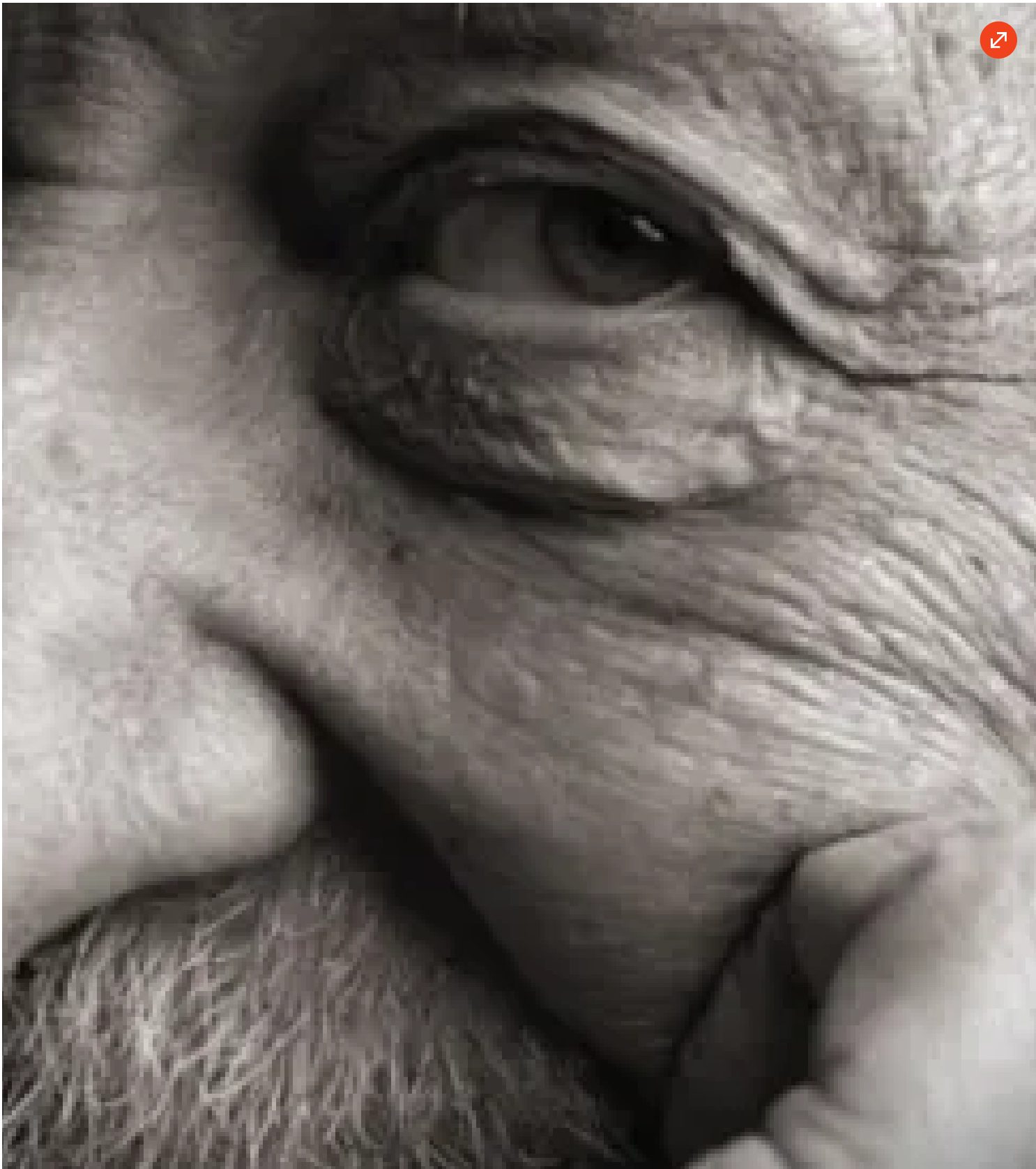


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Milton Glaser: “Art is a Judgment of History”

by **PrintMag**

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By Leida Snow

The first question I put to the legendary Milton Glaser is whether what he creates is art. His swift answer: “Art is a judgment of history.”

In Glaser’s design studio, the voices of children playing in the schoolyard next door tumble into the room. “You say ‘Art is whatever,’” I note. “Is anything art?”

“Art is transformative,” he answers. “Once someone experiences art, there are changes in consciousness, of awareness, of what reality is. If it doesn’t change people, then it’s not art.”

