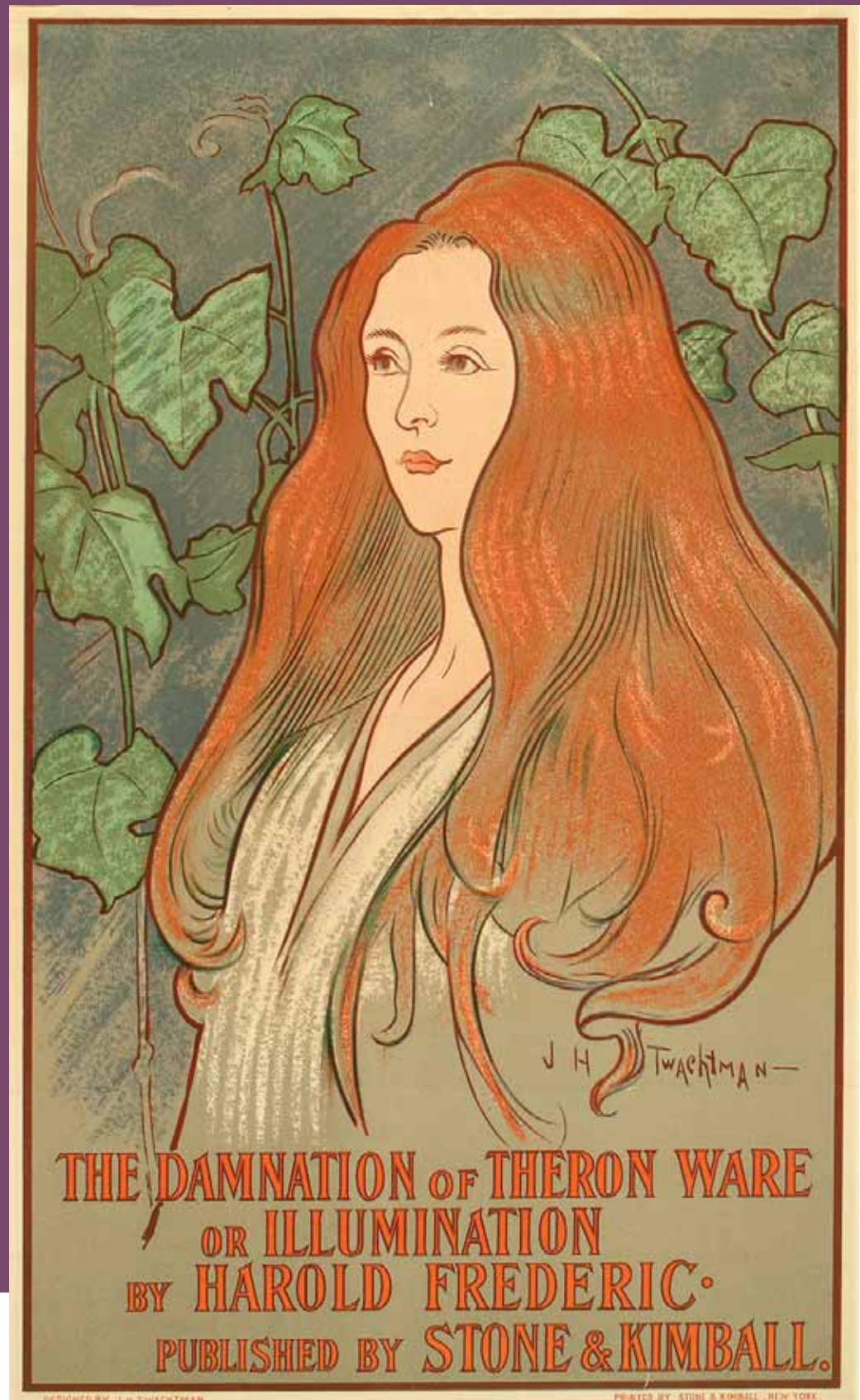


# CONSUMING DESIRES

Modern Marketing Posters, 1880-1918

June 26 through  
October 2, 2005



On the Cover:  
John Henry Twachtman,  
*The Damnation of Theron Ware*, c.1896  
DAM 1982-20  
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan



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Joyce K. Schiller, *Curator*

