

Brief History of Art and design

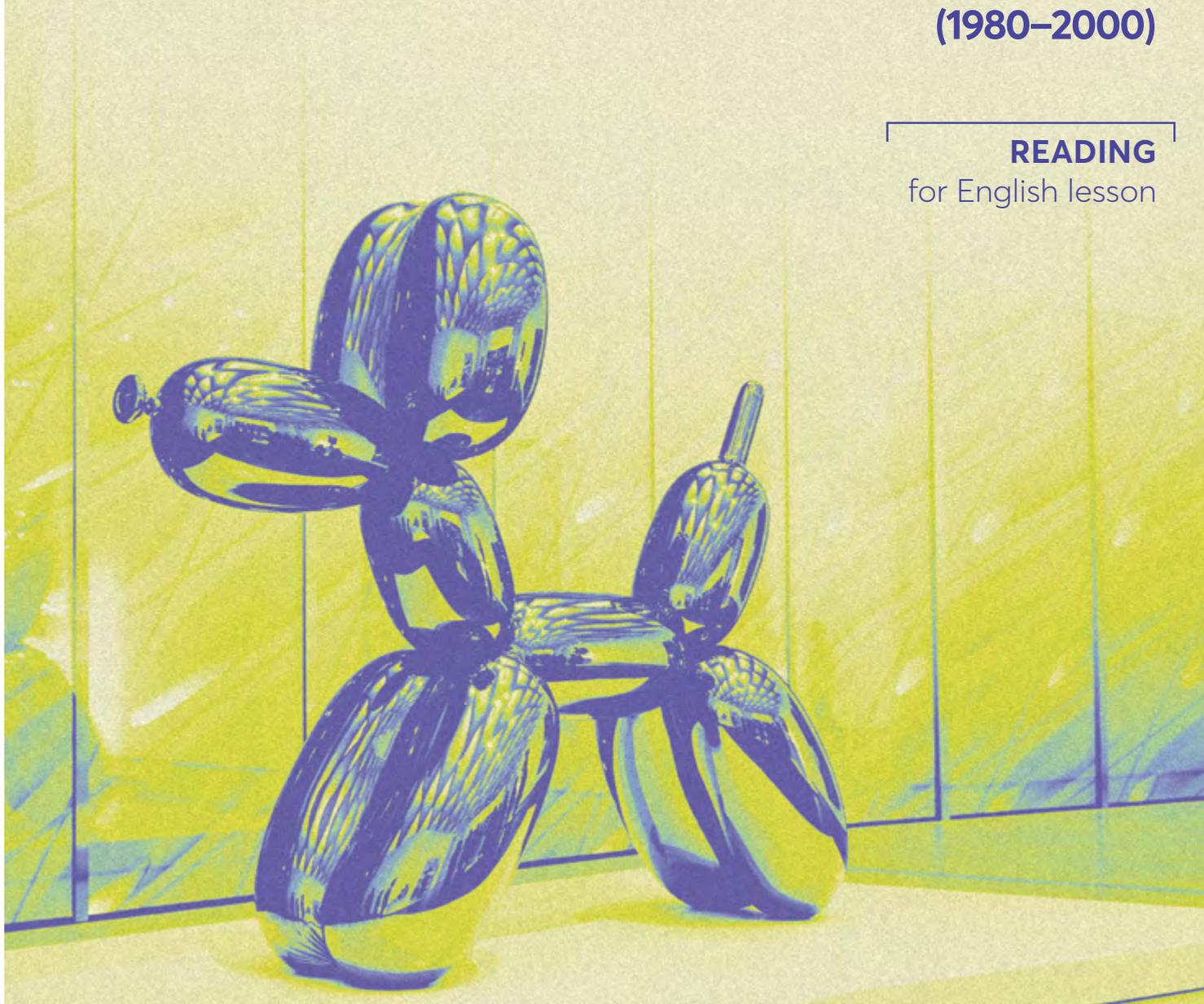
20th-21st century

07 POSTMODERNISM IN ART AND DESIGN

(1980–2000)

READING

for English lesson



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LMDV
LIEPĀJAS MŪZIKAS,
MĀKSLAS UN DIZAINA
VIDUSSKOLA


SUPŠ:UH

Empower **ED**

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READING

Hot Design Style: Playful Postmodernism

What is Postmodernism?