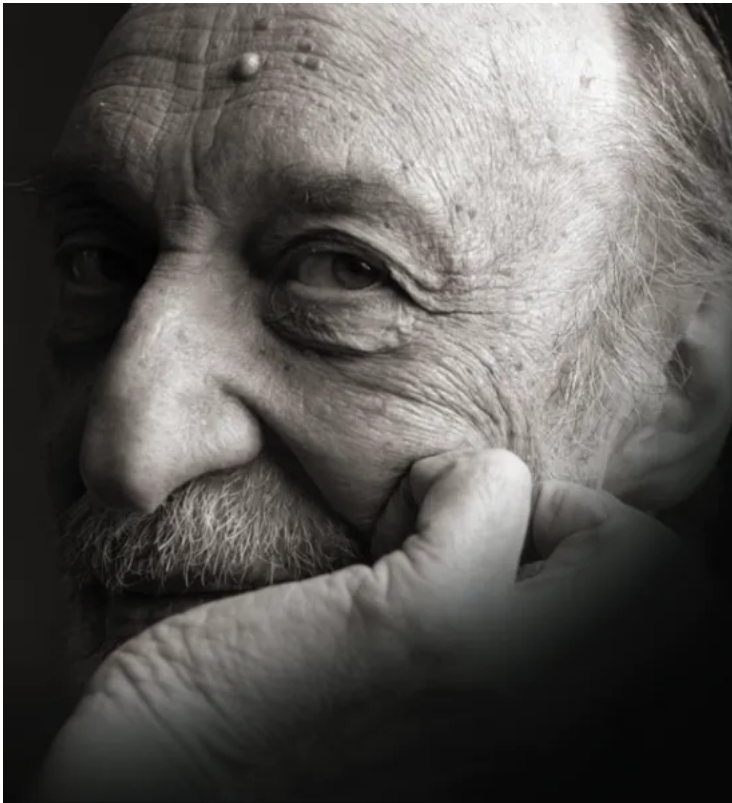


Photo by Michael Somoroff

original, which is now in the Museum of Modern Art. His aha moment for that design came in a taxi ride, begging the hours he's spent on less well-known efforts.

His iconic 1967 psychedelic Bob Dylan poster is playful, even as it riffs on a famous self-portrait of Marcel Duchamp. It embodies the two elements that define his work: intelligence and humor.

As he approaches his 88th birthday, Glaser can look back on one-man-shows at the Museum of Modern Art and the Georges Pompidou Center, several lifetime achievement awards and, in 2009, the National Medal of Arts.

"You have to plan for the end," he says. So he has downsized to a smaller Manhattan apartment and a smaller home in Woodstock. He still hearts New York, though, saying he can't imagine ever leaving the city.

Your workspace here seems super designed. We bought this place in 1965. New York Magazine started on the top floor. This place is not exactly designed. It's accumulated.

I like a combination of order and disorder. That's one of the characteristics of my work. It's why I'm only a partial loyalist to Modernism, which I use as the basis for communication. At the same time, I like this idea of what I create being finished by the person who experiences it.

I just did this poster—"To Vote Is To Exist." First you have to solve the puzzle of what you're looking at. It's not immediately obvious. I realized that all these messages that urge you to vote don't tell you why. But you should vote because if you don't, you don't exist; you have no effect on the life that surrounds you.

It's effective to engage people with things they can't understand immediately. That's what differentiates me from others. For example, most designers don't understand that a logo should have two purposes: It should be memorable, and it should leave the viewer with a feeling of affection. Design is something else. Designs solve problems and ask the viewer to do something.



Photo by Leida Snow

them to action.

Design is a mischievous act, because persuasion is dangerous, particularly in an advertising and capitalistic world. You are persuading people to do things that may not be in their interest. In the last 10 years or so, I've become conscious of the difference between informing and persuading. It's a moral question for anyone involved in communication.



How has graphic design changed over the years because of new technology? Paint is technological, so are brushes, so is the canvas. The methodology, the means changed.

Well, David Hockney says he now draws on an iPad. I've discovered a methodology that I can't do by hand, because it's labor-intensive. I've developed a series of overlapping patterns that produces an effect like Seurat on a computer. I can create that visual effect in five minutes instead of taking a year. For me, it's a question of time-saving. Most people manipulate existing material to create the illusion of something made by hand.

What would you say to someone going into the field of graphic design today? First you have to learn what reality is. The fundamental reason you learn to draw is because you want to understand what is real.

