



Iron Fists: Branding the 20th-Century Totalitarian State

Steven Heller

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It was just over 60 years ago that Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, two of the world's most powerfully imposing leaders, died and their regimes crumbled. One of the most illuminating facts about this dark era of history is the way in which these tyrants, and others like them, used graphic design as an instrument of power. But how did these regimes succeed in influencing the minds of millions? It is in the visual language—the imagery, the typeface, the color palette—that the answers truly take shape.

Phaidon Press is pleased to announce the publication of *Iron Fists: Branding the 20th Century Totalitarian State* by Steven Heller, the first illustrated survey of the propaganda art, graphics, and artifacts created by the totalitarian governments of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and the Communist regimes of the USSR and China. The book sets the disturbingly powerful graphic devices in historical context.


The infamous symbols produced by these regimes are recognized universally: the swastika and gothic typography of Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's streamlined Futurist posters and Black Shirt uniforms, the stolid Social Realism of Stalin's USSR and Mao's Little Red Book. Author Steven Heller, a world-renowned design historian, who has long collected two-and-three-dimensional examples from this period, reveals how these symbols were used in a wide variety of propaganda, from posters, magazines and advertisements to uniforms, flags and figurines.

In addition to using logos and symbols, all of the leaders researched in this book deliberately cultivated certain personal characteristics (Hitler's mustache, Mussolini's baldness, Lenin's goatee, Mao's smile), in an attempt to transform their corporeal selves into icons. These regime personalities were blanketed across public venues, from monuments to postage stamps. The Nazis, for example, installed an intricate graphic program that featured Hitler's face as a "logo," a system remarkably similar to modern corporate identity creations.

By integrating color images of artifacts with archival black and white photographs, *Iron Fists* offers unique insight into how these regimes were effective in using graphic design to further their causes. In the section on Fascist Italy, for example, there are numerous reproductions of stylized posters, magazines and handbooks designed to excite impressionable youth. Heller then connects this printed propaganda with historic photographs of Italian children dressed as men prepared for battle stoic and serious their small hands clutching guns instead of toys.

Divided into four sections by regime, Heller also explores the color systems (each dictatorship had a

distinctive palette), typefaces, and slogans used to both rally and terrorize the populace. In result, he demonstrates how these elements were used to "sell" the totalitarian message. The first extensively illustrated book on the subject, *Iron Fists* will have an obvious appeal to graphic designers but will also be an important contribution to the study of the history of the totalitarian state.

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