

A poster for an influential type designer

THE FIRST POSTERS

Art is man's creation, yet words and pictures are also the form of his language. If art is not primarily communication but creation, then posters, with their prescribed function of advertising and propaganda, would seem to be only a secondary art form. Yet posters, in the first hundred years of their existence, have also had a curious relationship with painting. Besides translating the visual art movements of the twentieth century into consumer media, the nature and limitations of advertising have sometimes influenced the form and direction of painting. The first occasion when the poster had such an effect was at its coming of age in 1870.

In 1866 **Jules Cheret** (1836-1933) started to produce colour lithographic posters from his own press in Paris. Bal Valentino (1869) is an example. The form of the poster as we know it dates from this time because of the coincidence of two factors: certain technical improvements in lithographic printing and the presence of Cheret himself.



Jules Cheret

The process of lithography was not new; it had been invented in 1798 by Alois Senefelder in Austria, although his methods were not perfected until later. By 1848 it was possible to print sheets at the rate of 10,000 an hour. In 1858 Cheret produced his first colour lithograph design, Orplie mix Enjers. His real contribution to the history of the poster, however, began when he returned to Paris after a seven-year stay in England and started to produce posters from the new English machinery based on Scnefelder's designs. Cherct drew his designs straight onto the lithographic stone - reestablishing lithography as a direct creative medium, as Goya and others had used it at the beginning of the century. For some years since then, lithography had often been used merely as a means of reproducing other art. In spite of this, a tradition of lithographed book illustration existed in France, and technically one can trace the poster's evolution through the printed page.

Gavarni, pseudonym of Guillaume Chevalier (1804-66), was an illustrator for the periodical *Charivari* and specialized in everyday themes. Denis Auguste Raffet (1804-60) had designed two advertisements for Norvin's *History of Napoleon* which were really part of his illustrations for this work. Tony Johannot (1803-52) designed an advertisement, *Don Quichotte* (1845), which was one of the eight hundred illustrations that he had made for the famous novel. Although these works and others like them were advertisements consisting of words and pictures, their connection with the printed book is too close for them to be considered posters, and their small size made it difficult to distinguish them among other advertising material on public display.

Though public announcements themselves have a long history and their roots have been traced back to antiquity, it is more realistic to start the development of this form of communication with an example such as the earliest printed advertisement in England, by William Caxton in 1477. In seventeenth-century France there was a ban against posting bills without permission. Sign-boards in France in 1761 were fixed flat against walls for safety by order of Louis XV - thus anticipating the hoarding, or billboard. As early as 1715 one finds a picture advertisement for folding umbrellas, and in 1800 *Bonne Bierre de Mars*, an illustration of young couples drinking at an inn - both from France. But these two examples were no larger than a book page. It is only in 1869, when Cheret's posters were first appearing, that one of those small advertisements seems to show some indication of new, simple patterns of design that were later to become the essence of poster technique. This was a design by Manet: *Champfleury - Les Chats* - a composition easily retained by the memory, since it is made up of flat shapes.

This form of simple visual pattern-making was not so apparent in Cheret's work, which, at a hundred years' distance, seems based on the traditional compositions associated with European mural painting. It is legitimate to compare the design of Cheret's posters with the murals and the tall, upright, rectangular compositions of Tiepolo.

Cheret studied at the Beaux-Arts in Paris while still working as a lithographer's apprentice and, in addition to Tiepolo's work, one can detect in his draughtsmanship a similarity with drawings by Fragonard and Watteau. In an interview with the English critic Charles Hiatt, Cheret even maintained that for him posters were not necessarily a good form for advertising but that they made excellent murals.

This is the reason Cheret has become known as the first name in posters. It is not that his designs are masterpieces of the art of advertising, but that his posters, over a thousand of them, are magnificent works of art. Instead of re-interpreting the great murals of the past for the public of his day by creating large salon canvases, he found a new place for his work - the street.

Part of Paris had recently been re-designed by Baron Haussmann, the architect of Napoleon III's new capital. Many of the old and well-loved buildings of the days of the Revolution had been pulled down, and in their place a city of great style, although perhaps of monotonous regularity, was being constructed. The wide boulevards and intersections have been admired by city planners ever since. They were, at the time of their construction, also a practical solution to the problems of mob-control by artillery. On the austere walls of this new city, Cheret's posters appeared as a new vital art form. Writers like Joris-Karl Huysmans and

Edmond de Goncourt, as well as countless critics and art-historians of the time, have drawn attention to the explosion of colour created by Cheret.

It is because of the material success of this public display of fine art that posters became known as the art gallery of the street. In the case of Cheret's works, this phrase is a just description. However, the idea that one has merely to display paintings in the road to provide high-class art for the masses is a basic error that well-intentioned publicists have often failed to understand. Cheret had taken the technique of the lithograph book-illustrator, but had used the scale and style of a master like Tiepolo. However, the real contribution of his genius lay in his introduction of a third element to these two familiar sources - one that was to give his undoubted ability as a traditional draughtsman the currency of popular language.

Cheret took the visual language of popular folk art used to decorate circus programmes - such as the one for Le Cirque Rancy in the middle 1860s - and enlarged this, as he was able to do with his experience as a trained lithographer. His posters bring together a traditional technique and an appreciation of great mural art, but also that essential ingredient - the feel of the popular idiom. In their programme covers and ephemera, the circuses and fairgrounds of England and France had for many years used designs that were striking and alive. The large fairground-booth paintings, such as those in use at Bartholomew Fair in England, and the big American advertisements for circuses from the United States on tour in England during Cheret's stay there, would also have contributed to his ideas. The American works were printed in small sections using wood blocks. All these elements may be said to have contributed to the appearance of the poster, but it was without doubt the effort of this one man that gave the poster its special character.

In *Bal Valentino*, Cheret established the dynamic quality of his work. The dancing figure of a clown with two girls seems to spring out at one, and this effect is accentuated by the lettering which fans outwards, the top word 'Valentino' being in suggested 3-D. In this case the lettering is part of the design, but in Cheret's work as a whole the lettering was added later (by a friend, Madare, who died in 1894), which reinforces the fact that he was primarily a mural painter and not an advertising man. But *Bal Valentino* is an awkward design compared with some of his later posters, for example, *Theatre de L' Opera* (1894) or *Pippermint* (1899). In these works the whole effect is lighter and freer.

Cheret created a type of girl who soon represented a popular concept for the 1880s and '90s in the same way that others - Roger Vadim, for example, in the 1950s - have done for later generations. His favourite model was a Danish actress and dancer, Charlotte Wiehe. She appears in Cheret's posters as irrepressibly happy, dancing, laughing and irresponsible. She was popularly called 'La Cherette', and girls imitated her looks. To catch sight of the posters is to be caught up in an extrovert release of happiness - a pictorial equivalent of the expectation aroused by the sound of the cork released from a bottle of champagne. The flowing, effervescent and transparent glazes of Cheret's posters were perhaps inspired by the colours of the butterfly wings that he kept by him as he worked. Layers of delicate tints are arranged carefully and simply with minimum technical fuss to produce an effect of spontaneity that makes many mass-culture productions seem laboured by comparison.