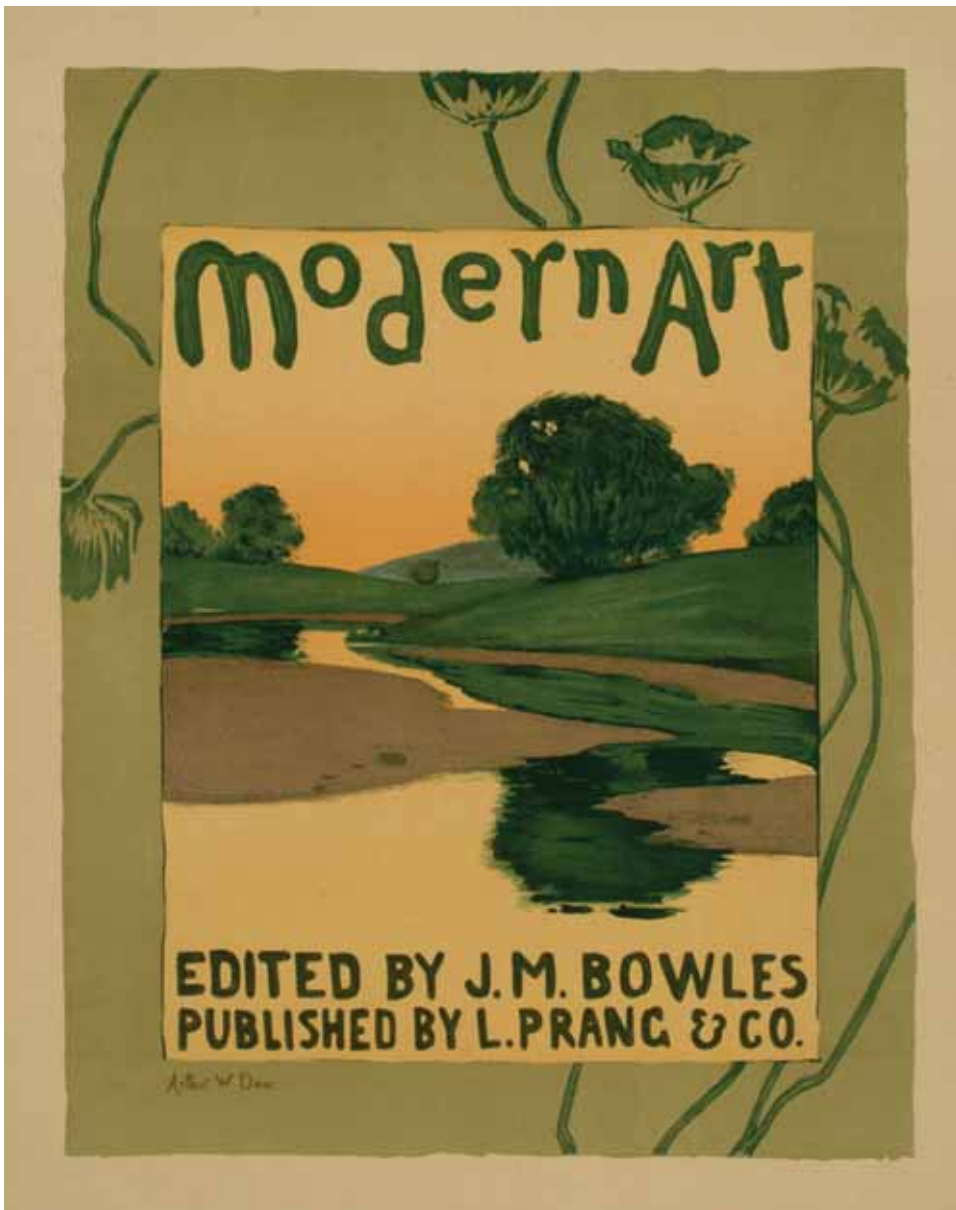
and

Heather Campbell Coyle, *Assistant Curator*

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# Posters

are so much a part of our aesthetic world we cannot imagine a time without them. Some, like Arthur Wesley Dow's *Modern Art*, 1895, are so familiar that they can seem unremarkable. Because they are attractive and relatively affordable, most of us have lived with posters – from rock concerts, art exhibitions or the Sierra Club – as part of our décor. We prize them for their colors and style, or we acquire a poster for its message, such as “save our planet – save our air,” but we rarely seem to make the connection that posters were created as an advertising medium. A little more than a hundred years ago posters were a new art form attracting new audiences.



Arthur Wesley Dow,  
*Modern Art*, 1895  
DAM, 1985-8 Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

Jules Chéret (1836-1932), a French lithographer turned artist, created the first modern artistic posters in the 1880s. Prior to that, posters, made via lithography and common in Europe since the 1700s, were laden primarily with written information, and illustrated posters featured crude line drawings or detailed realistic renderings, like the illustrations in magazines. Posters and their predecessors, posted bills, became increasingly economical due to the development of the mechanized rotary press, a new technology that replaced the earlier method of making one sheet at a time on hand-cranked presses. Developments in lithography – such as the use of lighter and larger zinc plates instead of heavy lithography stones – further simplified the production of artistic posters.<sup>1</sup> Combined with Chéret’s artistic talent, these technical developments led to a new type of advertising placard – the modern illustrated poster.