Like most of the movements in art and architecture, the Postmodern movement, sometimes called PoMo, developed as a reaction against Modern architecture and design. Unlike Mid-century modern architecture guided by simplicity and functionality, Postmodern design embraces unconventional ideas with an emphasis on playful, artsy, and extravagant style. The Postmodernists were not theoreticians, they enjoyed experimenting with vivid colours, theatrical shapes, exaggerated forms and mostly they enjoyed breaking the rules of architecture and design.

The "Birth" of Postmodernism

It's difficult to pinpoint the exact starting point of Postmodernism, but most of the schoolers agree that a possible "birth" could be traced back to Ettore Sottsass's [Totem](#), an industrial ceramic work created for the exhibition "Menhir, Ziggurat, Stupas, Hydrants & Gas Pumps" in Milan in 1967, now part of The Metropolitan Museum of Art design collection. Another arguable origin for postmodernism is the book *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) by the American duo Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. In this book, the pair argues that the multiplicity of architectural styles that is so typical for Las Vegas hotels and casinos is a subversion of modernist notions of "taste", particularly in the form of neon signage.

The statement of the 1980s

In the 1980s everything became a style statement. Cutting-edge graphics in art, magazines and music videos energized a new, post-punk subculture. Postmodern characteristics of vivid colours, theatrical shapes and exaggerated forms became the dominant look in fashion, furniture and accessories.

The MEMPHIS Group

The Memphis Group was a radical design group that emerged in 1981 in Milan, Italy. The group was founded by the designer and architect Ettore Sottsass and his fellow Italian creatives with the aim to create a new design collective. They took their name from a Bob Dylan song titled *Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again*. Only six years later the members of this loose group of like-minded designers suddenly disbanded.

Memphis was a reaction against the status quo. If the Bauhaus and the modernist designers made austere furniture with chrome and leather or expensive wood, Memphis designers had an affection for affordable materials such as plastic. The group's concept was centred around "radical, funny, and outrageous". Their aesthetic was a mix of geometric shapes, zany patterns and loud colours. Essentially, disregarding what was considered "good taste", the Memphis group combined the geometric figures typical of the Art Deco movement from the 20s with the colour palette of the Pop Art movement from the 60s with a touch of 50s kitsch.

A Unique Style

Controversy aside, the Memphis group was ground-breaking. Their use of clashing colours, haphazard arrangements was previously unseen. The laminate and terrazzo materials, which were usually used as flooring surfaces, were now incorporated into tables and lamps. It was a radical departure from the concept of objects designed to be functional, not decorative. Memphis changed all this with a more creative and humorous approach to design.

From Subculture to Mainstream

Among the early few supporters was the fashion designer of the Chanel House, Karl Lagerfeld. He was so impressed by Sottsass's design that he bought his entire first collection. When David Bowie's estate auctioned his art collection in 2016, it was revealed that he had collected more than 400 pieces of Memphis items since the '80s. With such influencing followers, the period Memphis items reached the cult status being highly sought after by design collectors and being exhibited in major art & design museums. V&A London has dedicated a major retrospective in 2011-2012 Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970 - 1990. Vitra Museum, in Germany, has currently on display [Memphis: 40 Years of Kitsch and Elegance](#) (06.02.2021 – 23.01.2022). Today the postmodernism is no longer a radical movement or a subcultural but it has become mainstream.

The Revival of Postmodernism

Once laugh at as the epitome of bad taste, the Memphis aesthetic is back in style, maybe once again as a reaction against the modernist-influenced interior design that has dominated the past decade from the Haussmannian apartments in Paris to Manhattan studios.

Strange times are asking for bizarre furniture. If you feel brave enough to bring a touch of 80s in your home, the original Memphis pieces are still in production or have been re-edited and available for purchase through Memphis Milano. Additionally, the preloved furniture market is spoiled for choices with period items to dazzle your mood. Countless furniture and accessories young designers are reinterpreting this style by giving it a fresh look.

Bold Art for Bold Design

When it comes to choosing the art, there is no reason to be shy, follow the true Memphis spirit, and go for statement pieces, and vivid colours. Don't forget that there is no middle way for this design style, more is more.