Today we probably find Cheret's work more representative of the end of a great European tradition than the start of new developments; the link with Tiepolo is more obvious to us than it would perhaps have been to his contemporaries. At that time, the innovations in his work

would have seemed more startling. In his early work the striking use of black as a colour and the interlocking flat shapes provided a break with traditional interpretation of solid form and illusion of depth, which younger artists, such as Toulouse-Lautrec and Bonnard were to develop even further. Henry van de Velde, one of the great spokesmen for Art Nouveau, mentioned Cheret as an important source for that decorative art movement. One can see this connection in a poster such as *Les Girard* (1879), with the restless character of the composition and the long pointed elements in the design.

In addition to his influence on Art Nouveau, Cheret's work had a significant effect on Seurat. Two of Seurat's paintings, *Le Chahut* (1889-91) and *Le Cirque* (1890-91), illustrate the use of circus backgrounds or dancers rather than that dependence on nature characteristic of Impressionist naturalism of the '70s. *Le Cirque*, in fact, echoes elements found in Cheret's *Spectacle-Promenade de l'Horloge* of a decade earlier. Seurat's art, in any case, had formalized the natural world, but Cheret had also provided an artificial concept which Seurat found useful. Seurat himself made a design in the poster manner - a cover for the novel *L'Homme a Femmes* (1889) - which owes a great deal to Cheret's *L'Amant des Danseuses* (1888).

Cheret's influence grew as younger artists found that the poster, through its very nature, was to develop a form of visual shorthand in which ideas could be expressed simply and directly. His posters remain for all time the first steps in this direction. They exactly convey the spirit of the era known as *fin de siècle*, but lift it into an illusory world of almost allegorical style - a decorative comment on the social life of the streets where the posters appeared.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901), by contrast, accentuated the style of Cheret's work, but used it to describe what went on inside the lives of the inhabitants of those streets. Whereas pupils of Cheret, such as Georges Meunier, in a poster such as *L'Elysee Montmartre* (1895), and Lucien Lefevre in *Electricine* (1895), illustrated the cabarets of Montmartre or domestic scenes in Cheret's manner, Lautrec's contribution to the developing style of the poster went further than this. He dramatized his own personal experience and used the medium of the poster as a means of expression: thus the poster *Divan Japonais* (1893) is his portrait of a friend, Jane Avril. The element of caricature, humorous and satirical, the simple, flat shapes and the decorative line, were all devices that Lautrec could employ in a poster but which he could not express so simply and directly within the conventions of the painting of his time. His posters have a quality of broad silhouette less apparent in his paintings and drawings of the same subjects, and this simplified statement is one that re-appears in the work of many painters during the first half of the twentieth century. Lautrec owes much of his style to the example of Cheret, who, in turn, had spoken of him as *un maitre*. Lautrec's posters, however, are a significant extension of Cheret's achievement. Cheret relates the poster to the art of the past while establishing it as a form. Lautrec was to relate the poster to future developments in painting while consolidating that form.



Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec



Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

Cheret designed the poster advertising the opening of the Moulin Rouge in 1889: Lautrec was commissioned to make one for the same establishment in 1891 featuring their new star La Gouloue. The change in style from the world of Tiepolo to the modern scene is obvious. Lautrec seems to have eliminated the traditional elements in Cheret's work while exaggerating certain aspects of broad pattern-making latent there. Lautrec's design takes the poster further away from the book illustration or the traditional easel painting.

His work was not necessarily popular. His lithograph Mlle Marcelle Lender, which he dedicated to the German periodical Pan, caused the resignation of its publishers when they attempted to print the work. Lautrec's exhibition in London, at the Goupil Galleries in 1898, was a failure. Even Yvette Guilbert - the star of the show at the Divan Japonais (who appears

with her head out of the picture in the poster that is obviously dedicated to a member of her audience, Jane Avril) - felt that the album designed for her by Lautrec was too hideous to publish. Edmond de Goncourt complained of what one can only translate as a 'sick' interpretation of women by the new modern artists. However, the English art critic, Charles Hiatt, correctly understood the element of caricature, comparing Lautrec's designs with the work of Hogarth and Rowlandson. There is a sharp contrast between the posters of Cheret, aimed to please and delight, and those of Lautrec which appeared to be ugly' and were uncomfortable. Hiatt describes them as half-attractive and half-repelling.

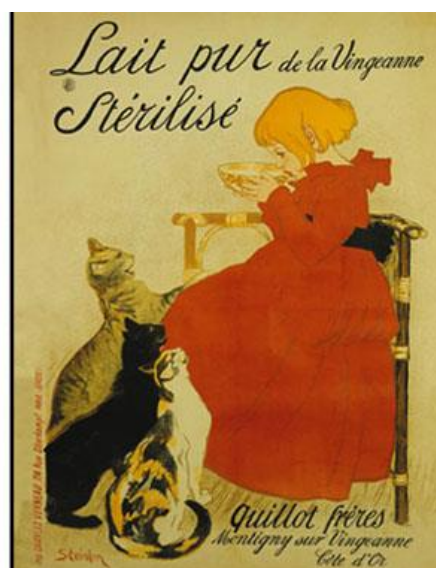
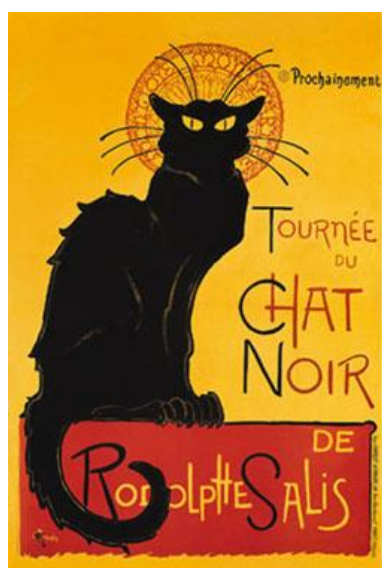
Lautrec's posters - he made only thirty-one during his short life of thirty-seven years (1864-1901) - are a major contribution to the history of posters. It is a strange thought that, had he lived as long as Cheret (a remarkable ninety-seven years), he would have died only in 1961. Lautrec's contribution to the twentieth century was indirectly reflected in all poster design, for he helped to establish the direct quality of the poster as an art form. But no poster artist of his calibre followed him in France - the impact of his work affected painting, for example, through the work of Pablo Picasso.

