

# Imagine Athena

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### On Netflix Now: Three Films About Design



**Candice Holdsworth** | On 19, Aug 2014

**On Netflix Now** is a new series, which reviews dramatic feature films and documentaries currently on Netflix.

**On Netflix Now** is now permanently located at [onnetflixnow.com](http://onnetflixnow.com)

Today we look at three documentaries which explore design: *Design Is One* (2013), *Helvetica* (2007) and *Objectified* (2009) (Available on Netflix US)

For a non-verbal form of communication, design is an incredibly vocal medium. It's everywhere and in almost everything we encounter. This font, this screen, whatever you're sitting on, the building you live in; your cup of coffee, the kettle that boiled the water, the spoon that stirred the sugar. All of it, designed, at some point, by someone.

And few designers have a wider vocal range than the legendary Vignellis – Massimo and Lella – a husband and wife design duo, featured in the biographical documentary *Design Is*

One (2013). (Massimo Vignelli died this year at the age of 83.)

Originally from Italy, the Vignellis brought a sophisticated design sensibility to 1960's America, where they quickly found success and recognition in areas as varied as corporate identity, architecture and interior design, with creations that were both beautiful and useful; the perfect blend of form and function.

Their skill for multi-tonal articulation can be found in the New York subway map (pictured above), Saint Peter's Church in New York, and [modernist furniture](#).

The Vignelli's unique, layered style, which traversed disciplines is, sadly, no longer possible in today's siloed design world, where strict qualification regulations force creative professionals to specialize in one area, with almost no opportunity to test the full upper ranges of their vocal chords.

Massimo Vignelli is also featured in Gary Hustwit's [Helvetica](#) (2007), a feature-length documentary, where he explores the design virtues of the ubiquitous font, one which Vignelli has favoured consistently over the years. It is Helvetica's supposedly neutral quality that has led to it being the most widely used font of the twentieth century. In fact, it is wholly representative of it. The "machined" aesthetic of Helvetica is in stark contrast to the elaborate, manually designed fonts of earlier, less technological eras.

For such a narrow subject area, [Helvetica](#) has enough engrossing material to keep you watching until the end. You will be amazed at how much this humble font has already seeped into your subconscious.

Hustwit has certainly made a name for himself with his intelligent documentaries about design. His other critically acclaimed 2009 documentary [Objectified](#), takes a broader look at the industry than [Helvetica](#), philosophically examining mankind's relationship to non-living objects, and the people who create them.

These designers communicate with us all the time, through silent, psychic transmission.

"The people, you know, putting their wires into our heads." – Rick Poynor, critic and curator (interviewed in [Helvetica](#)).

After these three films, I came away with a more finely tuned ear to the ultrasonic whispers of design.

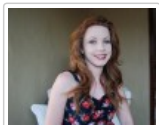
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Featured Image Credit: New York Subway Map by Massimo Vignelli (Image: WikiCommons)

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## Candice Holdsworth



Candice Holdsworth is the founder and editor of Imagine Athena. It is mythologised that she sprang fully formed from its pages. Candice has an MSc in Political Philosophy from the London School of Economics, and thus can be most commonly found discussing ideas and culture. Her writing can also be found on [Thought Leader](#) and [On Netflix Now](#) Follow her on Twitter [@CandiceCarrie](#)

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