

"Of course, with Mirko it is hard to separate the work from the man, but I'll try. His illustration and design have extraordinary intelligence. Far more is going on beneath the surface than meets the eye. The work is witty. And though Mirko is quick to point out nuances that may have escaped me, I sense other depths of subtlety and humor that he is keeping in reserve. So perhaps it is impossible to speak differently about the work and the man after all."

—JULIE LASKY



BELOW:
**Censorship in the Age
of Anything Goes,**
The New York Times,
September 20, 1998

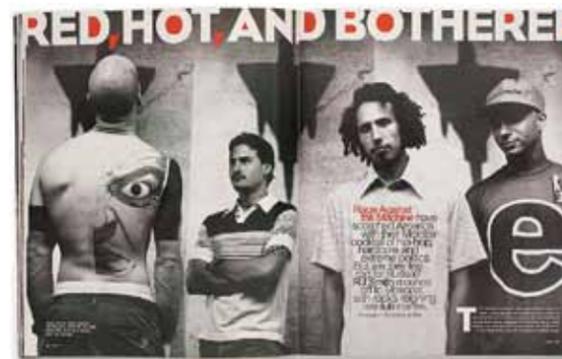
Mirko Ilić: The Eye.

by **Laetitia WOLFF**

MIRKO IS AN EYE—SHARP AND PLAYFUL—that looks, observes, and remembers images and icons. Whether he deals with socio- or geopolitics, scandals related to financial, governmental, or medical issues, Ilić manages to throw the concept right at the reader's face, somewhat brutally, however never losing a distant sense of humor, and always with the utmost relevance to and intelligence about the subject. Milton Glaser has said about Mirko: "He is a designer that draws and an illustrator that thinks."

Playing with visual analogies, Ilić's work questions the limit of what can be done in design, bypassing the established design rules while making new use of them. Analogy, juxtaposition, and comparison are recurring techniques used to visually reinforce the editorial content he is given to work with. His book layouts are often built on thought-provoking diptychs, which in essence convey a mental link between two images, i.e., two concepts. His art of provocation is not limited to gratuitous visual puns or juggling concepts, it also redefines the relationship between type and illustration. Typography seems to completely invade design while being shaken, toyed with, objectified with imaginative details, as if the designer wanted to disrupt both the body of text and the overall meaning of design. ✕

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A member of the band Rage Against the Machine has a copy of the *Red and Black* movie poster tattooed on his arm and the illustration "Rising Sun" from *The New York Times*, on his back. Above spread from *Spin* magazine.



Rising Sun—Is Japan Really Out to Get Us?
The New York Times Book Review,
February 9, 1992; AD: Steven Heller



“When I got the chance to do my first cover for *Time*, it was less exciting than meeting Mario Bošnjak on the street in Zagreb and him inviting me to do illustrations for *Start*.”

—MIRKO ILIĆ

Evil,
Time International, June 10, 1991
AD & D: Mirko Ilić

“The 1992 cover that received an award for exceptional creativity sums up Ilić’s thinking about evil: four black letters on a black background. Something that’s known in the history of modern art, but which was never done on the pages of a major magazine. All the injustice of the system in which Ilić has lived and worked, he has commented on over the years in a unique way, which was brought to simple perfection by the use of those four letters.”

SANDRA KRIŽIĆ ROBAN, MIRKO ILIĆ EXHIBITION
CATALOG: GRAPHIC DESIGN, ILLUSTRATION, ART
PAVILION, ZAGREB 1992

“In one week, this cover has transformed the look of *Time* magazine,” said William Drenttel on the front page edition of June 10, 1992. “It has truly surprised people and it is a good example of the power of design.” All the jury members praised the subtleties and boldness of the simple, two-tone design. “As far as I can remember, this is the only case that *Time* magazine has taken such a risk,” said Carol Carson. “For them it is quite an unusual design.” Apart from the deviation from the usual magazine practice, according to Louise Fili, the Evil cover stands out for its “stunning use of *Time*’s otherwise extremely restrictive typographical formula”.

38TH I.D. ANNUAL DESIGN REVIEW,
JULY / AUGUST 1992

Time Magazine

Illustrations 1986–2006 • Art director 1991

A WEEK AFTER LANDING in the United States Ilić was commissioned to offer design ideas for the cover of *Time* magazine. He was elated. A few days later, he hit rock bottom. The practice at *Time* in the late eighties was to get proposals from four authors whose articles were competing for the cover. His illustration was not accepted (the winner was Seymour Chwast). “I was ready to pick up my things and go back home. I thought it was the biggest failure of my career.”

However, other jobs followed and in the coming years many of his ideas were accepted by the magazine’s American and international editions.

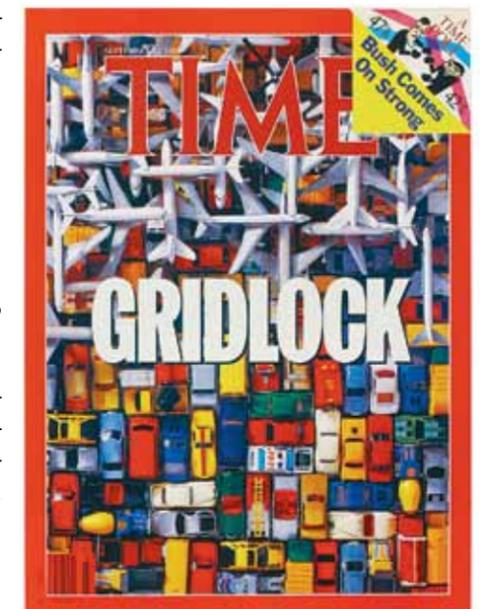
“The opportunity to do the cover of *Time* did not surprise me because I came to America with the intention of doing just that. It was much more exciting when they offered me a full-time job. It’s nice to write in the biography that my first full-time job was as art director of the international edition of *Time*.”

His first few covers are in the recognizable style of colored scratchboard illustrations, but soon Ilić began to use different approaches, including photography and collage.

“When I bought my first computer, I used it to scan drawings and add color,” Ilić said. “The best example of this was the cover with Germany. The first illustration I ever made in Illustrator was published in *Time*. And the first illustration that I made using Photoshop was the cover of *Time* magazine. But I feel a lot of stress using these new programs, so if I don’t have a good reason to use them, I won’t do it.”

As an illustrator, designer, and art director Ilić managed to publish many bold ideas. In one example, the main cover story had no headlines; in another the main headline was printed in black against a black background. According to Ilić, one of his biggest successes was a story about the conflict between English- and French-speaking Canadians. There was no text at all, not a single headline on the cover of *Time*. At first the editors were confused, but eventually they had to accept the argument that using an English title suggested favoritism for one side, which of course, *Time* magazine could not allow.

Illustrations for *Time*, especially for the cover, are created in close collaboration among artists, illustrators, art directors, and editors. Within that creative chain Ilić frequently changed roles from one to the other—sometimes as an illustrator, sometimes as a designer, and when he was employed as an art director, he asked other designers and illustrators to work with him. When asked how he so easily moved from one position to another, he replied: “It can be frustrating, especially when you work with a designer who is not as good or is less experienced. You know immediately what will happen. You are working on a story that is



Gridlock, *Time*, September 12, 1988
AD: Rudolph Hoglund, PHOTO: Roberto Brosan