A printer by trade, Chéret understood the possibilities presented by the modernization of the lithographic process, and as a Parisian he understood how posters needed to function in a busy metropolis. Designed to attract attention from a distance, Chéret’s posters almost always spotlight attractive women, and he drew his figures broadly with flat color and minimal detail. He was a pioneer in integrating text and image, selecting typefaces or drawing letters in a style that responded to his figures. Equally important, Chéret was engaged with contemporary art. With their loose handling and intense colors, his posters betray the influence of impressionist and post-impressionist art, and like these Parisian painters, his work was self-consciously modern and cosmopolitan.



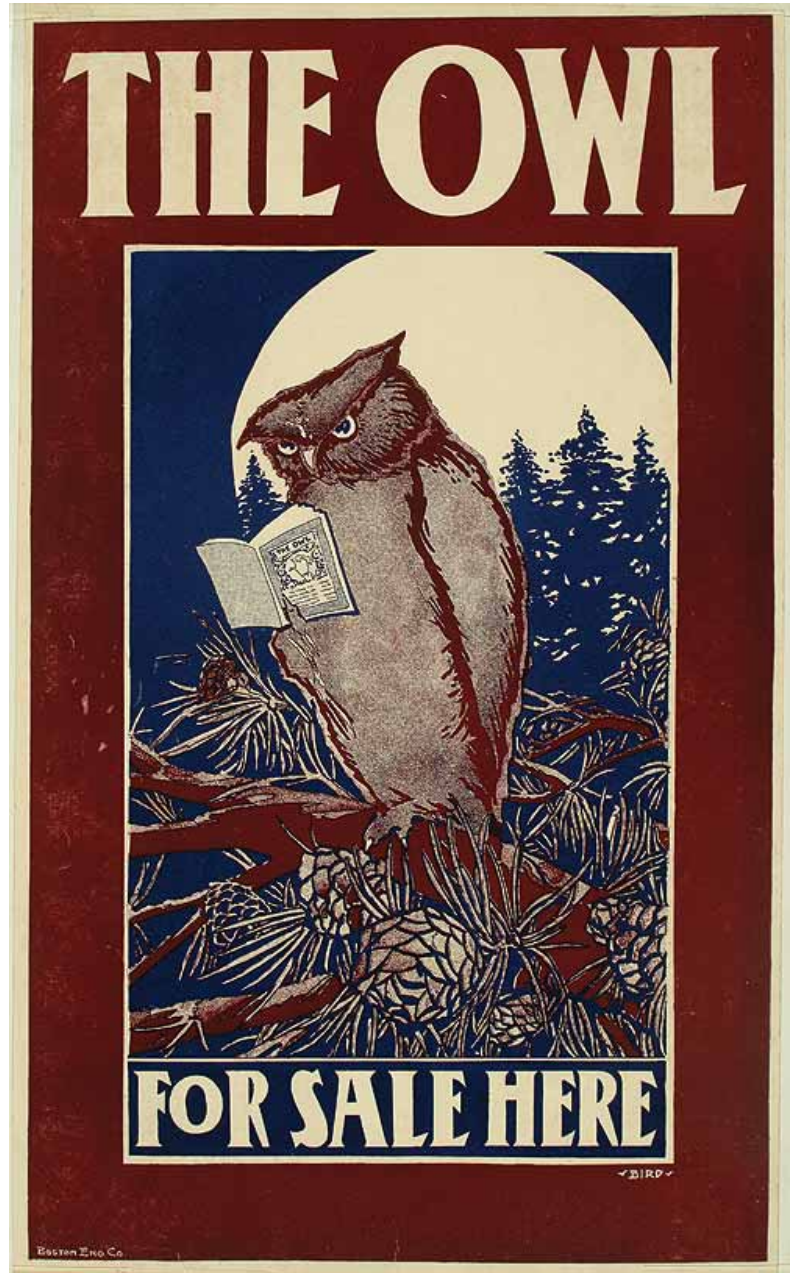
Jules Chéret,  
*Musée Grévin Pantomimes Lumineuses*, 1896  
Dam 1986-206 Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

Chéret’s use of broad areas of flat color may reflect the influence of Japanese art. Around the turn of the century, many artists were influenced by Japanese woodblock prints from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that were making their way into European and American markets. Certain aspects of these prints became central to the look of the new artistic posters. Like Chéret, many poster designers adopted the Japanese fondness for broad sections of color to format their compositions, and these areas of flat color were easily transformed into legible lithographs. Artists and advertisers realized how visually effective these flat-colored designs were and how comparatively inexpensive they were to produce. From the Japanese pictorial tradition, artists also adopted the choice of strong colors, a preference for images of everyday life, and the incidental cropping of a scene as though the viewer was seeing the scene through a door or window. While few posters directly copy individual Japanese prints, the artistic posters of the 1890s utilized Japanese aesthetics and techniques to full advantage.