In *The Blue Room* of 1901, Picasso gives us a portrait of his own room shared with models and friends; hanging on the wall is Lautrec's poster, *May Milton* (1895). It was in 1900 that Picasso first arrived in Paris, but French fin-de-siecle design was available to him earlier, in Barcelona, in the form of reproductions in magazines like *le Rire*, *La Vie Parisienne*, *Gil Bias* and *L'Assiette au Beurre*. In Barcelona, the Catalan tavern, *El Quatre Gats* (The Four Cats), was modelled on the Paris cabaret, *Le Chat Noir* - later presided over by Aristide Bruant, himself a subject of one of Lautrec's best-known posters. Picasso designed for this tavern a poster in the style of the Arts and Crafts movement in England. One of the leading personalities of the Barcelona circle was the Spanish painter, **Ramon Casas**. Aside from his poster, *Anis del Mono* (the monkey was the trade mark of this group), he made another called *Pulchinel-Lis 4 Gats*: both of these have echoes in Picasso's later work, such as the *Acrobat's Family with an Ape* (1905). These links with early poster design, and ultimately with Lautrec's broad caricature, seem to have a direct continuation in the simple, monumental forms that appear in Picasso's paintings, even as late as the 1930s.



Ramon Casas

Another artist whose posters may have contributed to the shift from naturalism towards narrative or descriptive journalism was the Swiss, **Theophile Alexandre Steinlen**, who arrived in Paris in 1881 -the year Picasso was born. Both Steinlen and Lautrec continued to explore the area of social commentary in the visual arts, an aspect already studied by artists like Daumier. Some of Steinlen's posters are direct social comment: *Mothu et Doria* (1894) shows two smokers, one gloved, in his top hat and cape, offering a light to the cigarette stub of the other, dressed in a cap, wearing a red scarf, hand in pocket. The same descriptive observation appears in Steinlen's poster *La Rue* (1896). Others are of domestic scenes with children and cats, which remind one of the Blue Period of Picasso's work. Steinlen had also contributed a famous series of designs to the original rooms of *Le Chat Noir*. The effect of all these posters on one of the great artists of the twentieth century during his youth has never been assessed, yet the change towards simple description and decoration in much twentieth-century painting from the elaborate naturalism of the nineteenth owes something to the new freedom conferred by the popular idiom of the poster.



Theophile Alexandre Steinlen

ART NOUVEAU POSTERS

The most characteristic modern style of the turn of the century was **Art Nouveau**. This movement in the arts, fine and applied, included poster design. As a style, Art Nouveau gave a decorative and ornamental value to linear patterns that were often derived from organic shapes. The term 'Art Nouveau' was applied to the movement in Britain and in the United States; in Germany 'Jugendstil'; in France 'Le style moderne'; in Austria 'Secession'; in Italy 'Stile Liberty'; in Spain 'Modernista'. In each case the interpretation of the style was linked with the idea of the 'new'. It represented, in decorative terms, new social developments, new technology and new expressions of the spirit. For example, in the hands of an artist like Charles Rennie Mackintosh of Glasgow, its patterns seemed to derive from Celtic illuminated manuscripts while at the same time anticipating, particularly in his architecture and furniture design, the styles of the twentieth century.

The style, which grew partly from the English Arts and Crafts movement, was developed by individual countries in Europe and in the United States. In Germany, the special characteristics of Art Nouveau were introduced through the enthusiasm of groups of designers and writers such as those who were responsible for magazines like *Die Jugend*, which was started in 1896. The term 'Jugendstil' was adopted from the name of this journal. Its subtitle -'Munich's Weekly Magazine of Life and the Arts' - shows that the intention of the 'new' was to integrate art with society. Fritz Dannenberg's poster of a girl astride a giant champagne bottle was made for the journal. Something of the same spirited involvement was also shown in Victor Schufinsky's *Lucifer Girl*. The special characteristic of Jugendstil in poster design is the quality of fantasy, which was usually presented in organic terms and which was also closely related to illustration.

The spirit of the 'new' prompted groups to break away from the academic and to form Secessionist associations, such as those in Munich and Vienna. In Munich, the artists von Stuck, Habermann and Eckmann were involved. In addition to *Die Jugend*, another publication, *Simplicissimus*, appeared in 1896 in Munich and the two journals provided a stimulating incentive for designers, especially in the field of posters. *Simplicissimus* was more satirical than its contemporary and contained a variety of elements, including popular stories, scandals and political cartoons. The posters and illustrations for this magazine by **Thomas Theodor Heine** (1867-1948) are particularly inventive. Bruno Paul was another contributor, and Leo Putz (1869-1940) made posters in which he used his skill as a draughtsman to create designs that probably appealed as **Pin-Ups**.

Thomas Theodor Heine

In Vienna, the Secessionists' work was collected together in a remarkable series called *Ver Sacrum* (Rite of Spring). In the various issues of this journal that appeared between 1898 and 1903, there are examples of the work of **Gustav Klimt**, **Koloman Moser** (1868-1918), Hoffmann, Olbrinch, **Alfred Roller** (1864-1935) and many others. Their designs and the posters they made are more delicate than the sometimes 'heavy' quality of Jugendstil, and there is often a characteristic balance and order that distinguish the work from the asymmetry of Art Nouveau generally. There is a real connection, in style, between this work and the designs made by **Charles Rennie Mackintosh** and his associates at the Glasgow School of Art. Klimt and others were aware of their work, and the Four of Glasgow showed at the Eighth Secessionist Exhibition at Munich in 1900. They also 'stole' the show in Turin in 1902.



