

# Posters by E. McKnight Kauffer

With notes by E. McKnight Kauffer and a foreword  
by Aldous Huxley

Author

Kauffer, E. McKnight (Edward  
McKnight), 1890-1954

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primary documents, installation views, and an  
index of participating artists.

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**MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

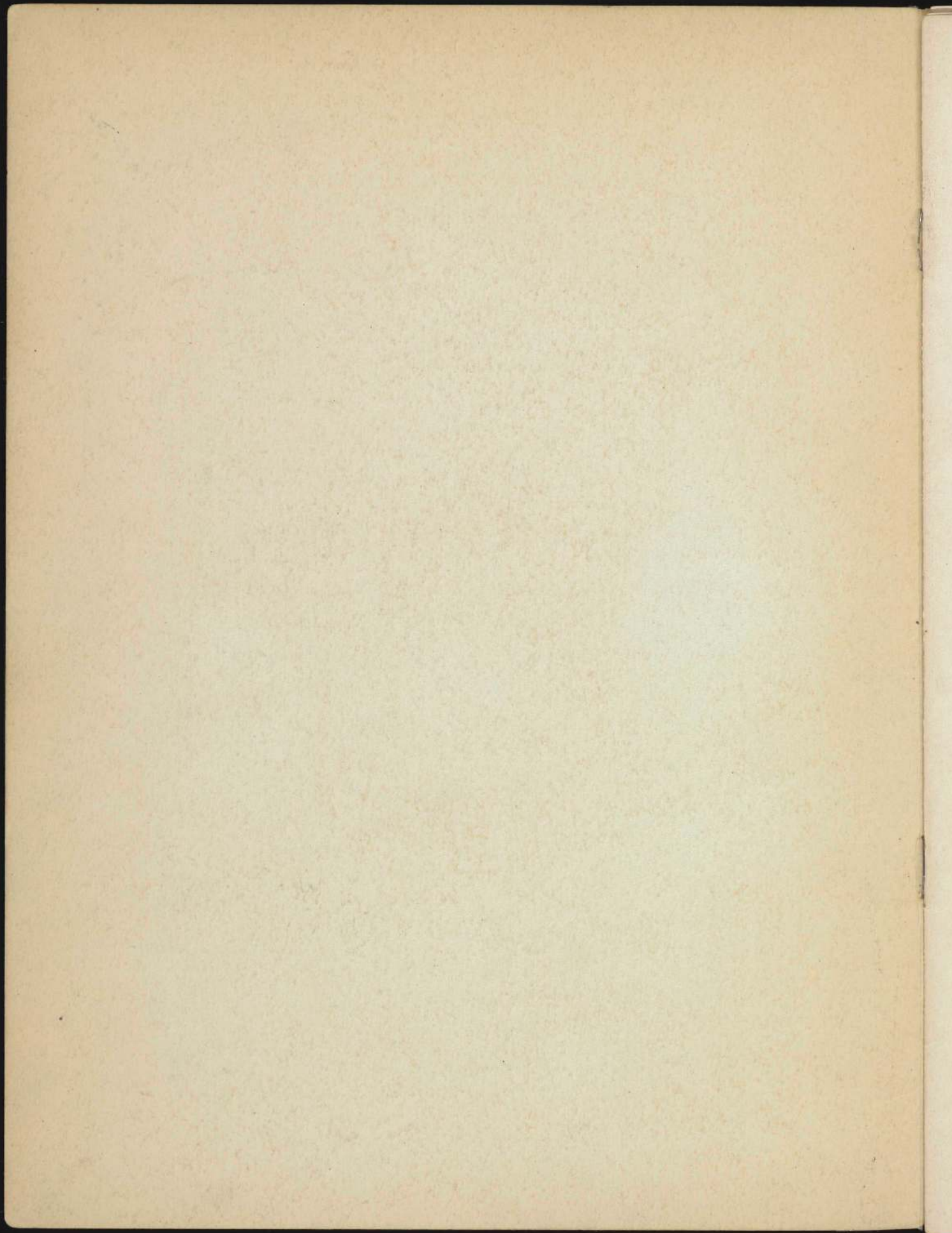
**POSTERS**

**BY E MCKNIGHT KAUFFER**



MCK.K.





Office Copy  
Janet Harwich





# **POSTERS**

**BY**

**E. McKNIGHT KAUFFER**

**WITH NOTES BY E. McKNIGHT KAUFFER**

**AND A FOREWORD BY ALDOUS HUXLEY**

**NEW YORK**

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

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Study  
Center

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1937

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

On behalf of the President and Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art, the Director of the Exhibition wishes to thank Mr. E. McKnight Kauffer for his cooperation in assembling and preparing the material for this exhibition of his work. Especial thanks are due Mr. Aldous Huxley for contributing the foreword to the catalog.