As the new style spread to other artists and other nations, other modern artistic interests were incorporated. Both the English Arts and Crafts style and the French and Belgian art nouveau aesthetic were extremely influential to the look of modern posters. Born in Britain, the Arts and Crafts movement opposed machine production of the Industrial Revolution in favor of hand craftsmanship and celebrated the model of the medieval workshop. This attitude encouraged the creation of objects in which the decoration was integral to the piece itself. In the world of print- and book-making, the art of woodcutting was transformed and hand-crafted books were produced in limited editions by small publishers, like William Morris's Kelmscott Press. Morris promoted decorative forms derived from nature, and the stylized floral and foliate borders on his book pages influenced the poster designs of Will Bradley (1868-1962). Other artists like Elisha Brown Bird (1867-1943) experimented with images resembling woodcuts, as seen in his *The Owl for Sale Here*.

Posters were undoubtedly a production of their time - a moment at the turn-of-the-century when art nouveau was the newest, most innovative decorative style in Europe. The term "art nouveau" (French for "new art") was taken from a shop opened by Samuel Bing in Paris in 1895. The style is characterized by the use of curving floral and foliate forms marked by asymmetry. Human figures, usually females with flowing hair, are arranged asymmetrically within the picture. Art nouveau owes both the concurrent arts and crafts movement and the growing interest in Japanese prints for some of its forms and style.

In the world of poster design, art nouveau influence was evident throughout Europe and America. Some of Will Bradley's most famous posters were executed in a very stylized art nouveau, inspired by the elegant and expressive illustrations of the English artist Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898). But while Beardsley often restricted himself to working in black and white, Bradley reveled in the juxtaposition of color complements, especially red and green



Elisha Brown Bird  
*The Owl for sale here*  
 DAM, 1977-17  
 Gift of Helen Farr Sloan



Will Bradley,  
*When Hearts Are Trumps*, c.1895  
 DAM 1986-153  
 Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

tones. His poster promoting Tom Hall's novel *When Hearts Are Trumps* features the typical sinuous lines, stylized foliage and asymmetrical arrangement. Another instance of this influence is Elisha Brown Bird's poster for *The Poster*, 1896, commissioned as the first poster for a magazine of the same name. [See page 11.] And with its graceful lines and asymmetrical composition, Louis John Rhead's (1857-1926) poster promoting advertising in *The Sun*, 1894 is yet another example of an art nouveau design.

Since posters were meant to appeal to a broad audience – the man on the street, so to speak – advertisers and poster designers tried to reach as wide an audience as possible. With their bright colors and bold graphics, illustrated posters caught the eyes of hurried pedestrians, making them ideal tools for street-side advertising. A vast array of talented artists, illustrators and printers were soon employed producing posters to promote products, amusements and publications. By the beginning of the 1890s posters inspired by French examples appeared all over Europe, and publishers of American magazines, books and newspapers began to commission artistic advertising posters to market their products.<sup>ii</sup> With the arrival of the modern illustrated poster in America, the style and form became truly international.

Initially, French poster designs were the primary influence on American production because they were seen in the United States both in example and in exhibition, and reproduced and discussed in books and magazines. As early as the 1880s, enterprising American publishers hired European poster designers to promote their products. In 1882 Swiss-born French artist Eugène Grasset (1841-1919) designed a cover for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* Thanksgiving Day issue, and he designed two holiday posters for *Harper's Monthly Magazine* in 1889. That same year, English-born American artist Louis Rhead created holiday posters for *Century Magazine* and for *St. Nicholas* magazine.<sup>iii</sup>



Louis Rhead,  
*Advertising in The Sun  
 Gives Best Results*, 1894  
 DAM 1985-10  
 Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

With the rising popularity of posters, publications and exhibitions of posters transformed this commonplace street advertising into a recognized, collectable art form in Europe and the United States. In 1886 a book was published in Paris chronicling the history of outdoor advertising, and the first successful poster exhibition was held in Nantes, France in 1889. In America, the Grolier Club of New York hosted an exhibition of posters in 1890 that featured many examples by Chéret, and in 1892 *Century Magazine* published the first American article on the new poster designs. The author Brander Matthews called the phenomenon “one of the most interesting manifestations of modern decorative art” in his opening sentence.<sup>iv</sup>

In 1892 Harper and Brothers hired the young Edward Penfield (1866-1925) as a staff artist and the following year promoted him to art director. In addition to supervising the illustrators for the various Harper publications and the layout of the magazines, each month Penfield was charged to create an original poster to announce the arrival of each number of *Harper's Monthly*. Between March 1893 and August 1899, Penfield produced over sixty posters advertising *Harper's* issues.<sup>v</sup>

He appreciated the possibilities as well as the limitations of the lithographic process and designed his posters accordingly. Typically Penfield included a few basic elements in each poster: the name of the magazine, the month, and one or more people holding or reading an issue of *Harper's*. Penfield explained his approach in an article he wrote for *The Limner*:

