

Introduction

The Swiss Poster Collection at Carnegie Mellon University is a critical selection of more than 300 works representing the Swiss Posters of the Year competition and other Swiss posters from 1970 to the present. The collection is for students, teachers, scholars, and the general viewer to explore the art of the poster and its leading expression in Swiss graphic design.

This collection of Swiss graphic design and poster art represents a tradition in transition. Swiss posters of the 1950s and 1960s illustrate the "Swiss School" or the "Swiss Style," relying heavily on composition, typography, and clear communication. This "style" had international influence, and the Swiss poster came to be regarded as a model in graphic design.

In the 1970s, however, Swiss graphic design and poster art began to change -- not in quality but in direction and vision. Designers, critics, and historians of design suggest many factors for the future changes, including changing tastes, rising quality in other countries, the decline of artistic personalities, commercial influence, and so forth.

What is clear, however, is that Swiss poster art remained at a high level of quality and expressive force and continues to attract worldwide attention. Indeed, the study of Swiss posters in the period represented by the collection at Carnegie Mellon offers special insight into many of the cross-currents affecting all graphic design in this period.

Themes in Swiss Poster Art

One may view Swiss posters either as street art or as excellent examples of graphic design, showing effective use of form, color and image to communicate an idea. From either perspective, the viewer may analyze themes that operate throughout the collection. First is the variety of purposes for which the posters were created. Although all of the posters are concerned with advertising in its broadest sense, the clients for whom the posters were created range from corporations to museums. In most cases, the intent of a poster is evident, even if the local and immediate circumstances of its creation are sometimes less clear.

Second is the approach to form and content, with an interesting interplay of type as image, type and image, and sources of pure imagery. Swiss posters are a superb illustration of the ability of design to shape and transform content through formal expression. One should watch for expressions of traditional "Swiss Style" and for the changes that emerge in the tradition.

The third theme is the level of visual and cultural sophistication that one is encouraged to bring to the posters. They are immediate in impact, spontaneous, and often playful or humorous. But the Swiss poster rewards a second and third viewing. The Swiss designer obviously delights in communicating with an audience that not only looks but sees -- an audience that delights in experiencing visual expression of high quality.

The viewer may also browse the collection by categories, and search the collection using terms that indicate Commercial or Cultural purpose, Graphic Technique, Designer, the name of a person who had a role in production, Date, and Keyword. Commercial purpose is divided into Fashion, Food, Beverage, and Tobacco, Other Consumer Products, and Tourism and Travel. Cultural purpose is divided into Concert, Exhibit, Museum, Zoo, Theater, Film, and Dance, Sports, and Health and Safety. Graphic Technique is divided into Black and White Photography, Color Photography, Hand-lettering, Illustration, and Typographic Images.

About the Collection

The Swiss Poster Collection was established at Carnegie Mellon in 1985 through the efforts of Swiss graphic designer Ruedi Ruegg and Professor Daniel Boyarski, who studied as a post-graduate student at Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel. The goal was to provide a teaching collection for faculty and students that would serve as a stimulus to experimentation and new work. The base of the collection in the beginning was Ruedi Ruegg's private collection. The works in the Collection were selected by Mr. Ruegg chiefly from the annual Swiss Posters of the Year competition held by the Swiss Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs. Mr. Ruegg updates the Collection each year, often adding other examples of excellent poster design that he believes will benefit students through close study. Over the years the Collection has served to strengthen the already strong connection between Carnegie Mellon and Swiss graphic designers. Additional posters would be welcome.

The Collection contains fine work since 1971 by designers such as Max Bill, Paul Bruhwiler, Ruedi Kulling, Herbert Leupin, Josef Muller-Brockmann, Roger Pfund, Ruedi Ruegg, Niklaus Troxler, Wolfgang Weingart, Kurt Wirth, R. Schraivogel, Cornel Windlin, and many others.

The Swiss Poster Collection is located in Special Collections of the Carnegie Mellon University Libraries. The curators are Daniel Boyarski, Professor of Design in the School of Design, and Mary Kay Johnsen, Special Collections Librarian and Liaison Librarian to the School of Design. The collection is available for study by students, teachers, scholars, and the general public.

The Swiss Poster Collection is one of several Design Collections in the Carnegie Mellon University Libraries. Others include the Tomas Gonda Collection, the Arnold Bank Collection of the Letter Arts, and Porter Garnett's Laboratory Press Collection.

The Swiss Posters of the Year Competition

The Swiss Poster of the Year competition was established in 1941 to give new impulse to the quality and popularity of Swiss poster art at a difficult historical moment in Swiss cultural and economic life. The idea for the competition originated with the famous graphic designer Pierre Gauchat and was taken up by a private firm and ultimately by the Swiss Federal Government. The competition is administered by the Swiss Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs and is supported by the Allgemeine Plakatgesellschaft (Public Poster Society) and The Swiss Poster Advertising Company.

The jury is composed of nine individuals, representing graphic design and the field of advertising. Typically, they select 20-30 award winners from among several hundred entries. In the words of the Ministry, "The decisive criteria of appreciation shall be the creative power, the novel and original underlying idea, and the quality of the transposition of the message implied." Each year, the prize winning posters are exhibited in over 80 cities and towns in Switzerland.

Readings About the Swiss Poster Competition

- 50 Years: Swiss Posters selected by the Federal Department of Home Affairs Geneva: Societe Generale d'Affichage in collaboration with Kummerly & Frey AG Berne, 1991.
- Bergmeir, Wolfgang. "Swiss posters 1989," *Novum Gebrauchsgraphik* 61 (October 1990), p. 4-9.
- Biffiger, Franz. "Artistry and all that jazz (Niklaus Troxler)," *Graphis* 52 (July/August 1996), p. 88-95.
- Bigler, Max. "Swiss posters of the year: the national competition," *Graphis* 46 (Jan/Feb 1990), p. 98-105.
- Lechner, Herbert. "Jazz posters", *Nouvum Gebrauchsgraphik* 63 (April 1992), p. 56-9.
- Lechner, Herbert "Swiss posters", *Nouvum Gebrauchsgraphik* 62 (October 1991), p. 44-9.
- *Swiss Posters, 1970-1980* / presented by Ruedi Rüegg and Shigeru Watano. Tokyo: Seibundo Shinkosha, 1982.
- Urban, Dieter. "Swiss posters of the year", *Novum Gebrauchsgraphik* 60 (March 1989), p. 50-5.
- Zahn, Heribert. "Swiss posters", *Novum Gebrauchsgraphik* 63 (October 1992), p. 56-61.

Other Swiss Poster Collections

Two major archives for the series are the **Archiv Allgemeine Plakatgesellschaft** and **Museum für Gestaltung Zurich**

Website Credits and Special Thanks

The original website was created in memory of graphic designer Robert Smillie.

The design team for that website was led by Daniel Boyarski, Professor of Design in the School of Design. Members of the team from the School of Design were graduate students Rick Hoobler, Chae Yong Yi, Adriana Moscatelli, Rob Gargiulo, Hyun-Jung Kim, Veronika Vanden Abeele, Patrick Hogan, and Julie S. Text by Richard Buchanan and Mary Kay Johnsen. Technical support provided by Henry Pisciotta, Mary Kay Johnsen, Brent Frye, Richard Schall, Adam Drobotij, and Angel Morris of the University Libraries.

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