

An Abstract of Netflix

Review Story

A photographer, illustrator and graphic designer are some of the subjects of Netflix's new eight part documentary, *Abstract: The Art of Design*. The series follows designers while they work and explore, inviting viewers into that process.

The series is unlike any other because there has never been a TV series or film that shows the process artists go through in design. *Abstract* should be viewed episode by episode as it profiles eight designers each representing different styles and different industries. Tinker Hatfield is the legendary designer behind the Air Jordan sneakers that made the brand what it is today. The photographer who goes by, Platon, is responsible for some of the most iconic photographic images of this generation. Bjarke Ingels' architecture appears in skylines all over the world.

In the first episode of the series, we see into the world of illustrator and designer Christoph Niemann. Although he doesn't talk in these terms, what we learn about most in this episode is the creative importance of constraints. Niemann's thought process about abstraction is of itself a constraint. In episode six, we see into the creative and personal life of Paula Scher, a graphic designer legendary for her innovative use of typography, particularly in logos and brand systems. "Typography is painting with words," she tells the camera. "That's my high." The seventh episode focuses on Greek-British photographer Platon. Although originally trained in graphic design, he is now best known for contributing some of the

Abstract: The Art of Design



Where: Netflix

Abstract: Documenting the design process of 8 artists from various backgrounds

Length: 40 mins each, 8 episodes

Rating: TV-14

Artists Featured: Tinker Hatfield, Ralph Gilles, Paula Scher, Platon, Bjarke Ingels, Christoph Niemann, Es Devlin, Ilse Crawford

most iconic images of 21st century world leaders such as Vladimir Putin, Barack Obama and Muammar Gaddafi to publications like Time Magazine.

Each episode does an excellent job at profiling the designers and we are able to hear their perspectives on art and design. The series brings into the mainstream a field which is usually looked down on and put off. Two other positives of *Abstract* is how filled with color and movement it is. The camera rides in cars and drones up the sides of buildings giving viewers a glimpse of architectural beauty someone crafted.

Viewed from the other side however, in the episodes where the perspective presented is limited, the viewer can feel a lack of insight. This was particularly noticeable in the episodes on stage designer Es Devlin and car designer Ralph Gilles. Emotionally, we have no doubt about their individual excellence but the audience does not learn much about their process, their teams or the bigger picture of their disciplines.

Although the series is about art, design is all around us from the medium which this is read on to the clothes we wear. If you are looking for a new series to Netflix binge on, maybe *Abstract: The Art of Design* could fulfill your need.