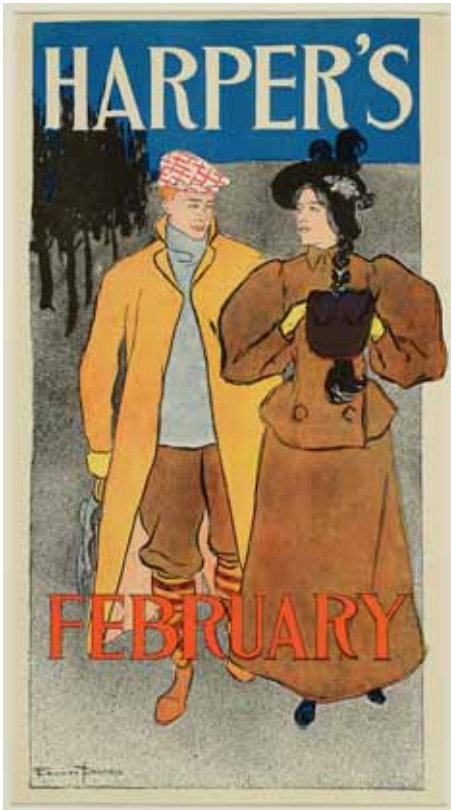
It is more a question of what to leave out than what to put in when designing a poster.

If you wish to get the true value of a color it stands to reason that it should be used as broadly and purely as possible. Every additional line, or any shading you place upon it detracts from its effect. If you wish to get the full effect you must keep that effect broad and simple.<sup>vi</sup>

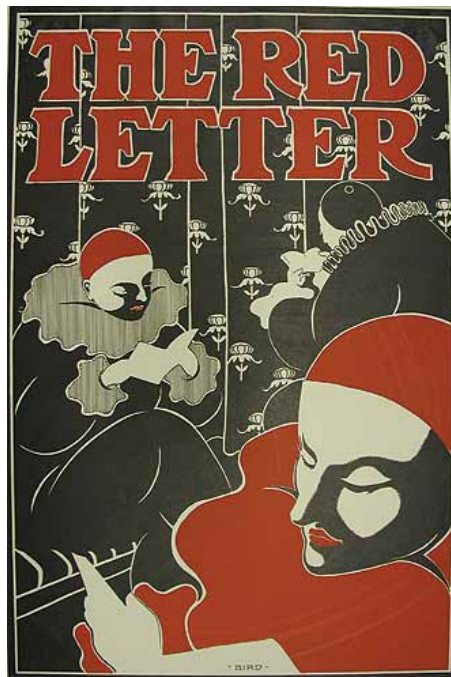
Like Chéret before him, Penfield exploited lithography's facility for creating textured surfaces, juxtaposing flat areas with stippled ones, as seen in his poster for *Harper's February* from 1896. In the same picture, the artist used the Japanese style of scene cropping, and he further activated the image



Will Carqueville,  
*Lippincott's July*, 1985  
DAM 1977-308  
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan



Edward Penfield,  
*Harper's February*, 1896  
 DAM 1969-5  
 Gift of Walker Penfield



Elisa Brown Bird,  
*The Red Letter*, 1896  
 DAM 1977-293  
 Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

by allowing the woman's left sleeve to defy the picture's edge. Penfield's use of a repetitive arrangement and a single distinctive style for the posters created an association between the magazine and the artist's spare graphic style. Penfield's posters became a signature look, making posters for *Harper's* instantly recognizable, and the artist became known as one of the nation's foremost poster designers.

In America posters predominantly advertised products from the literary world – magazines, books and related materials like paper and ink. In 1894 the *Century*, *Lippincott's* and *Scribner's* began to use poster campaigns to advertise their magazines. In the mid-1890s, *Lippincott's* hired Will Carqueville (1871-1946) and later J. J. Gould, Jr. (c.1875-c.1935) and *Recreation* hired Henry Watson Sumner (1868-1933), to make monthly posters, creating their own signature looks. Soon other types of magazines were using the new style of poster to promote their periodicals. Aided by their poster advertising campaigns the new, less costly monthlies expanded their markets. For example *Munsey's* sold around 40,000 copies per month in October 1893; by 1894 their monthly average was close to 500,000 copies.<sup>vii</sup> Even the miniature magazines (also known as little magazines, toy magazines or dinkeys) – like *Chap-Book*, the *Red Letter*, *Echo* and the *Bookman* – used artistic posters for on-the-street advertising.<sup>viii</sup> Produced on a smaller scale for a limited audience, these little magazines specialized in avant-garde art and literature, and their highly individualized posters reflect their bohemian and playfully subversive spirit. Posters, poster programs and poster runs were being designed to play a part in the competition between the newer cheaper monthlies, such as *Munsey's*, the older better established magazines such as *Harper's Monthly* and the miniature magazines. The rising profile of posters encouraged advertisers to commission designs in the new style, and newspapers and magazines sponsored poster competitions, awarding the winners with cash prizes and public exposure. Lured by contests or looking for work, many young artists and illustrators –Maxfield Parrish, Joseph C. Leyendecker, Bertram Goodhue, John Sloan – tried their hands at poster design in the 1890s.