Ernestine M. Fantl, *Director of the exhibition*

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## FOREWORD

Most advertising artists spend their time elaborating symbols that stand for something different from the commodity they are advertising. Soap and refrigerators, scent and automobiles, stockings, holiday resorts, sanitary plumbing and a thousand other articles are advertised by means of representations of young females disporting themselves in opulent surroundings. Sex and money—these would seem to be the two main interests of civilised human beings. That is why even aperients and engineering jobs have to be advertised in terms of some symbol of wealth or eroticism. The interests of the uncivilized are not the same as ours. To these benighted people, religion seems more important than sex or money. In Central America, for example, and among the pious peasantry of the Balkans, patent medicines are advertised by means of pictures, not of girls in evening dress or underclothes, but of the Holy Trinity and the Communion of Saints. The manifestations are different: but the underlying principle is the same. The symbols used by most advertising artists are symbols that stand for something which, whether sex or sanctity, Mammon or God, is quite different from the wares that are being advertised.

McKnight Kauffer is also a symbolist; but the symbols with which he deals are not symbols of something else; they stand for the particular things which are at the moment under consideration. The reference, in his case, is never to extraneous matters. To advertise, say, a motor car by an appeal to snobbery or sexuality is easy. McKnight Kauffer prefers the more difficult task of advertising products in terms of forms that are symbolic only of these particular products. Thus, forms symbolical of mechanical power are used to advertise powerful machines; forms symbolical of space, loneliness and distance to advertise a holiday resort where prospects are wide and houses few. And so on.

In this matter McKnight Kauffer reveals his affinity with all artists who have ever aimed at expressiveness through simplification, distortion and transposi-



tion, and especially with the Post-Impressionists and Cubists. It is a pity that this exhibition contains no specimens of his work outside the sphere of advertising. In his landscapes of Provence, in his illustrations to *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and *Don Quixote*, we can see the application to other artistic problems of those principles which underlie his practice as an advertising artist. Everywhere the aim is the same: to render the facts of nature in such a way that the rendering shall be, not a copy, but a simplified, formalized and more expressive symbol of the things represented. The aim is common to many of the most interesting and significant of contemporary artists. It is McKnight Kauffer's distinction that he was among the first, as he still remains among the best, of the interesting and significant contemporary artists to apply these principles to the design of advertisements.

ALDOUS HUXLEY



## E. McKNIGHT KAUFFER: BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

My mother is of Swedish descent, born in the United States. My father is a mixture, born in Evansville, Indiana and at one time a trap-drummer on one of the show boats on the Ohio River. Later he became a violinist in theatre orchestras. My paternal grandfather fought in the Civil War. I was born in Great Falls, Montana, December, 1890. Childhood spent in Evansville, Indiana. Earliest years spent in working in factories, drug stores, breweries, etc. Education only at a public school, not beyond the eighth grade. After that joined a traveling theatre stock company as assistant scene painter. At seventeen migrated to California with Frank Bacon and worked on ranch. After that in Paul Elder's bookshop in San Francisco for over two years—first contact with classicism in painting and literature. Night school at the Mark Hopkin's Institute. Was to have been sent abroad by Miss Phoebe Hearst, but plan abandoned—on her part, probably advised that I had insufficient talent. Was sent abroad in 1912 for eighteen months by Professor in the University of Utah. Stopped on way to Europe for six months at Chicago Art Institute. Rebelled against the system of Art education as given there. Sided with the Post-Impressionists, which was the first show from Armory in New York, shown in Chicago. Left Chicago and went to Munich. Stayed few months and then proceeded to Paris and worked in museums, one small Academy and the afternoon Sketch Schools. Outbreak of war—came to England on way to America. Liked the look of England and decided to stay. Tried to enlist in English Army and on technical citizenship reasons refused. About 1915 first effort towards advertising rewarded by a commission from Frank Pick of the Underground Railways. Had arrived in London as a painter and my work enthusiastically received. Continued as a painter until 1921—in the meantime my poster work beginning to make way. Gradually I saw the futility of trying to paint and do advertising at the same time. I wished also to keep my integrity as a painter free from depending on

social hypocrisy and the necessity to paint pictures that would sell. I decided to turn my whole attention to advertising and to give up painting entirely.

My success in England has been generally acknowledged, as the most recent distinction given to me has been by the Royal Society of Arts as Hon. D.I. I am a member of the Council for Art in Industry under the auspices of the Board of Trade and a member of the Advisory Council for the Victoria and Albert Museum and my work has been honoured by an Exhibition held at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (one man show).

