

Vintage Posters

Vintage Posters, as collectibles, carry a certain cachet, as rescued fragments of a lost past. Original authentic vintage European poster advertising has come to be recognized as a highly collectible form of art, whether for pleasure or for investment purposes. World-renowned museums exhibit vintage posters and many have permanent collections. Magnificent examples of such vintage poster collections can be found at the Louvre in Paris, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern, in New York, and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Cheret was the first to display his work via the medium of poster advertising in the 1880's. He is credited with inventing the new vintage poster art form, and was awarded the Legion of Honor in 1899. His style and talent so glamorized the profession of the poster artist that it was considered a very respectable and desirable career. Cheret was also a savvy businessman and he constructed a printing shop next to his home for producing vintage posters. It attracted many artists such as Grasset and Steinlen for the single purpose of producing and promoting advertising art.

Advertising agencies of that era would commission, or accept from free-lance artists, an original painting, referred to as a "maquette". This original piece was usually delivered in the form of a "gouache" or watercolor. If the "maquette" was accepted by the agency, the artwork would be recreated on a soft Bavarian limestone surface. This lithographic printing process involved as many as 17 individual color applications, which had to be applied to each individual paper one color at a time. Each new color application required that the limestone surface be washed repeatedly during the application of that individual color. When a new color was introduced, likewise a new stone was introduced, which was designed to accept the placement of the new color. Cross like markings, usually found at the top and bottom of the poster are the printer's registration marks, placed there for the purpose of keeping the color applications in their appropriate places when a new stone was introduced. A press was used to adhere the colored ink on the limestone, onto the paper. Over 65 yrs. of use of this lithographic process have been documented for vintage posters.

When the printing was complete the finished posters were glued or tacked to walls and kiosks across their country of origin. These colorful advertisements created a festival-like atmosphere on the otherwise drab and dreary streets of Europe. The people, the art critics and the connoisseurs alike, were delighted that this new form of advertising and poster art had transformed their cities and towns into open-air art museums.

As collectors grew more passionate, posters were burglarized from billboards at an alarming rate, and it became increasingly difficult for advertisers to keep posters on the streets. As a solution to the problem, printers increased production and began selling posters to the public.

Today the posters are rare. Most vintage posters have suffered the ravages of time and many were abused by the elements while they were serving their intended purpose as posted advertisements.