Introduction
Above are the words of Seymour Chwast- a self-proclaimed artist despite being well-versed across various creative fields including design, illustration, and typography. Born an only child to Polish immigrants in Bronx, NYC, Seymour was bright and inquisitive, yet painfully shy. His curiosity and sense of wonder resurface throughout his career as his devotion to his work.

In fact, his work set the pivot point for America’s development of popular and commercial art during the rise of photography and social activism. In particular, his team’s client work at Push Pin Studios, which ranged from editorial illustration to poster design, and packaging, carried a strong style that dominated the public space.

Growth and Influence
The growth of Chwast’s path in art and design was guided by an amalgamation of internal and external influences. The internal factors refer to Chwast’s inherent personality and things he experienced that influenced his work.

First, his early love for drawing was cultivated by his admiration of Walt Disney (Snow White in particular), Sunday cartoons, and serial movies. Initially, he aspired to work as an animator for Disney, but he shifted his direction while taking a Graphic Design class under teacher Leon Friend at Abraham Lincoln High School. Friend taught him to tap the potential of commercial art as an expressive medium, as well as creating with a purpose. In fact, Seymour learned that there exists a lot of play in design, from intellectual and visual manipulation to irony and parody. He was a part of the elite art squad at Abraham Lincoln- a group that created graphical pieces on demand and required a portfolio entry.

Afterwards, Chwast went on to study at Cooper Union in Manhattan and briefly co-founded a design firm his Sophomore year called Design Plus that completed all of 5 projects. After graduation, he worked as a designer for various renowned companies including: New York Times, Esquire, Glamour, and House & Garden. During that time, Seymour was influenced by several political graphics at Cooper Union including Ben Shahn, Georg Grosz, Georges Roualt, and Honore and Daumier.

Chwast identifies as a pacifist, likely influenced by the era he grew up in. Thus, many of his work, like the one above, criticizes violence. However, he believes his illustrations are not ground-breaking, and instead, only appeal to an agreeing audience.
Contrary to his internal influences, the external factors that influenced Chwast include the social climate and commercial needs—which occurred in parallel to the external ones. These influences shaped Chwast’s career most after college. First, the 1960s marked an end to the Norman Rockwell style of illustration as the rise of photography and film rendered drawings obsolete. Instead, illustrators of era began to explore complex issues and abstract concepts unable to be conveyed at the surface level. This was especially relevant amidst the plethora of social issues throughout the latter half of the 20th century. A prominent issue was the anti-war movement generated from the first two World Wards and the Cold War. Seymour Chwast proclaimed herself anti-war and anti-military, which was evident in prominent pieces of his work, and specific pieces include the 1968 poster End Bad Breath and his illustration for The Book of Bottles. While these moments of civil disobedience raised conversation, Chwast believes they did not change anyone’s minds, and instead only resonated with people who already agreed with the topics.

### Height of Push Pin

Seymour’s most renowned work that opened up his career was the Push Pin Almanack: a play on traditional farmer’s almanacs that was filled with arcane, yet beautifully typeset facts and quirky illustrations. Six issues later, Push Pin Studio was founded and named after the Almanack. Much of Seymour’s early renown generated from there, and it was also there that he and his colleagues ingrained an impact on American art and culture.

As previously mentioned, the rise of digital devices rendered realistic illustration obsolete. Instead, Chwast and Push Pin borrowed freely from the past: elements of Victorian, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco can be found throughout their work. As a result, their pieces were formal, yet fresh, and even in 2016, they look like they could have been done yesterday. Described as “the Beatles of Illustration and Design.” Push Pin was at its height throughout the 50s to the 70s and redefined a standard for American popular art because of its personal, but it tends not to communicate.”

“**If you do not start with the idea, you are creating fine art—its personal, but it tends not to communicate.”**

—Seymour Chwast

Notable contributions by Chwast this time including the Push Pin Monthly Graphic—a monthly publication that allowed the studio members to experiment and play with techniques and issues. Very few studios at the time and even today offer this creative outlet and thematic showcase of talent. A prominent piece was issue #54, titled The South, which was published in 1969 and was an expressive piece of its time dealing with political and social activism. Chwast also designed popular typefaces at the time including Chwast Buffalo, Loose Caboose NF, Folzaka, and Weedy Beasties NF.

### Pushpin Onwards — Present Day

After Glaser left Push Pin in 1975 Chwast remained and continued to work—now slower momentum. Since then, Push Pin has gone through several reformation and ruminating, as well as changing clientele, yet Chwast has always poured his diligence into his creations. In the 1980s, Push Pin entered a partnership with designer Alan Peckolick to form Pushpin Lubalin Peckolick; though it only lasted few years.

Afterwards, it was renamed Pushpin Group and Chwast continues to work for a large client base. Meanwhile, the firm has diversified to adjust for the changing demands to provide representation services for illustrators, an audio visual arm, and even a product line. Notable clients include: American Express, Mohawk Paper, New York Times, and Time Warner.
In addition to his client work, Chwast also continues to produce other pieces. For example, in the late 1990s to late 2000s, he published periodical issues of *The Nose* that dealt with relevant (though sometimes trivial) social issues. Recently, he began illustrating interpretations of classics like *Dante’s Inferno*, *The Odyssey*, and *Canterbury Tales*. He continues living and working in New York City today, along with his wife Paula Scher (who he married in 1973, divorced 5 years later, and then remarried in 1989). They collaboratively critique each other’s work and Scher is responsible for the direction of his book *The Obsessive Image of Seymour Chwast*. 

**Work Ethic and Values**

What’s admirable about Seymour Chwast is his never-ending passion throughout his career from the latter half of the 20th century to present day. After all, he works from 6 am to 6 pm everyday in his studio—I can’t help but wonder whether he needs any discipline or if he’s purely driven by burning passion. The latter seems likely given his constant excitement on any projects at hand, and even if he has no projects to work on he will create one for himself.

He also carries respectable, and perhaps optimistic, views on illustration. After witnessing the rapid changes throughout the latter half of the 20th century, Seymour claims that illustration will never become obsolete; instead, it changes its form and output to fit the demands of society and clientele. Moreover, he distinguishes illustration and design from art as the latter encompasses a universal expression, while the former address an approachable issue. He is also a proponent for traditional media and not to get jaded by modern flashy digital projects by advising to not “use bells when only whistles are required”. He has never lost touch of popular culture even today, as he guest starred a few years back at the San Diego Comic Con. 

**Wrapping Up**

The political and social climate, along with Seymour’s personal encounters, collaborated to shape Seymour’s development. Witnessing all the changes in the 20th century also influenced Seymour current values on art and design. Because of this, he believes illustration will continue to play a role in society—it simply shifts its media, methods, style and markets to fit the current needs. Despite his long career he has continued the last previous few decades of his life without losing momentum. Still at Push Pin, he maintains his insatiable desire to play and is not stopping anytime soon.

"Visual designers, like doctors, should do no harm"

—Seymour Chwast