In 1921 I came to New York in the hope of staying. Mr. Robert Parker arranged an exhibition of my work under the auspices of *Art and Decoration* but in spite of a moderate but enthusiastic press I did *not go down* and after a few months returned to England. I am very proud of the position I have in England and I wish to emphasise the part that the Underground Railways, Eastman & Sons Ltd., Shell Mex and B. P. Ltd., Lund Humphries Ltd. and many others have had in helping me by sympathetic understanding to do the work which I have done. In most cases it has not been possible to give me full freedom, and my clients have gone step by step rather than by leaps, but by this slow process we have argued and discussed each advance, until our opposite points of view have reached a synthesis, and it is because of this mutual understanding that I confidently expect England to progress to international distinction, not because of myself but through the new talent that is making way in many directions. . . .

E. McKNIGHT KAUFFER



## A NOTE ON TECHNIQUE

(Excerpt from a letter)

". . . I have used all kinds of instruments common to most contemporary painters, such as tooth brushes, cheese cloth, wire netting, etc.—in fact anything that suggests interesting textures. The air-brush I seldom use now, but when I did use it a few years ago I realized that it was a tricky instrument and that its use required an exceedingly disciplined technique. At the moment I prefer methods less exacting and with more direct contact between my idea and the medium. Lithography still tends to be commercially practical for reproduction and most of my posters are done by an old firm still using in many cases actual lithograph stones.

When I began advertising design in England in 1916, the outstanding work then was of the Munich realistic school, more pictorial than poster. My enthusiasm, to counteract that influence, was at first by violent methods, but such designs as I did were confined to exhibition posters for the then modern group of painters known as the London group, of which I was secretary.

In 1919 I produced the first and only Cubist poster design in England—a flight of birds (see No. 2), which was sold to an advertising agent for fifty dollars. It eventually appeared without my lay-out or lettering and for the Labour Paper, the *Daily Herald*. This design was so much noticed that Mr. Winston Churchill, then at the War Office, asked to see me with the idea of designing a new flag for the Royal Air Force. Mr. Churchill's appreciation of this "modernistic" design was flattering, but nothing further happened. I think at this moment a new direction in poster designing was created, but I realized that more persuasive methods would have to be employed. Rightly or wrongly, the progress of poster designing as done by myself has been slowly won, mostly by discussion, argument and a good deal of fighting. But English clients, once they are convinced, are prepared to go full steam ahead.



The cover design for the catalog is the most recent experiment I have made and it is an endeavour to dramatize shapes in space, to give an excitement to the mind with the use of non-naturalistic symbols and to suggest to the person who sees it a conflict of which he is a solitary witness. I am working more on these experiments, about which I shall write you later. . . .

E. McK. K.

# CATALOG OF THE EXHIBITION

- 37.876 ✓ 1. Derry and Toms, 1917 *38x59 E McKnight Kauffer*
- 37.877 ✓ \*2. The Early Bird (for the Daily Herald), 1918 *38x59 E McKnight Kauffer 1918*
- 37.878 ✓ 3. The London Group, 1918 *20x30 E McKnight Kauffer 1918*
- 37.879 ✓ 4. Winter Sale at Derry and Toms, 1919 *38x59 E McKnight Kauffer*
- 37.880 ✓ 5. Summer Sale at Derry and Toms, 1919 *38x59 E McKnight Kauffer*
- 37.881 ✓ 6. Vigil, the Pure Silk, 1919 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer 1919*
- 37.882 ✓ 7. Shop Between 10 and 4 (London Underground), 1921 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer 1921*
- 37.883 ✓ 8. Winter Sales (London Underground), 1921 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer*
- 37.884 ✓ 9. London Museum of Practical Geology, 1921 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer*
- 37.885 ✓ 10. London History at the London Museum, 1922 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer 22*
- 37.886 ✓ 11. "The Rocket" (Museum of Science), 1922 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer 22*
- 37.887 ✓ 12. The Vindictive Howitzer (Imperial War Museum), 1924 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer*
- Not Exhibited 13. Near Waltham Cross by Tram, 1924
- Not Exhibited 14. Bushey Park by Tram, 1924
- 37.888 ✓ 15. Hadley Wood by Tram, 1924 (?) *20x30 E McKnight Kauffer 24*
- 37.889 ✓ 16. Eno's Fruit Salts, 1924 *20x30 E McKnight Kauffer 24*
- 37.890 ✓ 17. Winter Sales (London Underground), 1924 *29x40 Not Exhibited*
- 37.891 ✓ 18. Whitsuntide Pleasures (London Underground), 1925 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer 25*
- Not Exhibited 19. The Wallace Collection, 1925
20. The Indian Museum, 1925 *Not Exhibited 37*
21. The London Group, 1925 *25x30 E McKnight Kauffer 37.892*
22. The Labour Woman, 1925 *20x30 E McKnight Kauffer 37.893*
23. The Flea (Natural History Museum), 1926 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer 1926 37.894*
24. Socrates at the British Museum (London Underground), 1926 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer 1926 37.895*
25. The Lodger, original gouache, 1926 *22x30 E McKnight Kauffer 37.896*
26. Metropolis, original gouache, c. 1926 *30x18 E McKnight Kauffer 37.897*
27. Eastman & Son, 1926 *16x22 Not Exhibited 37.898*
28. Eastman & Son, 1927 *16x22 E McKnight Kauffer 1927 37.900*
29. From Winter's Gloom to Summer's Joy (London Underground), 1927 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer 37.901*
30. Exhibition of Native Art from British Columbia (Imperial Institute), 1929 *Not Exhibited 37.902*
31. For All Theatres Travel Underground (London Underground), 1930 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer 1930 37.903*
32. Shop Between 10 and 4 (London Underground), 1930 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer 1930 37.904*
33. For Pull Use Summer Shell, 1930 *45x30 E McKnight Kauffer 1930 37.905*
34. You Can Be Sure of Shell, 1931 *45x30 E McKnight Kauffer 1931 37.906*
35. Faraday Centenary Exhibition, 1931 *11x24 E McKnight Kauffer 1931 37.907*
36. Power: The Nerve Center of London's Underground, 1931 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer 1931 37.908*
37. Piccadilly Extension Opening (London Underground), 1932 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer 1932 37.909*
- 37.910 *25x40 E McKnight Kauffer 37.910*