We now know that Vermeer used technology, the camera, to get the effect of perspective. So what was real? When I first sat down to draw my mother, at the age of 15 or 16, I realized I had no idea what she looked like. It was only when I shifted to the mindset of observation and trying to replicate that I understood what she looked like. Something exists, and it's firm in your mind, and at a certain point you stop seeing.

What would you say to someone who wants to be an artist, or maybe to a civilian—how would you advise them about how to look, how to see? The Buddhists say you must accept what is. Meditation is one of the mechanisms. You have to be conscious of how

yesterday, my wife woke up having trouble breathing. The hospital wanted to keep her overnight, and this was the first night I'd spent without Shirley at my side in over 60 years. The world was suddenly transformed by her absence in a way that I could not have anticipated. Even my cat acted differently. Life is a series of revelations that reveal how little you understand about everything.



Photo by Leida Snow

There's this element of humor in everything you do. Is that something you consciously add, or something that just comes in?

If life isn't about happiness and incongruity and fun, and the joyful moments, what are we living for? The light part of life has got to live along with the dark. That's why the idea of art being transformative is so powerful. Because it can open that possibility to people.

[Your parents were Hungarian Jewish immigrants, with progressive leanings.] Looking back on the past, you've spoken about how supportive your mother was ...Yes, overwhelmingly supportive, very important.

... and how distant and unsupportive your father was.He was concerned that I make a living. He was from Europe, escaping Hitler. For people like him the whole aim was to find a good life for their children. Incidentally, I think if your parents are both supportive, and you don't encounter the resistance of the world, you're not well prepared.

How much ab

out creating design and art can be learned?We all have aptitudes and potential, and there is something vaguely called talent. More than anything else there has to be a desire to make something, a fundamental driving force, independent of whether you make a living. If you don't have that, no amount of study or experience will make a difference.

And the lack of choice is one of the attributes that makes an artist. You don't feel complete; you're not alive unless you're dancing or writing or making music. And even with that drive, there's no guarantee that you'll get anywhere, that you'll be good at what you do. Because in addition to the drive, you have to have an endless desire to learn.

Years ago, someone advised me to have income from something else, and that would give me the independence to do whatever I wanted to do, even if it didn't pay.That's true, not only for artists, but for everyone. It has to do with a moral sense. You can't spend your time hurting people or accommodating to what the world wants, even if it may not want what you want to give.

region changed through that campaign. It showed me how something small could change the world. I'm proud that I made a contribution to the world that will be here after I'm gone.



Is there anything more that should be said? The consequences of what you do have to be examined. The work you do changes the culture and changes people's lives. We should act like good citizens.

I love working fast, but you can only do that when underneath is all the training and knowledge. I can't imagine what people call a "block." Does something seem hard? It's not hard. It's work. And I can't imagine life without it.

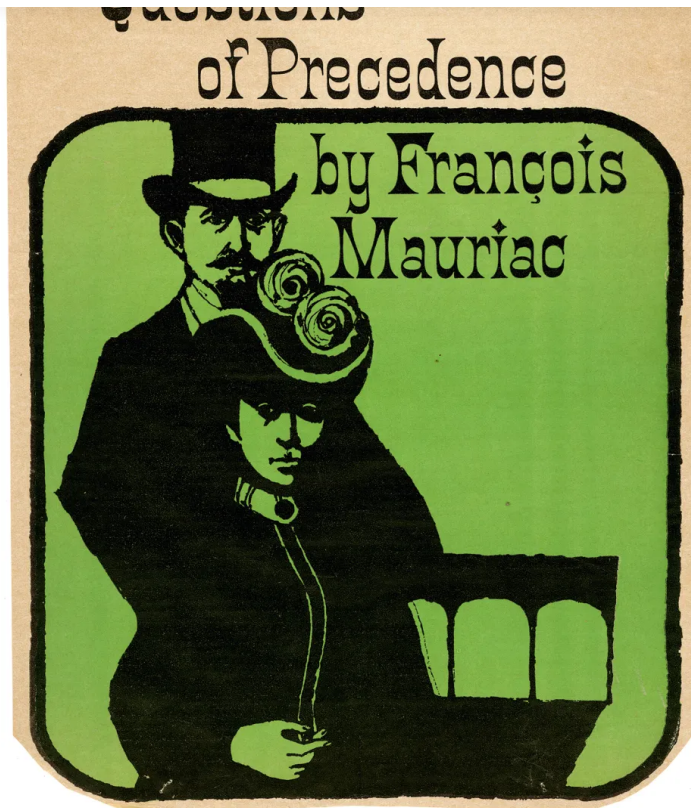
And one more thing: The good is the enemy of the great.

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