Along with the growing magazine and periodical market was an increased audience for books. American book readership had been on the rise since the Civil War, especially among middle-class women. In the mid-1880s into the 1890s the market for books expanded concurrently with the public's desire for self-improvement. The quest for self-education was not only reflected in the publication of self-help books devoted to household taste, etiquette and social graces, but also in the growing list of published

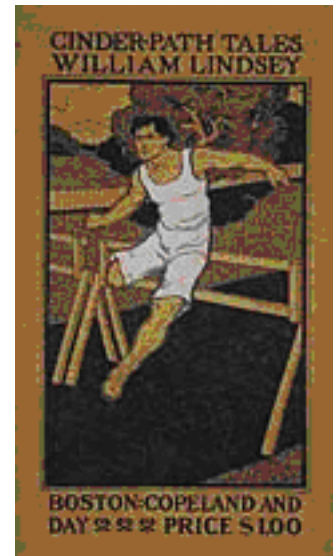
literature from mysteries and romances to histories and adventure stories. Changes in copyright regulation further encouraged the publication of works by American authors. Until the 1890s American publishers had happily reprinted British fiction without paying fair royalties to the authors, often making literature by foreign authors less expensive than works written by Americans. When the International Copyright Act passed in 1891, American manuscripts became comparable in cost to reprinted books from abroad. In order to satisfy the growing American market, publishers now sought American authors to create their new titles.

Book publishers used posters to their best advantage to market their products, and this was true for both the large publishing houses as well as for the smaller specialty presses. Harper and Brothers and Houghton, Mifflin and Company employed famous illustrators Edward Penfield and Howard Pyle to design book posters that could be far more stylized and broadly drawn than the illustrations within the books. Some smaller firms specialized in books and corresponding posters that were thoughtfully designed and printed in the Arts and Crafts tradition. With its borders filled with swirling, foliate forms, Will Bradley's 1895 poster for *Fringilla, or Tales in Verse* shows the influence of William Morris's Kelmscott Press.

Other posters echoed the content of the story or the typical style of the country of the author or the setting of the story. Ethel Reed (1876–death unknown) adopted Chéret's bright palette and loosely drawn style for her 1895 poster advertising Copeland and Day's English translation of Emile Zola's *Jacques Damour*.

The smaller American publishing firms - Stone and Kimball in Chicago, Lamson, Wolffe & Co. of Boston and Copeland and Day of Boston - often used advertising posters as an extension of the book. For example, John Sloan's (1871-1951) poster design for Copeland and Day's *Cinder Path Tales* was also used as the cover of the published book and the brown background for the poster and the brown cover for the book created a unified appearance and marketing familiarity. The same year *Cinder-Path Tales* appeared on the market, *Scribner's Magazine* published an article about posters and book covers. The author, Arsène Alexandre, suggested that, with an appealing cover, "a book might be so made as to be its own advertiser," attracting the notice of passersby from the bookshop's window.<sup>ix</sup> In other words, the book cover itself might function as a poster or in tandem with one.

