Large Poster Design Process Book

Lily Shan
Document Design

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Famous Poster Designer: Paula Scher


Paula Scher | BORN 1948 *by Lily Shan*

Paula Scher is a graphic designer and artist. She received her BFA at the Tyler School of Art in Elkins, PA. After college, she worked for CBS and Atlantic Records, where she was a prolific designer of album covers. Her work at Atlantic Records was recognized with 4 Emmy nominations. After working independently for a few years, Scher joined Pentagram, a design firm, and eventually became their first female design principal. At Pentagram, She worked with a variety of clients, including Bloomberg, Bausch + Lomb, Coca Cola, Microsoft, MoMA, and the New York City Ballet. Much of Scher's work takes inspiration from historic typefaces and movements, such as Art Deco and Russian Constructivism, and she uses bold colors and expressive type and graphics to create dynamism in her designs.

The famous poster designer I was assigned to was Paula Scher. I was really excited and intrigued to get to know her as a designer because her work seemed so different compared to my personal style – her expressive, pop art-esque, bold posters differ greatly from my more minimalist, neutral/earthy/jewel toned designs I naturally gravitate towards. I was also amazed to learn that she was behind many of the logos and designs that we commonly see in stores and online, from the Windows 8 logo to Citi Bank.

Self Promotional Poster

MoMA

An exhibit on the life of Lily Shan

THE GIRL

IN THE

MIRROR
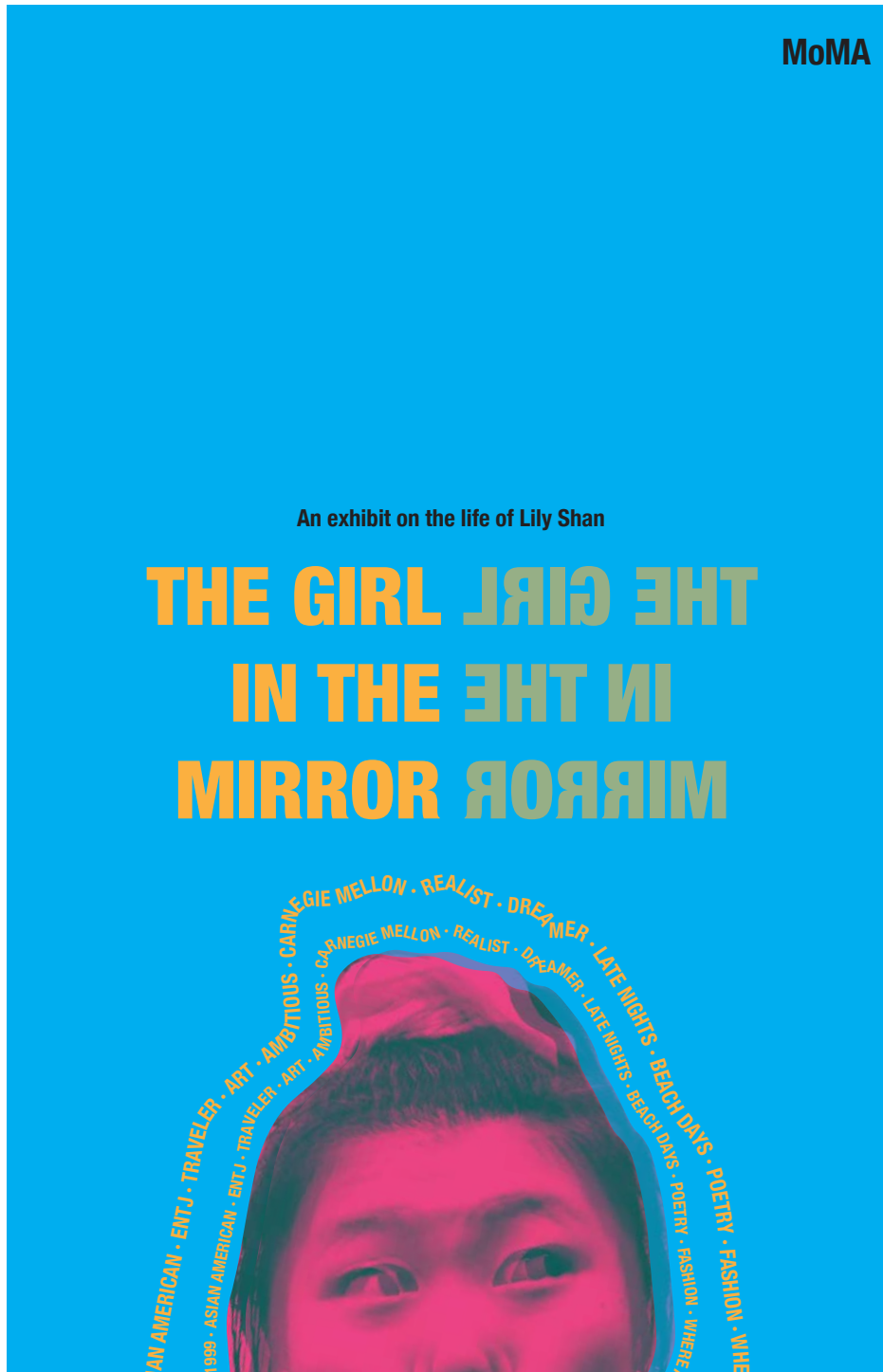
In creating my own self promotional poster, my main source of inspiration came from the "Him" poster, as I felt like it was the perfect combination of Scher's style and my own personal preference of minimalism. I played a lot with bright, complementary colors and the use of words as both visually expressive lines, yet also verbally content that spoke to who I was as a person. Scher also likes to use cutout photographs in her work, which I adopted in this design. With the title of the exhibit, "The Girl in the Mirror", I wanted to create a sense of intrigue and curiousity in order to make the viewer wonder what the story behind this person was. Overall, I had a lot of fun creating this poster and experimenting with color palattes and design choices that personally did not come naturally to me before.
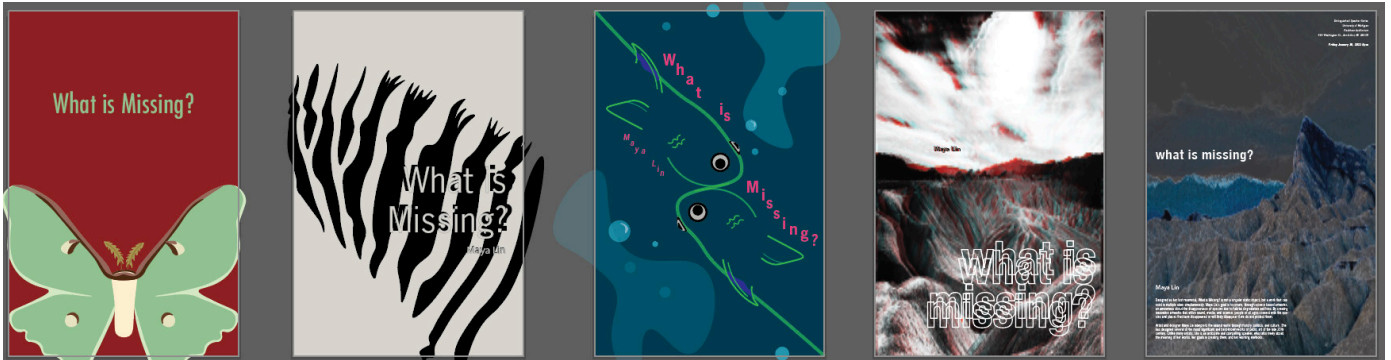
Thumbnail Sketches
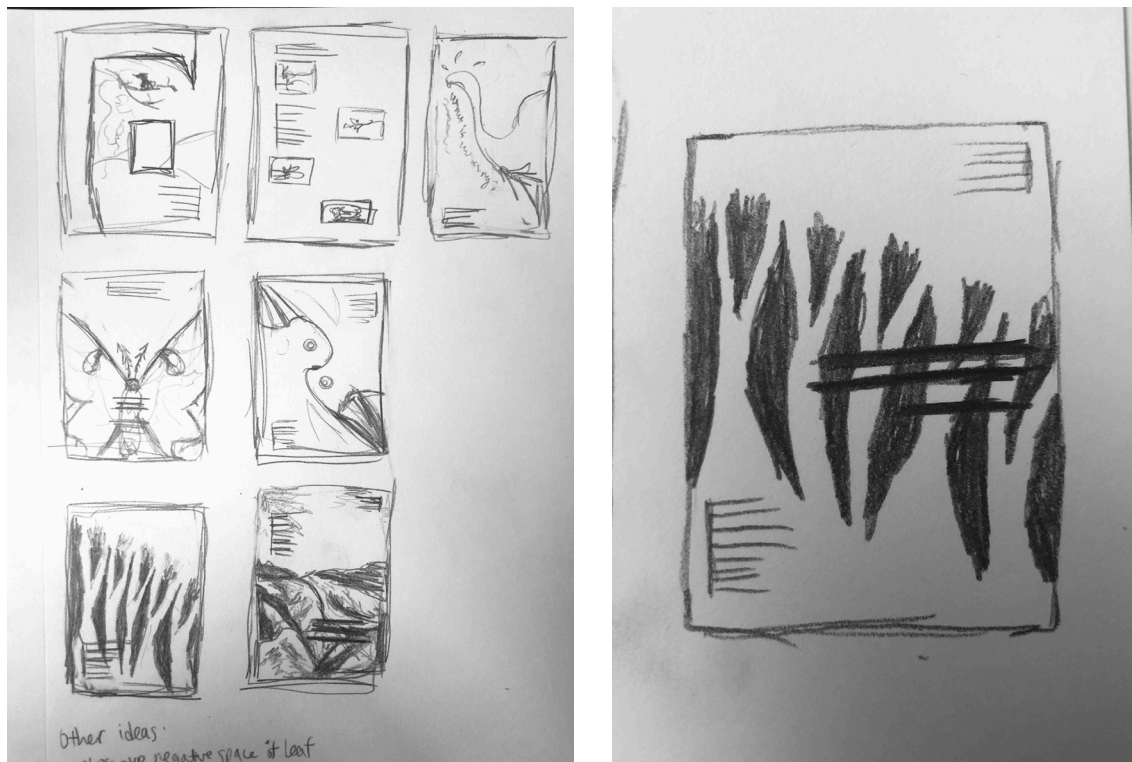
Left: Original sketches, Right: Thumbnail sketch after paying
closer attention to the content and placement of text