37.911

- ✓ \*38. By the rushy-fringed bank, / Where  
grows the willow and the osier dank.  
Milton. (London Underground), 1932

*E. McKnight Kauffer 32*

*Not Exhibited*

- ✓ \*39. A pillar'd shade / High over-arch'd,  
and echoing walks between. Milton.  
(London Underground), 1932

37.912

- ✓ \*40. Great Western to Cornwall, No. 14,  
1932

*E. McKnight Kauffer 24x40*

37.913

- ✓ \*41. Great Western to Cornwall. No. 15,  
1932

*E. McKnight Kauffer 24x40*

37.914

- ✓ \*42. Great Western to Devonshire, 1932

*E. McKnight Kauffer 24x40*

37.915

- ✓ \*43. Great Western to Devon's Moors, 1932

*E. McKnight Kauffer 24x40*

37.916

- ✓ \*44. Bodiam Castle: "Wherever you go you  
can be sure of Shell," 1932

*E. McKnight Kauffer 45x30*

37.917

- ✓ \*45. Stonehenge: "See Britain first on Shell,"  
c. 1932

*E. McKnight Kauffer 45x30*

37.918

- ✓ \*46. Ask for B. P. Not Just Ethyl (Shell), 1933

*E. McKnight Kauffer 45x30*

37.919

- ✓ \*47. B. P. Ethyl Controls Horsepower (Shell),  
1933

*Photo & Design by E. McKnight Kauffer 45x30*

37.921

- ✓ \*48. Merchants Prefer Shell, 1933

*E. McKnight Kauffer 45x30*

37.922

- ✓ \*49. Actors Prefer Shell, 1933

*E. McKnight Kauffer 45x30*

*E. McKnight Kauffer*

37.923

- ✓ \*50. Gilbey's Invalid Port, 1933

*15x20*

37.924

- ✓ \*51. Quickest by Air Mail, 1933

*E. McKnight Kauffer 20x30*

37.925

- ✓ \*52. Whitsuntide Holidays (London Under-  
ground), 1933

*E. McKnight Kauffer 25x40*

37.926

- ✓ \*53. Explorers Prefer Shell, 1934

*E. McKnight Kauffer 45x30*

✓ 37.928

- ✓ \*54. Magicians Prefer Shell, 1934

*E. McKnight Kauffer 45x30*

✓ 37.929

- ✓ \*55. 7 Day Seasons (Great Western Rail-  
way), 1934

*E. McKnight Kauffer 25x40*

- ✓ \*56. Orient Line to Australia, 1934

*E. McKnight Kauffer 25x40*

- ✓ \*57. Come on the Telephone, 1934

*E. McKnight Kauffer 25x20*

- ✓ \*58. Come on the Telephone, 1934

*E. McKnight Kauffer 60x15*

- ✓ \*59. Contact with the World. Use the Tele-

phone, 1934 *E. McKnight Kauffer 20x30*

- ✓ \*60. Regent Exhibition. Dorland Hall, 1934

*E. McKnight Kauffer 20x30*

- ✓ \*61. Westminster from the Thames (London

Transport), 1934 *E. McKnight Kauffer 25x40*

- ✓ \*62. Buckingham Palace (London Transport),

1934 *E. McKnight Kauffer 25x40*

- ✓ \*63. The Tower of London (London Trans-

port), 1934 *E. McKnight Kauffer 25x40*

- ✓ \*64. Westminster Abbey (London Transport),

1934 *E. McKnight Kauffer 25x40*

- ✓ \*65. Publicity Pays (London Transport), 1934

*E. McKnight Kauffer 20x30*

- ✓ \*66. Train Yourself to Better Work (London

Transport), 1935 *E. McKnight Kauffer 25x40*

- ✓ \*67. Treat Yourself to Better Play (London

Transport), 1935 *E. McKnight Kauffer 25x40*

- ✓ \*68. London County Council Evening Classes

(London Transport), 1935 *E. McKnight Kauffer 25x40*

- ✓ \*69. The New Gas Fires (Gas Light and Coke