Gustav Klimt



Charles Mackintosh



Alfred Roller



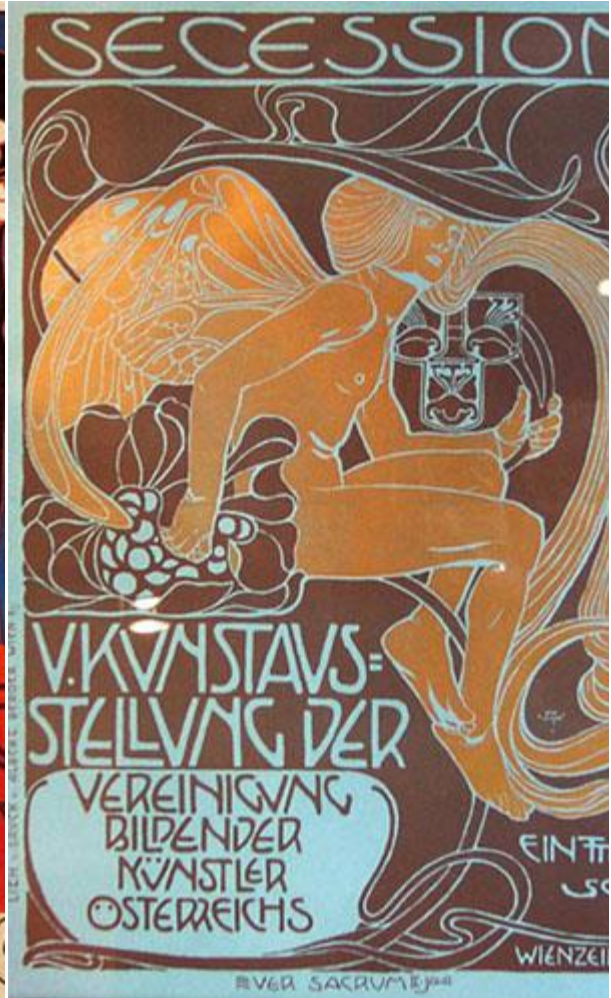
Koloman Moser



Koloman Moser

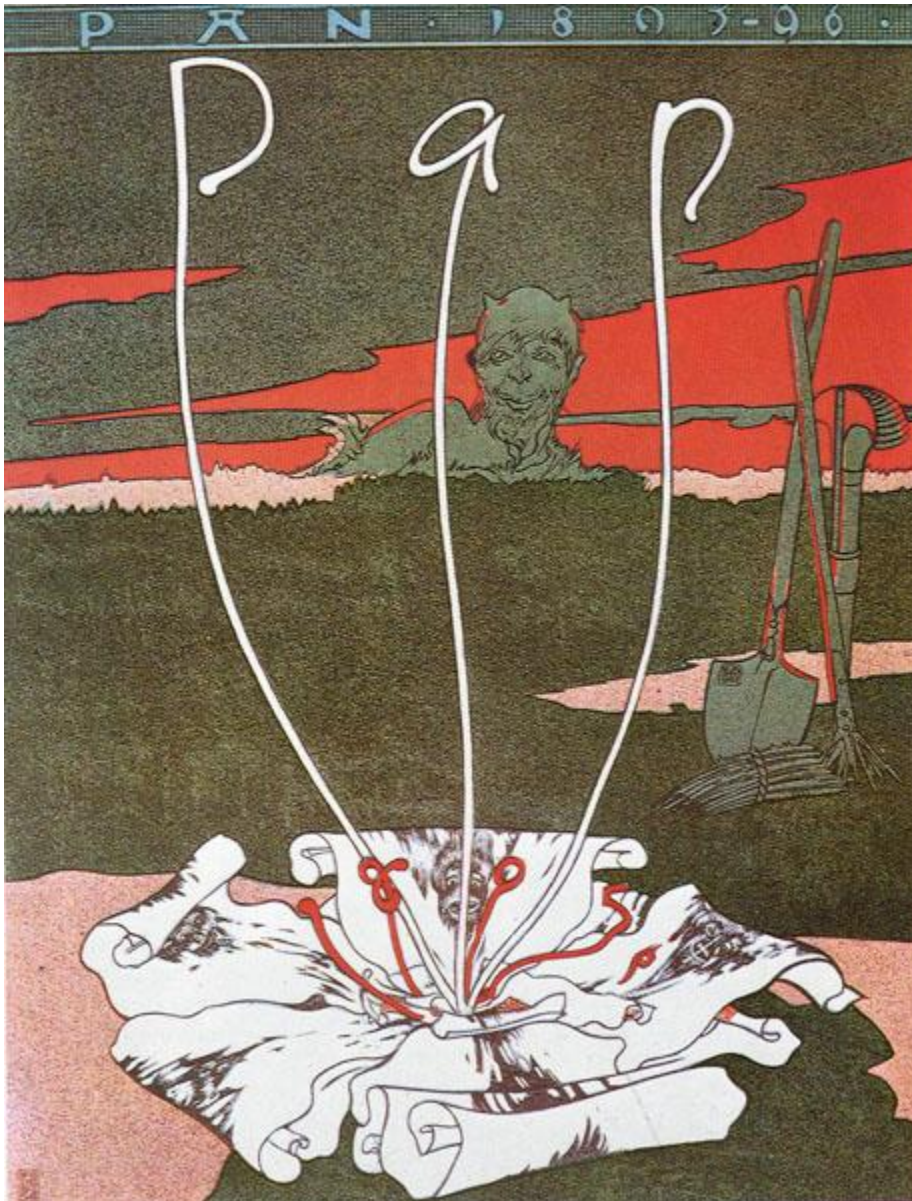


Koloman Moser



Koloman Moser

In Berlin the founding of the magazine Pan by Julius Meier-Graefe and Otto Bierbaum in 1895 was given striking visual form by the cover designed by **Josef Sattler** (1867-1931). Other poster designers in Berlin included Paul Scheurich, Edmund Edel, Hans Rudi Erdt, Lucian Bernhard, **Julius Klinger**, Julius Gipkens, Jupp, Wiertz and Joseph Steiner. Many of these artists were still dominating the scene in the 1920s. Some of the posters designed in Austria and Germany at the turn of the century tended, in style, towards a form of Expressionist realism, while retaining a strong link with the decorative motifs of Jugendstil. Examples taken from the enormous output of remarkable posters are those by Johann Cissarz, Hans Unger (Estey-Orgein, 1896), Nikolaus Gysis and Peter Behrens -also associated with Munich - whose designs include Allgemeine Elektrizitätsgesellschaft (1910) and his famous Der Kuss (1898). Posters designed by Olaf Gulbransson (1873-1958) and Emil Preetorius (b. 1883) carried many of the characteristics of Jugendstil into the post-war world of the twenties. After 1900 the floral decorations as a dominant motif gave way to a more abstract design. The Wiener Werkstätten, which existed from 1903 until 1932, displayed a continued development of this style of work; and the Deutscher Werkbund, founded in 1907 (Gustav Klimt was a founder member), led, after the First World War, to the establishment of the Bauhaus, which became a focal point for formal abstract design.



Josef Sattler

In Germany the motif of flowing shapes, as illustrated so well in the cover by **Ludwig von Zumbusch** for *Jugend No. 40* (1897), becomes linked through the heavy shapes and bright colours of Kandinsky's poster, *Ausstellung Phalanx Munchen* (1901), with the design ideas of the Blaue Reiter group, which came to be recognized as a force in 1911, and which are therefore seen to derive from Munich Jugendstil.



Ludwig von Zumbusch

The most famous examples of posters in the 'style moderne' in France were, of course, the work of Toulouse-Lautrec. However, it is known that he had admired the poster France-Champagne (1891) by **Pierre Bonnard**, and it was Bonnard who introduced him to the process of lithography. Bonnard made only a few posters, yet a work like La Revue Blanche (1894) demonstrates his gift for unusual composition and the subtle sense of humour that he continued to use in his drawings and paintings until his death in 1947. Something of the character of La Revue Blanche remained with his work always.