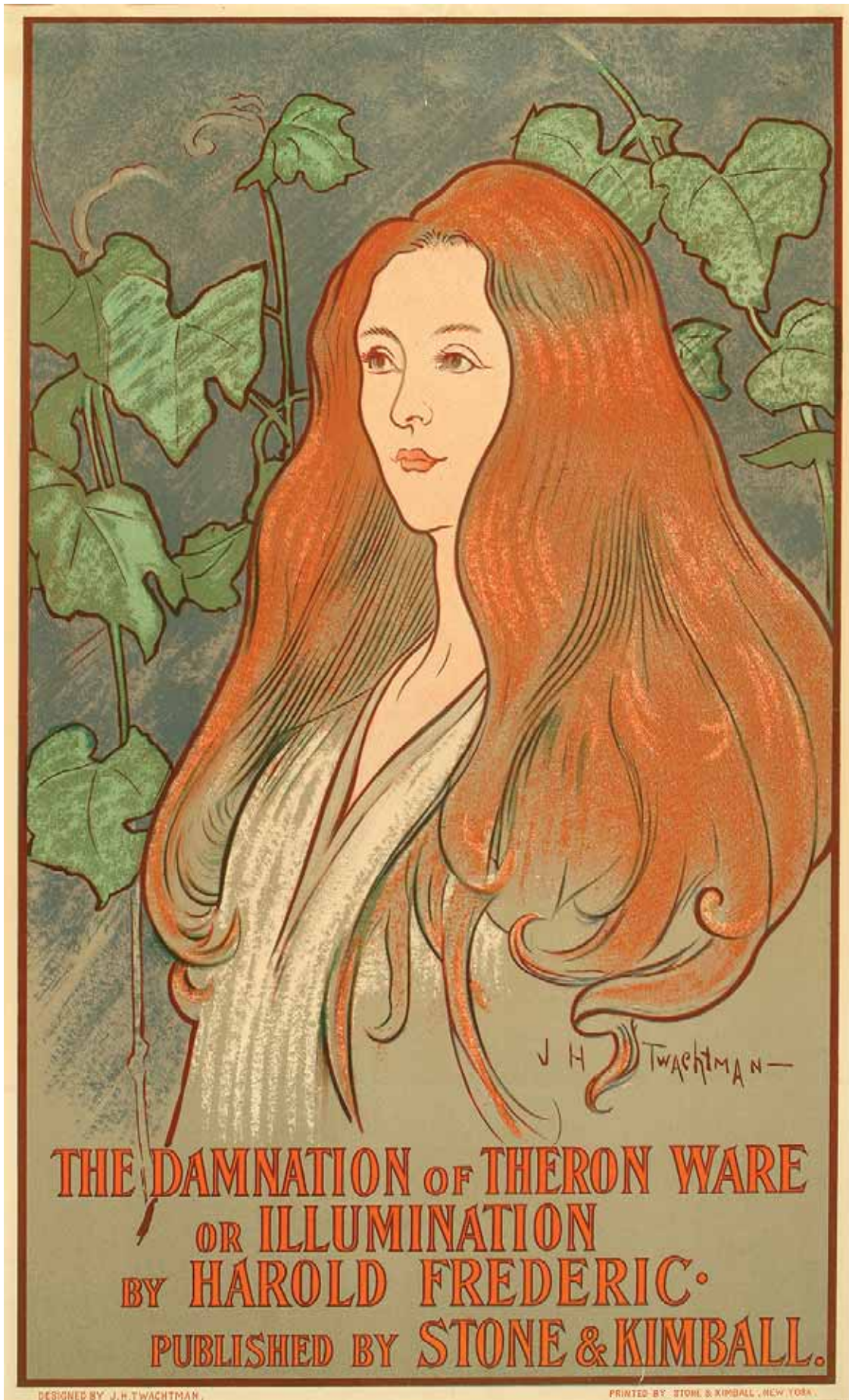
Posters and book covers related to the book's contents, in illustration and design. In his poster for *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (published in



John Sloan,  
*Cinder-Path Tales*, 1896  
DAM 1977-268  
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan



Will Bradley  
*Fringilla, or Tales in Verse*, 1895  
DAM 1977-296  
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan, 1977



John Henry Twachtman, The Damnation of Theron Ware, c.1896 DAM 1982-20 Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

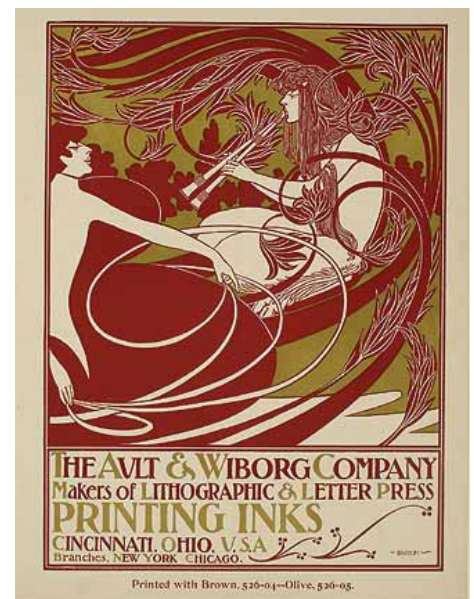
1896 by Stone and Kimball), John Henry Twachtman (1853-1902) utilized a sensuous art nouveau style for the woman's trailing red hair and for the swirl of greenery surrounding her. The story is about a young Methodist clergyman's descent into doubt and disgrace as he succumbs to the wiles of an alluring freethinking woman.<sup>x</sup> The sinuous lines of art nouveau not only convey the sensuality of the story's leading lady, but the style itself was linked with sexuality, making it particularly apropos for a novel about a temptress.



The use of eye-catching posters to promote books resulted in greater sales. In 1895 Henry Thurston Peck, the editor of *The Bookman*, began publishing a regular list of those books with the highest sales in fifteen cities – this became known as the “best-seller list.” Many of the books that appeared on the *Bookman*'s list were those that had been promoted by artistic posters including *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, *The Phantom Death* by W. Clark Russell, with its poster designed by A. W. B. Lincoln [dates unknown], and *The Days of Auld Lang Syne* by Ian Maclaren, with its poster designed by L. F. Hurd [dates unknown].