Part 1: Vocabulary Match Match the words with their correct definitions.

Vocabulary Words

1. Postmodernism
2. Memphis Group
3. Theatrical Shapes
4. Subculture
5. Radical Design
6. Zany Patterns
7. Kitsch
8. Terrazzo
9. Avant-garde
10. Aesthetic

Definitions

- A. A design movement known for its playful, exaggerated, and bold forms.
- B. A design collective founded in the 1980s in Milan, famous for its loud and unconventional designs.
- C. Design that is avant-garde, pushing boundaries and disregarding traditional norms.
- D. A subgenre of art or culture that rejects mainstream values, often associated with counter-culture movements.
- E. A material composed of chips of marble, glass, or other stone fragments set in concrete.
- F. A decorative style that includes exaggerated, bold shapes, often used in Postmodern design.
- G. A term describing art or objects that are in poor taste but appreciated in an ironic or nostalgic way.
- H. A particular style or look, often involving artistic choices in shape, colour, and form.
- I. Abstract or unusual patterns, often in bright, contrasting colours.
- J. An experimental approach to art or design that breaks away from traditional forms.

Part 2: True or False

Read each statement and determine if it is *true or false*? Circle the correct answer.

1. Postmodernism was a reaction against the simplicity and functionality of Modernism. *True / False*
2. The Memphis Group's designs were known for their minimalist approach and neutral colour palette. *True / False*
3. Ettore Sottsass's Totem is considered one of the key "births" of Postmodernism. *True / False*
4. The book "Learning from Las Vegas" by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown rejected the use of neon signage. *True / False*
5. The Postmodern movement was influenced by rapid social changes and economic challenges, such as punk music and deconstructed fashion. *True / False*
6. In the 1980s, the use of vivid colours, theatrical shapes, and exaggerated forms became popular in fashion, furniture, and accessories. *True / False*
7. The Memphis Group's aesthetic was a mix of geometric shapes, Pop Art colours, and elements from the Art Deco movement. *True / False*
8. Karl Lagerfeld, the fashion designer, was a supporter of Postmodern design and bought the first collection from the Memphis Group. *True / False*

Part 3: Multiple Choice Questions

Choose the best answer for each question.

What was the main goal of the Memphis Group?

- a. To create furniture that was purely functional
- b. To challenge traditional design with bold, playful, and unconventional pieces
- c. To promote minimalist design in art and architecture
- d. To follow the principles of modernist architecture

Which material did the Memphis Group famously use in their designs, which was usually used for flooring?

- a. Wood
- b. Terrazzo
- c. Marble
- d. Leather

The term "Postmodernism" refers to:

- a. A movement that focused on strict simplicity and functionality
- b. A reaction against modernist ideas, embracing eccentric and extravagant design
- c. A return to classical design principle
- d. A movement that only focused on minimalistic interiors

What is one characteristic of Postmodern design?

- a. Simple, neutral colours
- b. Emphasis on functionality over appearance
- c. Use of exaggerated forms and vivid colours
- d. Monochrome colour schemes

What significant event in the 1970s helped establish Postmodern ideas?

- a. The publication of "Learning from Las Vegas"
- b. The construction of the Eiffel Tower
- c. The rise of the Bauhaus movement
- d. The founding of the Memphis Group

Which of the following statements best describes the Memphis Group's use of materials?

- a. They only used expensive and luxury materials like marble and gold
- b. They used affordable materials like plastic and laminate, focusing on creativity over cost
- c. They avoided using any materials associated with mass production
- d. They preferred using traditional materials such as wood and metal

What was one of the results of the Memphis Group's influence?

- a. Their designs were seen as irrelevant and unimportant by the fashion industry
- b. The group was immediately rejected by designers worldwide
- c. Their style became mainstream and was embraced by collectors and museums
- d. Their works were considered purely functional with no artistic value

Why did Postmodern design gain popularity in the 1980s?

- a. Because of its association with luxury and high-end materials
- b. Because it reflected a rebellion against traditional, minimalist design in times of social change
- c. Because it focused solely on simplistic and neutral designs
- d. Because it was inspired by the French classical design aesthetic