Pierre Bonnard

Among the most significant elements of Art Nouveau design, particularly in Paris, were the shapes derived from the Japanese print. Some of these designs had appeared on the wrapping paper of articles from the Far East. The famous prints of artists such as Hiroshige, Hokusai and Utamaro belonged to the Ukiyo-e 'School' - work that described the daily life of the street. The subject-matter also included a series of erotic prints. As well as being a direct influence on the European poster, the Japanese print, with its reflection of daily life as well as more glamorous material, has had a profound effect on pictorial advertising. Most posters connected with the Art Nouveau style show a marked similarity of composition which was the European version of the 'Japanese'.

Art Nouveau, which, as we have seen, contained elements of design that anticipated future developments (for example, the furniture of Josef Hoffmann), also included references to the distant past: William Morris's painted furniture and the spirit of medievalism were essential elements among the many factors included in an overworked title that expressed so many transitional styles and manifestations in the arts of 1900. Eugene Grasset expressed in France the same love of the medieval decorators that the Pre-Raphaelites showed in England. Grasset's pupil, Paul Berthon, wrote of his work:

You see, our new art is only, and must only be, the continuation and development of our art of France choked by the Renaissance. What we want is to create an original art without any model but nature, without any rule but imagination and logic, using at the same time the French flora and fauna as details and following very closely the principles which made the medieval arts so thoroughly decorative. ... I myself only try to copy nature in its very essence. If I want to see a plant as decoration I am not going to reproduce all its nerves as leaves, or the exact tint of its flowers. I may have to give the stem of the flowers more harmonious as well as geometrical line, or unconventional colours which have never been seen in the model I have before me. For instance I shall never be afraid to paint my figures with green, yellow or red hair, if these tones are to be wanted in the composition of the design.

This significant deviation from naturalism is characteristic of much Art Nouveau design - although Grasset claimed to dislike Art Nouveau. It also shows that the considerable licence that was taken for granted in applied arts, like stained glass or posters, could also be applied to painting itself.

One of the significant features of the general amalgamation of styles and media at the turn of the century was that one art form could and did affect the development of others. The poster, soon after its coming of age, was able to take part in this exchange. Thus one of the most characteristic examples of Art Nouveau in any medium is the astonishing poster work of **Alphonse Mucha**. Mucha was born in 1860 in the then kingdom of Bohemia, and came to Paris in 1890. His work went through a phase of Art Nouveau expression, during which he designed posters in the fashionable 'Byzantine' style of ornamentation, as well as interiors - for example, for the jeweller, Georges Fouquet - and projects

for giant exhibition buildings. He later left Paris in order to live for a short time in New York and finally changed the style of his work to become a painter of Slavic themes on the grand scale. He died in Prague in 1930. His long working life therefore runs parallel to that of Cheret, who had also abandoned his fame as a poster designer in order to become a painter - but of less consequence. (In Cheret's case, failing eyesight after 1910 probably contributed to his change of working methods.)



Alphonse Mucha

Mucha's best-known posters are those associated with Sarah Bernhardt, although one feels that her spirit haunts all his poster designs. She was responsible for commissioning him to make his first successful poster - Gismonda (1894), which made his name in Paris. As a painter of the Bernhardt myth, **Mucha** proved to be her perfect counterpart. His appreciation of exotic clothes and jewellery found a living reality in her personality. He accompanied her to New York and his work was introduced to another world. It is significant that his designs were so extreme that when Art Nouveau, as a style, suffered an eclipse and disappeared temporarily from popular favour during the twenties, Mucha also was forgotten. He was

considered too local a phenomenon even to find a mention in a history of posters written by McKnight Kauffer in 1924. This is also an indication of the uncompromising nature of his considerable contribution to Art Nouveau: it has even been suggested that the oriental horseshoe-shaped motifs of Guimard's famous Metro entrances in Paris were, in fact, derived from the same design found in Mucha's posters. Until about 1897 his posters were probably executed by his own hand directly on the stone, but after that date one can detect a less brilliant manner: much of his work was being done by assistants because of the great demands made on him. It is interesting to know that he sometimes worked from photographs, not only for reference to the complicated draperies but also for the pose of the model.

Other poster makers in France whose work reflected the fashionable Art Nouveau style included **Manuel Orazi** (working between 1880 and 1905), who created jewellery for Meier-Graefe's famous shop, which became a centre of design: his poster for La Maison Moderne (c. 1905) has a wonderful feeling for the fashion accessories of the period. An earlier poster by Maurice Biais (1900) also shows the articles in the shop, which had been founded in 1899 and which rivalled the Maison de L'Art Nouveau. It was the latter, owned by Samuel Bing, from which the name of the movement was derived. **Georges de Feure** (1868-1928) made a number of designs in the applied arts for Bing and also designed the poster for the fifth exhibition of the Salon des Cent. Many artists made posters for these exhibitions, which were shown at 31 Rue Bonaparte, sponsored by Leon Deschamps; they could be mixed shows or the work of one artist (the total number of exhibits was not allowed to exceed a hundred). De Feure's posters feature fashionable women with pale, sad faces; one of his most elegant was that made for Le Journal des Ventes in 1897. **Hector Guimard** (1867-1942), the architect, also made a poster design, Exposition Salon An Figaro le Castel Beranger (1900), in which his well-known designs are related to lettering.



Manuel Orazi



Georges de Feure



Hector Guimard

In Belgium, Henri Meunier, Victor Mignot and **Privat-Livemont** (whose work reflects Mucha's style) were the most important artists to compare with those working in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century. In Liege, the publisher August Benard commissioned Armand Rassenfosse, Emile Berchmans and August Donnay to make designs for him in the late 1880s. Other poster designers in Belgium of importance were Adolphe Crespin, who designed Alcazar Royal (1894) with Edouard Duyck, and Henri Evenpoel. On the whole it can be said that many of the designs are more literal and less stylized than other works in this era of the art poster, the work of the Liege school being direct and simple. However, the effects of Paris designs are evident in Berchmans' Amer Mauguin or Rassenfosse's Huile Russe. In the Netherlands, the work of Braakensiek shows an affinity with that of Cheret; and two of the leading Dutch poster designers in this period were J. G. Van Caspel and Willy Sluiter. The unusual imagery produced by two Belgian artists, Van de Velde and Felicien Rops, and the Dutch painter Jan Toorop, are discussed below in an examination of the symbolism and iconography of Art Nouveau.



T. Privat-Livemont

In Hungary, Benczur and Rippl-Ronai were contemporaries of Cheret and, as in France, a tradition of advertising for circus performances and other events goes back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The most famous of the fin-de-siecle designers was Arpad Basch, who had trained in Paris, but whose style was still that of the illustrator: he was a particularly fine draughtsman. His work was reviewed in the magazine The Poster and an example of his designs was included in Les Maitres de L'Affiche, a monthly series of lithographed posters in reduced size, edited by Roger-Marx and issued in Paris from 1896 to 1900.