WIth my thumbnail sketches, I explored a variety of ideas very quickly. Growing up taking art classes and drawing/painting, I am familiar with thumbnail sketches, especially on quickly iterating the composition of an art piece, and I implemented much of my experience in that field into these sketches. However, after discussing these sketches in class, I realized that I was too focused on the visual composition and had abandoned thought on where the verbal text and content was going to be. For most of these sketches, I drew them to get the general feeling of what the poster was going to look like and considered the text as something I could just tack on later once my ideas were digitized. However, when reflecting upon this point in the project, I now realize how important text is in marrying the visual and the verbal and how both components need to be considered, even at this early stage.

First Iterations

Based on the ideas from my thumbnail sketches, I explored a mass variety of ideas using both illustrations and photographs before focusing on two main designs: the zebra and the tiger. I felt like the negative space created from the zebra pattern fit the "What is Missing" title aptly, and with the tiger design I wanted to use the whitespace to show the lack of habit that the tiger resided in. These ideas were both amazing starts, but in retrospect, they were missing the point of the poster's purpose.

After our critique in class I realized that I was focusing too much on the lecture title and instead should be pivoting the punchline of my designs towards Maya Lin and her work specifically. Furthermore, I was inspired by my classmates to think more abstractly about how to illustrate the lecture's meaning.

Second Iterations

I took a step back for my second iterations and almost completely started from scratch, only using the general gridding of my tiger poster as a foundation. I looked through my own collection of photos and Maya Lin's work again to gain more inspiration.

I noticed that many of Maya Lin's installation pieces involve mountains and playing with elevation. This was my initial inspiration for both designs, with the orange-purple gradient design more explicity showing a mountain, and my space-themed design using a topographical map as inspiration for the purple lines in the center. Specifically, in my space-themed poster I blended the topographical map lines with elements from the What is Missing website in order to create a celestrial/galaxy-like look that is grounded by the off-black world map in the background. In my gradient mountain poster, I wanted to use purple and orange to create a design that was reminiscent of the skies during the California wildfires.

