The Gerard Herbst Poster Collection

The University of Melbourne Art Collection

The posters in this display have been selected from the Gerard Herbst Poster Collection. The Herbst Collection contains over 2,000 individual posters, donated in 1997 by Dr Gerard Herbst, and now managed as a whole by the Ian Potter Museum of Art. The collection is extremely significant as a great body of poster design, focusing on excellence in poster production and representing many international schools and periods.

Prior to the donation of the collection, Gerard Herbst had been collecting examples of excellent international design in posters for the last four decades, focusing on the design schools and studios of Germany, Switzerland, Finland, and Poland, and including examples from Italy, Greece, Japan, and Australia amongst others. Herbst is himself a designer, originally trained in Germany under Bauhaus principles before he came to Australia in 1939. His influence on Australian design has been significant, as the head of Industrial Design at RMIT from 1960 to 1976, and as an energetic advocate of excellence in design and the importance of learning from best international examples. With this aim in mind, Herbst organised many exhibitions of posters, displaying national styles developed in Switzerland, Japan and Poland, and exploring design related to specific genres, such as the film or festival poster. Dr Herbst has given his collection to the University of Melbourne to promote the importance of the art of the poster in improving design practice in Australia, through regular exhibitions and access for students and the public to the collection.
Bon Voyage: Selections from the Gerard Herbst Poster Collection

The travel poster is one of the key genres within the history of the poster. Initially dominated by text detailing routes and fares, posters for shipping lines focused on the market demand for freight and migration transport. With the growth of tourism in the later nineteenth century, railway companies used new printing technologies to present alluring and colourful images of newly accessible holiday destinations. In the twentieth century, airlines modified this design tradition, combining the existing imagery of exotic destinations with the promise of global reach.

Travel posters present fascinating examples of graphic design, combining both reason and romance. The viewer must be convinced of the reliability and superiority of the transport provider but equally must be tempted to make an emotional decision based on the promise of relaxation and adventure. In meeting these demands, travel posters often emphasise the distance of destinations, and their difference from the traveller's home culture. In the latter case, exotic costume, folk imagery, nostalgic style and rich colour are brought into play. Bold, simple typography, often stripped of any decorative embellishments, confers a reassuring sense of modernity and efficiency to airlines and railways.

The posters on display are a selection from the many travel posters held in the Gerard Herbst Poster Collection. They are evidence of the immense growth of tourism and air travel after World War II, but also of the persistence of nineteenth-century colonialism and romanticism within the mentality of the tourist.