between packaging and art date back to the ‘20s when the Bauhaus movement in Germany laid the theoretical foundations of industrial and graphic design. Typography as art was further explored by Mondrian, van Doesburg and their Neoplasticist movement.

The following table shows two works by Van Doesburg. On the left side, one of his works of art; on the right side, one of his posters for an exhibition:



It is easy to note how art functions as an exploratory research tool in the field of design composition that will later inspire the production of the actual design.

In more recent times, this integration has lost its original edge. Due to the technical specialisation of industrial design and advertising activities, mainstream art has contributed less and less in their development. It has rather focused on provocative performances and conceptual explorations, distancing itself from corporate managers’ impelling needs.

However, there are signs that this trend may be reversing again.

If we look at Italy, where art still permeates every aspect of human life, a number of interesting projects is emerging. For instance, every year Poste Italiane (the leading Italian postal service operator) launches a competition of artists to design a limited-edition Christmas package. The winner of the 2013 competition was the artist Giuseppe Stampone, voted by a popular jury through a social network campaign.



Another interesting attempt is represented by pptArt, a Rome-based innovative start-up offering art-related services through a crowdsourcing platform of over 400 international artists. Among its corporate services, one can find ‘When packaging becomes art’, i.e. the redefinition of packaging design through a competition of artists and the possibility to engage clients in the selection of the best design through a social media campaign.

Among the ‘Four Ps’ of conventional marketing theory, packaging has always had a secondary role versus promotion and advertising. Less creative effort has been devoted to the development of packaging design than to sparkling and artistic advertisements involving famous photographers or movie directors.

This is just the result of a mindset that has strengthened with practice and tradition. The truth is that, beyond its function as a container or wrapper, the packaging of a product has an enormous potential to become a stimulating canvas for artists’ creativity. □