Final Poster Design
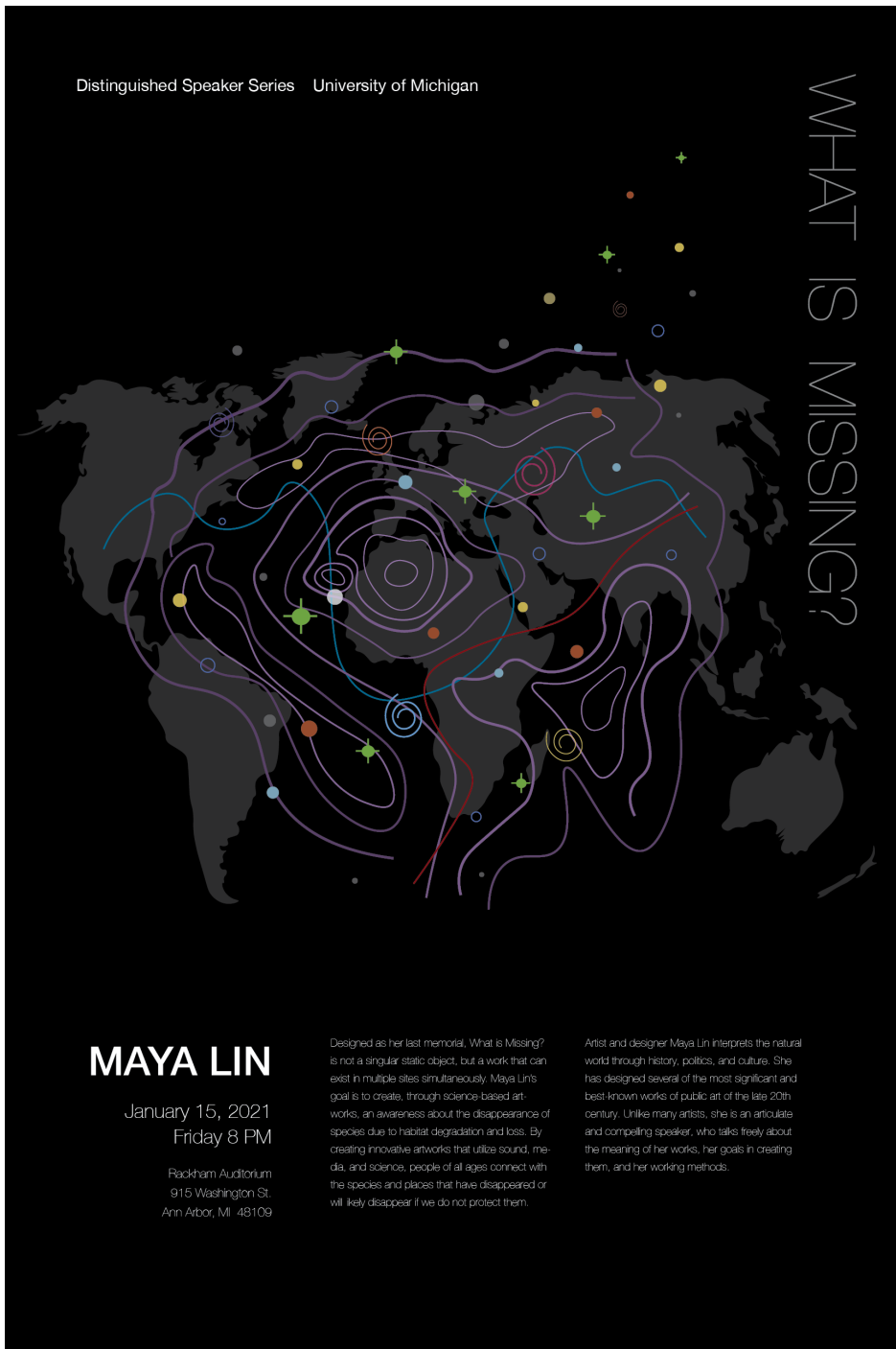
I decided to go with the celestial/ space themed poster instead of the mountain one because I felt like there was more of a variety of interesting components to look at from both far away and close up. Furthermore, I believe the illustration overall fits the theme of the lecture more, as it takes aspects from the What is Missing website and abstractifies it.

The main aspect of my final design that I wanted to focus on improving was the overall contrast of the poster in order to make it stand out more, as well as making the poster more of a call-to-action, as it was difficult to tell that the poster was for a lecture in my previous iterations. Thus, I increased the line widths and saturation of the colors. Furthermore, I rearranged the hierarchy of the information presented so that one of the first texts the viewer will see is the "Distinguished Lecture Series". This immediately gives the viewer the indication that the purpose of this poster is for a lecture. Also, I chunked the time and address with Maya LIn's name in order to further emphasize that the poster was for an event.

Reflection

Overall, I learned a lot about designing with purpose and how important it is for text and image to flow with one another to create a cohesive and intriguing poster. Throughout all the interim assignments and iterations, I realized that oftentimes ideas are never inherently bad, just ill-fitting for the context in which the design is meant to showcase. Growing up painting and drawing, I am used to doing whatever I want because I feel like it looks good – which is why I struggled less with the Self Promotional Poster because the poster's content and purpose was about me. With the large poster design, I've come to realize that a successful poster is one that aligns who I am as a designer and what I believe looks aesthetically pleasing with the poster's content and purpose. Once I did that with the 2nd iteration, I was able to create a much more successful result.

If I had more time to explore this project, I would dedicate more time to improving my orange/purple gradient poster because I believe that design has potential to be stronger in its association between the visual and the verbal.