Company), 1935 *E. McKnight Kauffer 20x30*

- ✓ \*70. Quickest Way by Air Mail, 1935

*E. McKnight Kauffer 20x30*

- ✓ \*71. Special Areas Exhibition (London Trans-

port), 1936 *E. McKnight Kauffer 25x40*

- ✓ \*72. See the model of the new building: Earl's

Court (London Transport), 1936 *E. McKnight Kauffer 25x40*

37.920

- ✓ \*47a. B.P. Ethyl Controls Horsepower  
(Shell) 1933

*E. McKnight Kauffer 33 11x24*

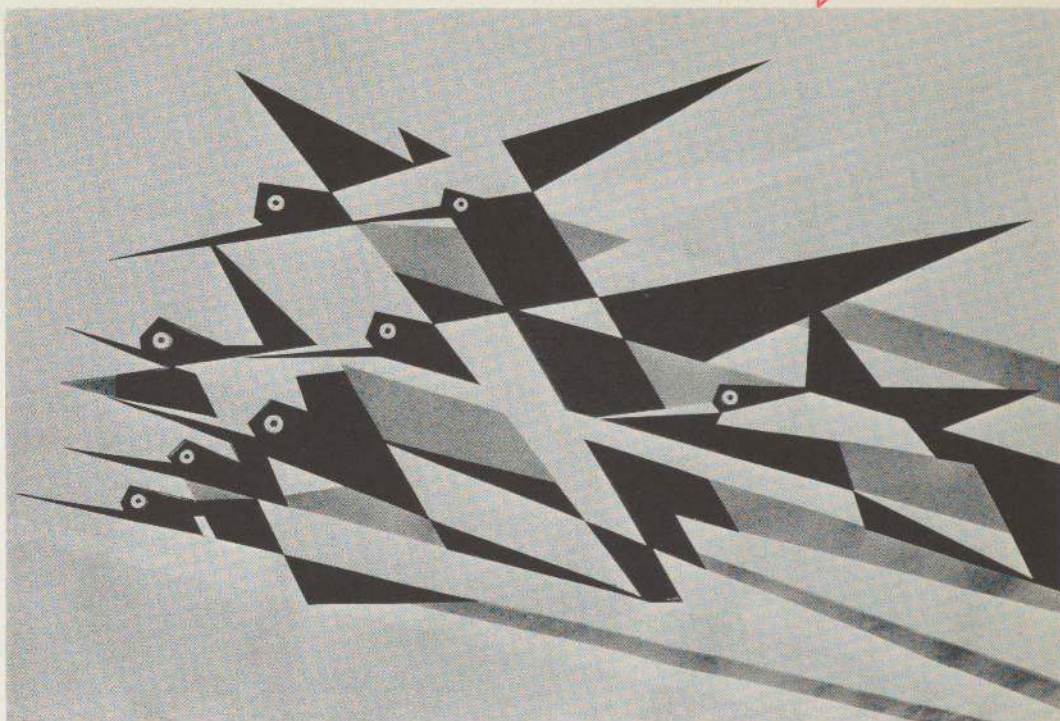


## UNDATED POSTERS

- 37.947 73. Group X 2. 1920 <sup>20x30</sup> *unsequed* 37.953  
Using Winter Shell 30x45
- 37.948 74. Read "The Cricketer" (Manchester Guardian) <sup>20x30</sup> *E McK Knight Kauffman* 37.954  
28x12
- 37.949 75. Villiers Motor Cycles <sup>20x30</sup> 37.955  
21x11 *E McK Knight Kauffman*
- 37.950 76. You Can Be Sure of Shell *unsequed* 37.956  
21x11
- 37.951 77. Winter Shell on Sale Till Next May *E McK K* 37.957  
21x11
- 37.952 78. Recommended for Winter Double Shell Lubricating Oil *E McK Knight Kauffman* 37.958  
21x11
- 37.953 79. Economize in Time, Temper, Petrol by Using Winter Shell 30x45
- 37.954 80. Road Accidents *E McK Knight Kauffman* 37.959  
28x12
- 37.955 81. Gilbey's Invalid Port *E McK Knight Kauffman* 37.956  
21x11
- 37.956 82. Gilbey's Castle Port *unsequed* 37.957  
21x11
- 37.957 83. Gilbey's Spey Royal Scotch Whiskey *E McK K* 37.958  
21x11
- 37.958 84. Gilbey's Rubicon Australian Burgundy *E McK Knight Kauffman* 37.959  
21x11
- 37.959 85. Travel in Comfort (Imperial Airways) 37.959  
25x40 *E McK Knight Kauffman*
- 37.960 The London Group 1919 <sup>20x30</sup> *E McK K 19 -*
- 37.961 The River Yeas near Barnstable *E McK Knight Kauffman*  
Whenever you go you can be sure of shell 1932 45x30
- 37.962 Great Wootton to Cornwall 1932 <sup>25x40</sup> *E McK Knight Kauffman* 1931
- 37.963 Publicity Pays on the Underground 1931 <sup>20x30</sup> *E McK Knight Kauffman*
- 37.964 Orient Line Cruises <sup>25x40</sup> *E McK Knight Kauffman* 34
- 37.965 Victoria + Albert Museum (L. Underground) 1921 <sup>25x40</sup> *E McK Knight Kauffman*
- 37.966 Chrysler Prices are Down <sup>20x30</sup> *E McK K Kauffman*
- 37.967 Oxhey Woods 1915 <sup>20x30</sup> *E McK Knight Kauffman* 5
- 37.968 Study Success at the Advertising Exhibition <sup>25x40</sup> *E McK Knight Kauffman*
- 37.969 " " " " <sup>20x30</sup> (smaller)
- 37.970 National Safety Week. undated *E McK K Kauffman*  
Be on guard against accidents 28x12
- 37.974 Official for Winter: double shell Lubricating Oil *E McK Knight Kauffman* 36
- 37.987 <sup>1/2</sup> for winter Single shell
- 37.950 Gilbey's Wanganoo Austral Red Wine <sup>28x12</sup>  
Not Exhibited, Not in Cat
- 37.971 Eastman + Son 1921  
16x22 London Dyers + Cleaners for over 100 yrs.
- 37.972 Eastman + Son undated  
16x22 Since 1802 the London Cleaners + Dyers
- 37.973 Eastman + Son 1922  
(Gloves) 16x22



