Internationally recognized, New York based Luba Lukova is regarded as one of the most distinctive image-makers working today. Her original art uses metaphors, the juxtaposition of symbols and very few lines and text to best capture the essence of basic humanity. Lukova’s solo exhibitions have been held at UNESCO, Paris; DDD Gallery, Osaka, Japan; and The Art Institute of Boston. Her work is included in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Library of Congress, Washington, DC; and Bibliotheque Nationale de France. Her many awards include Grand Prix Savignac at the International Poster Salon in Paris and Golden Pencil Award at the One Club in New York. In May 2009 she received an honorary degree of Doctor of Fine Arts from Lesley University.

What contemporary designers inspire you and why?

LL: My inspiration has always come from art, literature, theatre, and music, and my favorite artists are so many. To be honest, contemporary design does not inspire me so much, because it has become so dependent on those who pay for it. What I like about design is that people are in contact with it everyday. As an artist I like to use that immediacy to express messages that are meaningful, humanistic, and independent.

Who has inspired you with regards to doing work for the public good? (and why?)

I am inspired by people who are selfless, who can do something good without expecting recognition.
When did you start doing philanthropic and/or pro bono work?

I've always thought philanthropically, simply because I think it is the right thing to do.

Can you speak a bit about your history with pro bono work? Can you offer some examples, and why you chose to do these projects pro-bono?

Well, I've done a lot of pro-bono work for the theatre, because I've admired the artists who create it. I'm doing similar work for the War Resisters League, because I believe their cause is right. I don't really have any special agenda for doing pro-bono work. Basically, if a cause moves me I will do my best work.

Where do you find inspiration? Has this changed throughout your career?

For me, inspiration comes from life. As we live our lives we learn and grow, but it seems that my motivation to do what I do always comes from the same place called heart. I guess that means to be sympathetic, active, uncompromising.
In your life what was the greatest gift that you ever received, and why? What do you feel your greatest gift has been to others?

Do you feel your design work has impacted society? And if so, how?

In a society where we are barraged and bombarded with a myriad of media messages, what responsibilities do designers have? What do you feel specifically is your responsibility with regards to society, or within your community?

The greatest gift I’ve received is the way people react to my work; the greatest gift I’ve given is, I hope, my work.

I hope it has impacted society in its small way. When the former Communist regime in Bulgaria was banning my posters I was sure that the rulers were impacted. Here in the US when my Health Coverage poster was exhibited at President Obama’s Inauguration and it was later purchased by a governmental agency. I thought this piece of paper made some impact. Receiving letters from 80-year old people as well as high school students makes me think that my messages have found their way.

Design is about making and packaging things and ideas. Historically, design has been seen as a force for changing the world. How do you feel design and/or art has changed the world? Or maybe more locally; society, a community, or even an individual?

This is not easy to answer because the media messages are transmitted to the public using design. How can designers express their own opinion if they disagree with these messages? Each person will have to find the answer for themselves. Do you want to be used as a tool or you have something to say?

Well, I have declined well-paid jobs because I’ve disagreed with the ideas behind them. I’ve always refused to work with people who tell me that they have a great concept and they just want me to execute it in my style. I can not make such a compromise. I think the strength of my work is in its meaning and that can not be separated from the form. If I’ve occasionally declined to work on a pro bono project it’s been because of limited time. I’ve been lucky to be approached by many clients who share the same ideals as me and deciding to support them has been an easy decision.

If you had all the power in the world to ensure that you were to leave a lasting, positive, and permanent affect on contemporary visual communication how would you wield that power?

Here I would disagree a little. I’m not sure design has been historically as a force for changing the world. Yes, design and new technology are improving our daily existence. But human consciousness has not changed much. Our contemporary wars are more cruel because of the modern technology; our corruption scandals are more difficult to prevent because of the crafty use of new media. I think art is what makes humanity better and design can be elevated to that level if it tackles important issues. Design, the way it is practiced now, is more about doing good business and making the client happy. If this is its main purpose design will never change the world.

What are your hopes for the future of design?

I’m just an ordinary person who happened to be an artist. I wish I could make people question more, think more and feel more uplifted when looking at art.

I’m hopeful as long as we as designers are willing to use the power of design to make a positive difference.