In Italy, poster design owed a great deal of its technical background to the publishing firm of Ricordi, which had provided the basis for commissioning posters. Among artists who worked for Ricordi were Leopoldo Metlicovitz, Mataloni (Caffaro Zeitting, 1900) and Adolfo Hohenstein, whose poster *Tosca* (1899) is a fine example of fin-de-siecle art, with its mixture of Art Nouveau decoration and theatrical drama. His posters, *Iris* (1898) and *Esposizione di Elettricita* (1899), also have monumental character. Leonardo Bistlofi's *Prima Esposizione Internazionale d'arte moderna decorativa Torino* (1902) has a Jugendstil quality about it. One of the best-known artists was **Leonetto Cappiello** (1875-1942). Like many poster designers who were working in Paris, he came from elsewhere - in his case, from Italy. He started to make his name in Paris in 1900 and his posters were among the first to anticipate a more modern approach to poster design.. Many of them derive from Cheret and other pioneers, but his work also represented a simplified version of fin-de-siecle designs which gave them the character of impoverished versions of the older works. In fact, he was the first to appreciate the quickening pace of life in the streets and his posters arc a link between the more leisurely world of the end of the nineteenth century and the new era created by the speeding motorist.



Leonetto Cappiello

In the 1890s the poster boom was at its height. Special editions were made for collectors; posters were sometimes stolen from their position on the walls. There were exhibitions of posters in Paris, and in 1890 a show at the Grolier Club in New York. Ernest Maindron, who had written the first article on posters in 1884 (in Paris) and the first volume on the poster's history in 1886, added a second volume (1886-95) in 1896. The following year a companion volume by various contributors was also issued dealing with posters in other countries. In England, the first volume of *The Studio* contained an article on poster-collecting (Art Nouveau was sometimes known as the 'Studio style') and in 1898 the magazine *The Poster* was founded. The craze for poster-collecting was a short one among the general public, although posters have always been sought after by specialists. Significantly *The Poster* was merged with *The Art Collector* in 1900, reflecting a general decline in the exceptional enthusiasm that the appearance of the poster had originally generated.

In the United States, poster design in the **Art Nouveau** style was brilliantly shown in the work of **Will Bradley** (1868-1962). He made a number of designs for *The Chap Book*, to which Toulouse-Lautrec and Aubrey Beardsley had also contributed. After a long and

distinguished working life in graphics in the United States, he was awarded the gold medal of the American Institute of Graphic Arts in 1954. **Edward Penfield** (1886-1926) also produced a number of posters which, like Bradley's, not only used the Paris style but added a clear-cut element that gave a feeling of solidarity to the European designs. Other poster artists in the United States at this time were Ethel Reed, Frank Hazenplug and Will Carqueville, all of whom worked in the Art Nouveau style.



Will Bradley



Edward Penfield

Apart from the effect of seeing Mucha's work during Sarah Bernhardt's tours, Americans would have seen magazines and copies of *The Yellow Book*, and the work of such artists as Grasset, who designed a cover for *Harper's Magazine* in 1889 and posters for *The Century*. A first-hand account of the poster situation comes from the Englishman F. Scotson-Clark, who visited the United States in the nineties:

Until the winter of 1894, the artistic poster was practically unknown in the United States. The only things of the kind, and they were very excellent and very original, were the *Harper's Magazine* window bills by Edward Penfield. But during the latter part of 1893 and the early half of 1894, the name and work of Aubrey Beardsley had become known, and popular as was his success amongst a large class in England, his fame was tenfold in America. Every twopenny-halfpenny town had its 'Beardsley Artist', and large cities simply teemed with them. Some borrowed his ideas and adapted them to their own uses; others imitated, until one asked oneself: 'is this done by the English or American B?'

The 'American B' was of course Bradley; and besides Scotson-Clark himself, another English-born artist was at work there -Louis Rhead, who produced some very colourful

posters in the Art Nouveau manner. In England, however, the position of Art Nouveau was a strange one. Whereas the style had derived much of its original stimulus from English sources, like the Pre-Raphaelites and William Morris, the application of their ideas as international Art Nouveau was slow to return (the position in neighbouring Scotland was different). James Pryde, who had studied in Paris before returning to England and a subsequent career as a well-known painter gives an account of the difference between the attitude towards poster design in Paris and in London:

At that time posters in England were, with two or three exceptions, anything but striking, although there were some very interesting poster artists working in Paris. For example, Cheret, who did some notable work for the Divan Japonais, and Toulouse Lautrec, who in addition to affiches for the same cafe chantant did some remarkable designs for Yvette Guilbert, Jane Avril, Caudicux and others.

Poster art in England was just being redeemed by Dudley Hardy whose *Yellow Girl* for the Gaiety Theatre was a clever piece of work; Maurice Greiffenhagen, later a Royal Academician, who did a poster for the Pall Mall Budget and **Frederick Walker** whose *Woman in White* [1871] really seemed like an enlarged reproduction of a black-and-white drawing of his own. There was also Aubrey Beardsley's poster for what was then regarded as the advanced theatre in London, the Avenue [1894]. This last found little favour with Punch which, referring to it, made the suggestion: 'ave a new poster. There were oases in the desert of others designed by regular -workers for various firms. This was the condition of affairs when I decided to become a poster artist.



Frederick Walker

Pryde goes on to say that he and his colleague, William Nicholson, who had also studied in Paris, tackled the problem together. They did this, in what must then have seemed a very amateurish way, by making paper cut-outs and pasting them onto board. No lettering was included; their intention was that any suitable title could be added later. The fact remains that, in spite of what appears to be an unassuming way of working, they produced original and unorthodox results. They called themselves the Beggarstaff Brothers after seeing the name on a sack ('it seemed such a good hearty old English name') and they admitted designing posters 'to afford the luxury of painting pictures'. The ten or so works they made are all exceptional. *Girl on a Sofa* (1895) was rejected at the time but has now taken its place as one of the outstanding designs of the period in any country. Their work belongs, in style, more to the English Arts and Crafts movement than to international Art Nouveau. It does, however, relate to the posters of Toulouse-Lautrec and one can see their ideas continuing in the work of the great German poster designer, Ludwig Hohlweg; they were pioneers in the use of large flat areas of colour and compositions of extreme simplicity.

Other designers in England at the time, such as Dudley Hardy and John Hassall, produced posters for entertainments in the popular idiom. Although the subject-matter was similar to that of their contemporaries in Paris, they used the cartoonist's imagery and their work suffers, for example, in comparison with Lautrec's. They nevertheless produced some brilliant examples of popular humour.

Posters that were more in the style of Art Nouveau came from Sidney Ransom (working under the pseudonym of Mosnar Yendis) - e.g., his cover for the first volume of *The Poster* in 1899. Walter Crane's posters, which are good examples of Art Nouveau, were too close to his illustrative work, and in any case he expressed an aversion to the element of 'shouting' that posters represented.