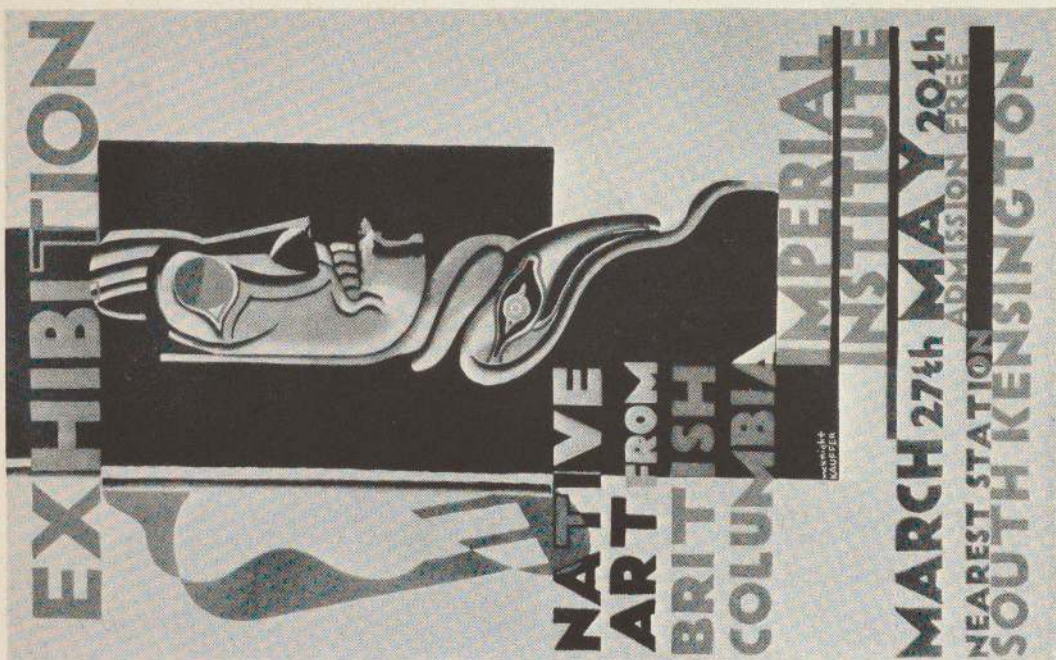






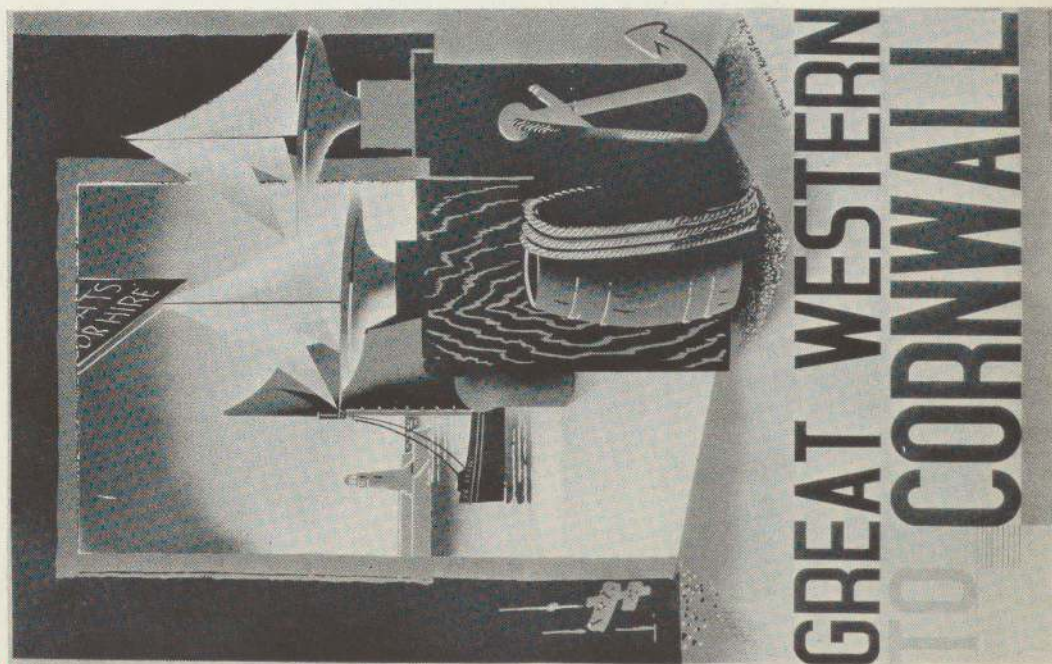


