

The Poster: A Visual History

by Gill Saunders, Margaret Timmers, Catherine Flood, and Zorian Clayton. Thames & Hudson, April 2020. 304 p. ill. ISBN 9780500480380 (h/c), \$65.00.

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The Poster: A Visual History, edited by Gill Saunders, Senior Curator of Prints in the Word & Image Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum of Art and Design (V&A) and Margaret Timmers, former Senior Curator, draws from the extensive V&A Poster Collection. Saunders and Timmers, along with V&A curators, Zorian Clayton and Catherine Flood, contribute thematic essays that offer an overview of the poster as a visual medium. At first glance and through outward appearances, the book is simply an aesthetically pleasing coffee table addition, but it packs more in its pages than just pretty imagery. Readers can explore the technological, socio-cultural, and political implications of the poster throughout history, couched in important and critical contexts.

The first chapter offers basic history and context for poster art, presenting the poster as a form of communication that can be anything and everything all at once--artwork and advertisement; popular and subversive; kitschy and critical. Subsequent chapters take a subject-oriented approach: Performance & Entertainment, Sport & Recreation, Art & Exhibitions, Commerce & Consumption, Travel & Transport, Politics, and Protest & Propaganda. The final chapter, The Poster in the Digital Age, begins to peel back the layers of complexity of the poster in today's virtual world. Compelling points for further investigation are brought up, such as the allowance of more participatory creative practices in the digital poster, as well as the continued value of the physical poster as witnessed through current protest and activism. The book concludes with a history of the V&A Poster Collection and its cultural importance.

Though the history and analysis in this book is rich, it still only scratches the surface of poster art, and does so with a primarily Western point of view--any more global inclusions are cursory. However, attempting to provide a complete history of the poster across the entire world would require multiple volumes. The majority of the content focuses on western Europe and the United States, though there is significant discussion of Soviet Europe and to a lesser extent some brief references to the poster in Japan, Korea, and India. A particularly nice feature of this volume is its over 300 colored illustrations. Every image includes a detailed caption giving specific historical context, design, and processes of the piece.

The Poster is an excellent introductory level text on the topic for art students, undergraduates, or anyone with an interest in the history and cultural relevance of posters. A style glossary and printing process section at the end of the volume explain principles and practices that the more casual reader may be unfamiliar with, while an extensive bibliography opens up the door for deeper exploration into particular points, persons, or topics of interest.