The most significant contribution to **Art Nouveau** posters from England came from **Aubrey Beardsley** in spite of the close connection between his posters and his illustrative material. The sensitive and the intense are two aspects of art often greeted with suspicion - certainly by the hearty element that existed in Edwardian England. Comic opera and parody were areas of expression in which the English public could treat, with confidence, art that proved too stylized or which made them feel self-conscious. A thoroughgoing aesthete was expected to conform to the abnormal: Beardsley's work was sufficiently uncompromising and he remains one of the most important influences in the history of design. His work provides a link with a new element that was making another contribution to the arts in general and to posters in particular.



Aubrey Beardsley

POSTERS AND SYMBOLISM

The **Symbolist** movement, which in France is associated with painters such as **Gauguin** and **Maurice Denis**, used some of the devices and decoration of the wider style known as Art Nouveau but in a special way. Briefly, one can say that Symbolist art affected poster design by reintroducing iconography as a pictorial element. Symbolist artists used the writhing linear patterns and amorphous shapes of Art Nouveau to describe things sacred and profane. To the nineteenth century, with its veneers of propriety, it was possible to say something of those areas of human experience that were generally left to the imagination, Images that could express, in equivalent terms, passion and excitement were loaded with classical or religious references, for a society that could thus mask its feelings. Salome, the Sphinx, Pan, Medusa, the child-woman, the serpent, are all subject objects of painting, poster and poetry. Josef Sattler's design for Pan (1895) is an example.

One must also remember that at this time the art-collecting public - in England, to take one country as an example - was changing. In place of the Establishment, whose tastes were on the whole conservative and therefore still linked to Classicism and the eighteenth century, we now find a new middle class that had none of these preconceived attachments. At this time, too, the Tractarians, closely associated with the **Pre-Raphaelites**, were trying to revive a sense of spirituality in the doctrine and liturgy of the Church of England, then one of the central pillars of society. This High Church' Movement, Pre-Raphaelitism and the Gothic Revival formed a direct chain of new thinking in religious and artistic terms in England. The effect on architecture as well as poster design is significant. On the Continent, the same process existed and was given expression by writers like Huysmans, who were fascinated by the liturgical rituals of the Catholic Church. He and other artists extended their experiences into more experimental spheres of the occult: black magic, theosophy, the theories of the Rosicrucians and the activities of Sar Josphin Peladan, whose teachings equated the role of the artist with that of the priest.

The pictorial designs of the artists connected with these movements affect the poster directly because, as documents, their posters and paintings contained pictorial information that did not necessarily have to be presented in a naturalistic way. Enlarged, almost expressionist-like faces, decorative borders composed of eyes, Rosicrucian and ancient signs, arc mixed together with little regard for the traditional rules of pictorial composition. Many of the paintings of the Symbolists look like posters, with their allegorical subject-matter, subjective colour and striking imagery. This revival of iconography was of great importance to both painting and graphics. The use of symbols in a design gives that work its own reality, its own unity; objects do not need to be arranged in the naturalistic limits of a single viewpoint that are imposed by a tradition of illusionist easel painting.

Most of the leading **Symbolist** painters also produced posters. **Maurice Denis** wrote of posters in 1920: 'The important thing is to find a silhouette that is expressive, a symbol which, simply by its forms and colours, can force its attention on a crowd and dominate the passer-by. The post is a banner, an emblem, a sign: in hoc signo vinces.'

His remark, made after the initial event, applies to the growing powers of the poster at the turn of the century. Perhaps the most impressive example of commercial symbolism - showing how the advertisement could make use of these developments - is the poster *Delftsche Slaolie* (1895) by the Dutch artist, **Jan Toorop**. This work contains a mixture of Art Nouveau devices and stylization, as well as a straightforward bottle of salad oil. A brief account of Toorop's background gives an idea of the associations between the various Symbolist groups in Belgium, France and England. He was born in Java in 1858 of Norwegian and Oriental parents. He came to Europe at an early age and in 1882 met **Van de Velde**, **James Ensor** and Khnopff in Brussels. A poster made by Khnopff in 1891 gives a list of invitees to the 8th exhibition of Les XX, and includes the names of Gauguin, Cheret, Seurat, Crane and Wilson Steer. Toorop also exhibited with Les XX. In addition, his work appeared at the first Salon of the Rose + Croix (1892) in Paris. (Among those who were connected with the Rosicrucian sect and designed posters for the movement were Edmond Aman-Jean, Marcel Lenoir, Armand Point, Leonard Surluis, and Carlos Schwabe.) Toorop was also interested in the work of Beardsley and William Morris; he passed through a phase of socialism, finally becoming a Catholic convert. He died in 1928.



Maurice Denis



Jan Toorop



Henri Van de Velde

His contemporaries included **Felicien Rops** (1833-98), who also showed with Les XX. Rops

designed only three posters - that for Les Legendes Flamandes shows the melodramatic element of the macabre side of his work. Rops was also well known for his erotic drawings and engravings. The element of voyeurism that runs through his work has since become acceptable in public advertising. However, the moralizing element so obvious in Rops's work is absent from the antics displayed in the underwear posters eighty years later - and also from the posters and graphics of the Underground Movement. As a precursor of the freer imagery of the 1960s Rops's work shows that, in spite of a change of attitude, the devices of presenting the semi-naked have remained constant.

The name of **Henri Van de Velde** is associated with many of the significant developments in the applied arts of the early twentieth century. He was one of the founders of the Deutscher Werkbund in 1907, although as a Belgian he decided to leave Germany in 1914. He recommended as his successor Walter Gropius, who later became the first director of the Bauhaus. Van de Velde died in 1957. He designed only one poster - for the firm of food manufacturers,

Tropon (1897) - although he also made a series of related designs for them. This single poster remains a key example of **Art Nouveau** design in any medium. It shows admirably how a poster could contribute to design, and how, in fact it anticipated some of the developments in decorative abstract painting later on.

The **Symbolists** made another contribution to the development of pictorial design which affected the course of painting as well as that of design in advertising: they displayed different aspects of the same idea within the same work of art. In this way past and present, and different aspects of the same theme, such as the 'sacred' and the 'profane', could be displayed simultaneously. Furthermore, they combined art forms so that the same idea could exist pictorially, musically and in words. A musical and liturgical event seems to be an apt description for the Solemn Mass at Saint Germain l'Auxerrois on 10 March 1892: music by the superhuman Wagner and a figure who was to become part of avant-garde circles in the early twentieth century - Erik Satie. Posters of the Rose + Croix display the same multifarious character and showed the spirit of the nineteenth century in terms of another age. The graphic use of these methods has become part of the language of posters ever since. It was not until the 1960s, however, that another generation was to discover just how meaningful these works had been.

