



MASSIN

NOT JUST ONLY A SEVENTIES MARVEL

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Massin's graphic staging of Ionesco's play La Cantatrice chauve, a key piece of the absurdist movement, made in 1964, it is a true masterpiece in the history of graphic design, influencing a lot of non-functional graphic designers from the eighties and nineties.

Robert Massin, the french graphic designer known as just Massin became widely known to the public by creating the graphic staging of Ionesco's play La Cantatrice and La Lettre et l'image (Letter and Image), an imaginative catalogue of figurative alphabets from the eighth to the twentieth century.

Massin was greatly inspired by his mentor Pierre Faucheux who inspired him with his own approach of creating book design "Faucheux had been one of the first designers/typographers to emphasize the importance of dynamic typography and documentary iconography on covers, at a time when illustration had not yet been replaced by photography. For my first covers, I was asking myself, 'What would Pierre Faucheux think?'"

Apart from traditional book design, Massin also credited some films as a big influence: Saul Bass's title sequences for some Alfred Hitchcock movies and animated cartoons by Ted Avery.

But Massin was not only just a seventies marvel of typographic experiments and graphic design, a lot of people don't know that he designed beautiful book covers for more than a thousand of masterpieces in french literature, including the Gallimard Folio collection. Gallimard, a publishing company releasing acclaimed works of literature such as 'Le Petit Prince' by Antoine de Saint Exupéry hired Massin as their main art director for more than two decades. Gaston Gallimard gave him carte blanche starting as the first art director at the company, since before Massin came to Gallimard, art direction and well done cover design was somewhat of a novelty in french book publishing. Starting art directing the 'Soleil' collection, creating some 350 titles using a minimalist design using tiny titles set in the classic Didot typeface, Massin later created a very recognizable cover layout for the Folio collection, using Baskerville Old face juxtaposed against unique illustrations often created by himself or other selected illustrators like Folon, Andre Francois, Etienne Delessert, Ronald Searle, and Roland Topor. (Massin still has a few of the original drawings framed on his walls.). The choice of a consistent, bright-white background was made possible only by advances in paper technology heralded by the introduction of Kromekote from Champion Papers.

The books needed a design that made people keep them, rather than throwing away after reading. Massin's outstanding design helped these books to become a long term success. The covers of the Folio collection were widely emulated by other french publishers, proving that when Gallimard gave Massin a chance to do art direction on book covers, it was a good choice.

The Folio collection books can still be found in stores like FNAC (A big department store chain in France), but they use stock photo's rather than the original illustrations, but the typographical lay-out is still the same, proving Massin's timeless design.

Massin, someone originally wanted to become a writer, having no education in graphic design whatsoever created a truly unique oeuvre, inspiring many graphic designers to this date.

He still lives in Paris



An example of a book cover from the Gallimard folio collection art directed by Massin.