False Colors: Art, Design and Modern Camouflage

The story of artists' involvement in modern military camouflage by Roy R. Behrens

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Chapter One

Hundreds of Differences All Fitting In Together

Esthetics, Anesthetics and Gestalt Theory

In 1923, Max Wenthelmen, one of the founders of Gestalt psychology, published an innovative paper titled "The Laws of Organization in Perceptual Forms. "1.1 Among his students at the Psychological Institute at the University of Berlin, it was nicknamed Wertheimer's Punktarbeit or "dot paper" because virtually all its examples were abstract patterns made

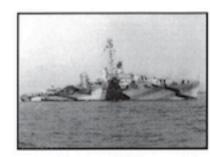
One of Wertheimer's graduate students was Rudolf Arnheim, a 19-year-old Jewish-German student who had grown up in Berlin and whose father owned a piano factory. Annheim's major was in psychology, which was then a branch of philosophy, with a double minor in the histories of art and music. It was the interplay of these four academic disciplines—philosophy, psychology, art and music-that provided the groundwork for his subsequent trailblazing writings about the

oufeur] was the most important thing, so far, I artist. The mechanical contrivences of building, the base, because they were so inceresting in themselves, classic attenuations, from my esthetic drivelings and makers' social reunions. "4.39

terns, up-to-date designs of stripes in black and white or pale blue and deep ultramarine, and earlier designs of curves, patches, and ther in what appears to be hopeless con and stern pointing in all directions, mix in ittle sunshine, add the varied and sparkling ections, stir the hotchpotch up with smoke, life, and incessant movement, and it can safely be said that the word 'dazzle' is not far from the mark, "427

A FIGURE 4.5 Riding in a convoy of dazzle-painted ships, norm Hur Bearon. a journalist said, was "like being in the middle Photograph by Proor A. and of a floating art museum," while others spoke of dazzled ships as "so many floating cubist [Serving as a U.S. Navy cam- paintings," "a futurist's bad dream," "cubist painting on a colossal scale" and "a cross ever done for myself as [an] dent."428 "You should see our Fleet!," exclaimed an American newspaper, "It's cam new sirplanes, the blimps. Outlaged so, it looks like a flock of sea-going the dredges, the ships of the Easter Eggs. If you shut your eyes good and tore me away from all my ship a cable's length away. It was an English growed habits, from my guy [Wilkinson] thought of it first, and his play with colored cubes and name's the first toast now at all the paint-

But was it Norman Wilkinson who first THOMAS HAVE BENTON thought of dazzle painting? Not according to quoted in Adams (1989). an American naval manual, prepared in 1961, p. 87. which contended that Abbott Thayer had devised "a system of course- and type-decep



ubmarine making an erratio vessel in a less vital spot."

and 4.Y Depart Young Wil ship comouflage applied o [from top so bottom] U.S. Nutsuper O'Briss, U.S. Destroy LK Swason (both Play 1944)

nd U.S. Carrier Yardstreen

A Broser Trush, p. 232.



■ THIS IS a fascinating account of the role of hundreds of artists, designers, and architects who served as army, navy, and civilian camouflage experts (called camoufleurs) during both World Wars.

Described and illustrated are ingenious and often amusing attempts at "fooling the eye" by such prominent artists (from France, England, the US, and Germany) as Abbott H. Thayer, Jean-Louis Forain, André Dunoyer de Segonzac, Jacques Villon, Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, Norman Wilkinson, Everett Warner, Sherry Fry, Barry Faulkner, Homer Saint-Gaudens, John Singer Sargent, Frederic Waugh, Edward Seago, Blair Hughes-Stanton, Charles Burchfield, Oskar Schlemmer, Franz Marc, Edward Wadsworth, William Stanley Hayter, Roland Penrose, Julian Trevelyan, Eric Sloane, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Gyorgy Kepes, Jon Gnagy, Arshile Gorky, Victor Papenek, and Ellsworth Kelly.

Illustrated by 120 artworks, diagrams, and vintage photographs, the book explains how strategies used to conceal or distort the appearance of things in nature and war depend on the same "unit-forming factors" that artists, designers, and architects use every day in the creation of paintings, prints, typefaces, logos, page layouts, web sites, furniture, buildings, and so on.

Throughout the book, the author makes shrewd observations about the connections of art, design, and camouflage to such seemingly wide-ranging topics as Gestalt psychology, esthetics, Cubism, Dada, Surrealism, psychoanalysis, kindergarten, creativity, the Bauhaus, Frank Lloyd Wright, humor, dream analysis, Rockwell Kent, poetry, pickpockets, and sleight of hand.

Of additional interest are a camouflage timeline, an account of the etymology of camouflage, and a 10-page bibliography (the largest ever compiled) on the subject of art and camouflage.

Soon out of print

Signed copies are still

available at Amazon.com

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