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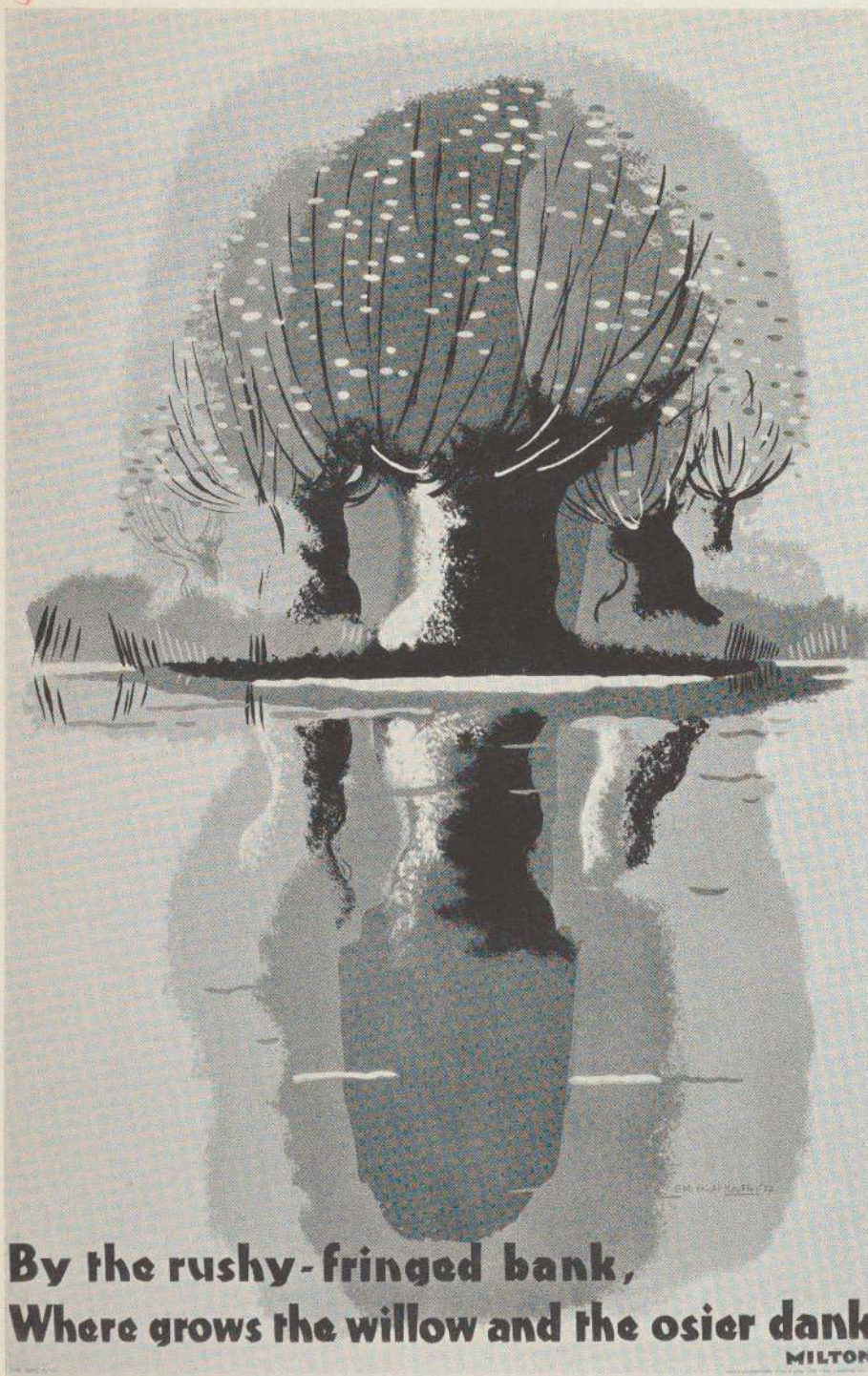