HIPPY POSTERS

In November 1965 an exhibition of 'Jugendstil and Expressionism in German Posters' was held at the University Art Gallery on the Berkeley campus of the University of California. This proved to be of special interest to designers of a new development in artistic style - the Hippy poster - a bizarre, stimulating form of decoration that owes a great deal to **Art Nouveau** and **Symbolist** designs of the turn of the century. There are many points of similarity. In the first place, designers of the Hippy posters make full use of the past, as though it were a direct part of their experience; stylistically the past participates in the present. A poster design such as that in the 1960s by Robert McClay (Funky Features) is related to Rose+ Croix designs. In the 1890s Peladan and his followers were disillusioned with a world of materialism that proved to be hollow; his search for spiritual qualities was revived by a section of society in the 1960s. The long robes, flowing beards, drugs and unisex are expressions of both Symbolist and Hippy. The cult of the bizarre has returned with renewed force in a materialistic society that has multiplied its technical tricks a thousand

times but is still no wiser.

The Hippy poster is brighter, slicker, and more accessible than its predecessor. Some of the methods used by poster designers in the 1890s have been revived - but they have been exaggerated and their effect extended. In two posters from the 1960s, Young Bloods by **Victor Moscoso**, a former student of Albers, and Avalon Ballroom by Bob Schnepf, a dazzling effect is produced by juxtaposing complementary colours and confusing the spectator by allowing one pattern to run into another.



Victor Moscoso



Victor Moscoso



Victor Moscoso

Two works by **Will Bradley** from the 1890s -The Chap Book (1894-95) and Victor Bicycles - relied on a similar element of confusion. In these designs the decoration of foliage and the lettering arc deliberately blended, so that it is quite difficult to distinguish the message. One finds similar design ambiguities in the work of **Gustav Klimt**. Neither in 1890 or 1960 is this confusion part of an attempt to make a private code for the initiated, but is in both cases an appeal to the senses rather than to reason. It is an attempt to defy interpretation. In presenting a confused pattern - which may seem a contradictory element when dealing with communications - the artist is saying, 'enjoy - let the effect ride over you - through you -use it - live it'. This attitude has even spread to criticism. Susan Sontag, in an essay written in 1964 and published in Evergreen Review, said:

The aim of all commentary on art should now be to make works of art - and, by analogy, our own experience - more, rather than less real to us. The function of criticism should be to show 'how it is what it is,' even 'that it is what it is,' rather than to show 'what it means.'

This is the key to many poster designs of the 1960s - from the commercial posters advocating the 'consumer society' way of life at one end of the scale to the posters that suggest 'Love' or 'Peace' as a philosophy. Many of these designs rely on a sensuous appeal, and represent a

break in the attitude that had been built up during the previous decades when the designer developed techniques of delivering clear, concise messages. In the 1960s the general public developed a technique of seeing without reading - even hearing without really listening. It is very much an attitude of mind: the messages come across through the senses generally.

In this way the Hippy poster is used to create an environment - in itself another manifestation of total art, as was Art Nouveau. The display of one Hippy poster is as ridiculous as placing one Art Nouveau article by itself as an object of taste. It can be done, but the true effect is achieved only if an entire environment is created: indeed, it is a way of life. Art Nouveau interiors reflected the architecture of the exterior and consisted of wallpaper, furniture, tableware, as well as all forms of decoration, including paintings and even clothing. Yet the **Symbolist** element in **Art Nouveau** reduced what might have been art as a total religion on a Wagnerian scale to the dimensions of a private cult. The Hippy poster has a more widespread effect because of the technical revolution in printing: the development of typesetting machines and the use of offset lithography. This has made possible the mass-production of colour work and low-key black and white photographic posters on a large scale. Legitimate publishing firms have been able to take advantage of this situation, but so also have the private presses.

It is now possible to collect rather crude reproductions of posters and poster-size photographs which seem to have an almost universal uniformity in Europe and the United States. Heroes such as Che Guevara share the privacy of the domestic wall with W. C. Fields, designs by Beardsley and the posters of **Toulouse-Lautrec**.

Mucha and Steinlen have reappeared alongside images of Marlene Dietrich, Brigitte Bardot and Karl Marx, together with many anonymous girls posing in the manner already established by **Felicien Rops** and others. This constant bombardment of the senses has had the effect of producing a conditioned public whose tastes in visual experience are sophisticated. The effect of this poster craze on poster advertising generally has been to turn the commercial advertisement, and even the political poster, into a decorative mural and to link posters of the 1970s with the designs of the 1880s and 1890s almost a hundred years ago. An example of direct quotation appeared in Paul Christodoulou's poster (1967) for the Elliott Shoe Company in London. The sources, taken from the works of **Aubrey Beardsley**, have been catalogued by the Print Room of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, in a comprehensive list that shows how popular this sort of material had become in the 1960s:

The design contains elements from Beardsley's illustrations to *The Wonderful History of Vergilius the Sorcerer*, *Salome* - including the Stomach Dance, *The Woman in the Moon*, *Enter Herodias*, *the Eyes of Herod*, *The Toilette* and the title page; *Lysistrata haranguing the Athenian Women*, *Massalina returning from the bath*, *Neophyte* and . . . *the Black Art*, *the kiss of Judas*, *Sganarelle and the Beggar*; the *Pall Mall Magazine*, cover design for the *Yellow Book*, Vols I and IV and a self portrait.

There are also sources of contemporary imagery in the posters of the 1960s, although this may be mixed with a style from the past. Science fiction, comics and mass-media references appear in many of the posters of the various Underground movements. In England, Mal Dean, John Hurford and Mike English have used mass-media references and Martin Sharp a series of phallic designs based on comic-strip techniques. The American designer Peter Max,

who claimed that he wanted to redecorate the world, expresses the spirit of many poster designers. A series of established billboard sites in the United States, however, were suddenly covered in 1968 with a set of mysterious designs that showed the head of a young man with a great deal of hair - the caption merely read 'Get a haircut - Beautify America'. Established advertising has not been slow to make use of new methods. The most striking studio of art associates to appear in the West is probably the American firm Push Pin whose Almanack was first issued in 1954. Two of the founder members, Milton Glaser and Seymour Chwast, showed their work together with their associates in the Pavillon de Marsan in Paris in 1970, making yet another link between the decorative advertisements of Europe in the 18 80s and California in the 1960s.

However, the recent proliferation of posters and pseudo-posters, in what has been described as a poster-mania, produces a mass of material in which the vitality of the medium is weakened. At the start of their book, *Après le Cubisme*, published in 1918, Amedee Ozenfant and Le Corbusier quoted a statement by Voltaire that is as significant in the 1970s as it was at the end of the First World War: 'The causes of decadence are facility in working well, weariness with what is good and a taste for the bizarre.'