

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE MODERN POSTER

June 6 - September 6, 1988

A survey of poster art from 1880 to the present opens at The Museum of Modern Art on June 6, 1988. THE MODERN POSTER, which remains on view through September 6, surveys in depth the art of the poster from its origins in Europe during the last decades of the nineteenth century to the international developments in poster design over the last twenty years. Organized by Stuart Wrede, director, Department of Architecture and Design, the exhibition consists of over 350 posters drawn from the rich resources of the Museum's graphic design collection.

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In the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Stuart Wrede writes, "The poster, a medium of its time, has always existed at the junction of the fine and applied arts, culture, and commerce. As a hybrid medium it has provided an arena where painting, drawing, photography, and typography came together in new ways, influencing each other in the process. Its approximately one-hundred-year history coincides with that of modern art itself. Thus, it is not surprising that the poster became an integral part of the Museum's collection."

The first posters formally entered the Museum's collection in 1935. When, in 1968, the exhibition WORD AND IMAGE presented a poster survey from the Museum's holdings, the collection numbered two thousand. Since then, it has

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doubled in size, with the addition of recent works and the filling of gaps from earlier periods.

THE MODERN POSTER is arranged in broad chronological segments from late nineteenth century to World War I, the period between the wars, and the last forty years. The selection of posters reflects changing styles in twentieth-century art, as well as the various functions poster art has played in society, including product advertising, political and social messages, travel and entertainment posters, and exhibition and film announcements.

The exhibition begins with the late-nineteenth-century work of Jules Chéret, who utilized technical advances in color lithography and popularized the medium in France. The subsequent evolution of the poster in both England and France owed much to Japanese prints, as evidenced in the works of such artists as Pierre Bonnard, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and the Beggarstaffs.

Art Nouveau represented one of several ambitious efforts to develop a new unified style embracing all the arts. This impulse brought to the poster medium many of the most talented artists, architects, and designers of the period. Among them were Charles Rennie Mackintosh in Scotland and the various artists and architects of the Vienna Secession, such as Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser, and Joseph Maria Olbrich.

The modern form for the commercial poster was developed early in this century by the German designers Ludwig Hohlwein and Lucian Bernhard. By isolating a vignette or the image of the product on a neutral background and combining it with the name of the manufacturer in powerful compositions, they established a poster genre that influenced subsequent advertising.

Works in THE MODERN POSTER from after the First World War reveal how avant-garde artists turned to typography and the poster as a means of extending

the modernist revolution in the fine arts to the applied arts, and as a means for reaching a mass audience. The work of Russian artist El Lissitzky became the most important influence on the new typography. The Bauhaus in Germany, which played the most visible role in the effort to integrate all the arts of the modern period, was also instrumental in developing and adapting the innovations of avant-garde typography to commerce and industry. In Russia, photomontage and techniques derived from film were developed in the political and film posters of artists such as Gustav Klutsis, Alexander Rodchenko, and Vladimir and Georgii Stenberg.

School of Paris modernism of the thirties provided an important formal basis for poster artists A. M. Cassandre and E. McKnight Kauffer in France and England. The complex machinelike style of Fernand Léger, for example, is reduced to instantly grasped iconic forms.

After the Second World War, a new sensibility in art--lyrical abstraction with a new emphasis on painterly qualities--exercised considerable influence on graphic designers. In general, the brightly colored, the playful, and the informal came to dominate postwar poster design. At the same time, Swiss graphics, developing the traditions of the twenties, became internationally preeminent.

In the sixties the counterculture movement generated its own art form: the psychedelic poster. While drawing on the vibrating effects of Op art, this work also reflected a new interest in Art Nouveau and the Vienna Secession. The new interest in diverse styles--as well as the appropriation of commercial art by Pop artists--represented a revolt against "good taste" in modern design. In the current decade, a similar revolt has occurred within the graphic design establishment against the Swiss graphic tradition.

The international developments of the last twenty-five years have taken many forms. In Poland, for example, posters have become a primary vehicle for the work of artists. Japanese designers have drawn on their own traditions, on Futurist imagery, and on technical advances in color printing to produce remarkable work. In Germany, many designers prefer the photographic medium--from staged situations to photomontage to manipulations of the photographic image--to create posters concerned with social issues. Similarly, in France, political and social concerns provide much of the impetus for the new graphic work, as in the posters of Grapus, combining graffiti, typography, and photography.

A symposium, The Changing Use and Form of the Poster, will be held in conjunction with the exhibition on June 9, 1988, at 8:30 p.m. in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2. Moderated by Stuart Wrede, panelists include Pierre Bernard, Szymon Bojko, Keith Godard, April Greiman, and Armin Hofmann. Tickets are \$8 public, \$7 members, and \$5 students, available at the Museum lobby information desk.

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