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43





**By the rushy-fringed bank,  
Where grows the willow and the osier dank**

**MILTON**











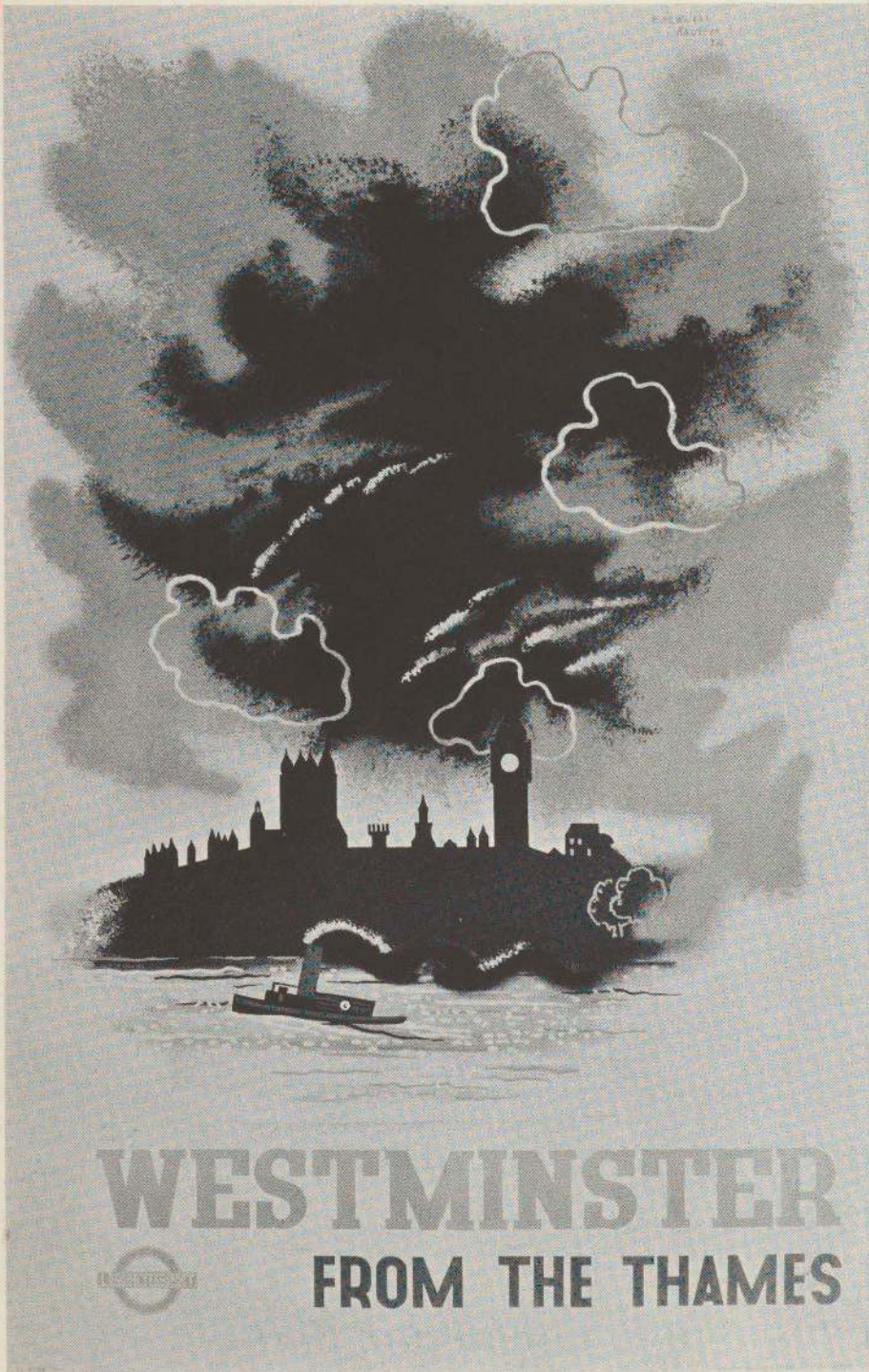


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