Louis Rhead,  
*Morning Journal*, 1897  
DAM 1989-86  
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

By 1895 the link between posters and successful sales of books and magazines influenced various newspapers to employ the same means to strengthen their circulation. For a variety of reasons, newspaper commissions resulted in fewer artistic posters, and of those that were produced, fewer remain. Unfortunately many newspapers printed their posters on their own presses and used poor quality paper stock. Newspaper publishers often cared little about the poster's appearance and only on occasion hired innovative designers to create memorable promotional posters. Louis Rhead created posters for *The New York Sun*, *The New York Journal* and *The New York Herald*. Ethel Reed produced posters for *The Boston Sunday Herald* and Claude Fayette Bragdon for *The Rochester Post Express*. Often it was the larger Sunday edition that garnered special attention via a specially designed poster. Special editions, such as the Women's Edition and holiday editions, also received special advertising. In 1896 the Philadelphia *Press* commissioned Marianna Sloan, John Sloan's younger sister, for a poster advertising the Thanksgiving women's edition of the newspaper.



Will Bradley,  
*The Ault & Wiborg Company*, c. 1900  
DAM 1989-34  
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan



Marianna Sloan,  
*Women's Edition The Press*, 1895  
DAM 1978-600 Museum Purchase

Use of the artistic poster by the various arms of the publishing industry extended into products related to printing. Will Bradley created art nouveau-influenced posters for *Whiting's Standard Papers* and designed a series of posters for the Ault and Wiborg Company of Cincinnati, makers of lithographic and letterpress inks. In keeping with the product, Bradley created color-rich posters with a limited palette. The unusual tones featured in the Ault and Wiborg posters may reflect the company's desire to display new ink colors.

# Modern Posters and Modern Life

As advertising images, posters provide a wealth of information about the interests and issues of the day. Posters identify what people were reading and what styles of art were current. And they clarify how advertisers perceived their audience - what they thought would appeal to the public. The changing role of women and the rising interest in the Orient are among the subjects highlighted in modern advertising posters.

## Women's Images

Posters have much to tell us about the interests and concerns of women at the turn of the century. Advertisers appreciated the role of women as consumers and marketed their publications and products specifically toward the female audience. Much of the publishing market was aimed at middle and upper-class women, since they were the largest segment of readers of popular literature. At the same time, many of these female consumers were attempting to broaden their horizons beyond their roles as wives and mothers. Consequently advertisers used a range of women's images to address the variety of women's markets, speaking to women as the keepers of the domestic realm, women engaged with the movement for women's rights and independence, and finally beautiful women as the object of men's admiring gazes. Targeting women as mothers and keepers of the home were advertisements featuring young children, like Maurice Boutet de Monvel's (1851-1913) French poster for toothpaste (*pate dentifrice*), which shows a fresh-faced girl dressed in a pretty red and white dress with her toothbrush and paste in hand. The work of American illustrator Jessie Willcox Smith appealed to women in much the same way.



Maurice Boutet de Monvel,  
*Pate Dentifrice Pierre*, 1896  
DAM 1986-198  
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan



O. C. Malcolm,  
*Outing Special Bicycle Number*, 1896  
 DAM 1977-269  
 Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

Those interested in new opportunities for women might be drawn to the many images of the new woman in turn-of-the-century posters. Intelligent, independent, active and attractive, the new woman was a much-discussed phenomenon in the 1890s. The new woman dressed comfortably, read books, rode bicycles and pursued a university education, but she was also dangerously independent and critics worried if these opinionated young women would marry and raise families. A kind of stock character, recognizable by her youth, her clothing and the activities she pursues, the new woman became a popular subject for authors and illustrators, from whom she inspired both admiration and derision. During the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the physical culture movement popularized leisure sports for men and women, and new women embraced outdoor activities, as well as education. Advertisers marketed to new women with images of active, adventurous females riding bicycles or playing golf and intelligent independent types reading or traveling. Joseph J. Gould, Jr.'s *Lippincott's July* poster of 1896 shows a young lady riding a bicycle; in her right hand she holds a copy of the magazine, implying that she is the sort of woman who reads *Lippincott's*.

The new woman type is also the subject of Albert George Morrow's (1863-1927) 1894 poster for the Sydney Grundy play, *The New Woman*.<sup>xi</sup> Dressed in a practical black dress,<sup>xii</sup> the woman pictured in the poster is an intellectual, a reader and writer of feminist literature (one of the books littering the floor at her feet reads "Man the Betrayer") and a smoker, hence the smoldering cigarette in the red border. No longer tied to the home, the new woman's key hangs on the wall, rather than being worn on a chatelaine at her waist.<sup>xiii</sup> With her pince-nez and serious expression and a pile of books at her feet, the new woman character became a humorous exaggeration of an earnest scholarly type in this poster, as indeed she did in the play.

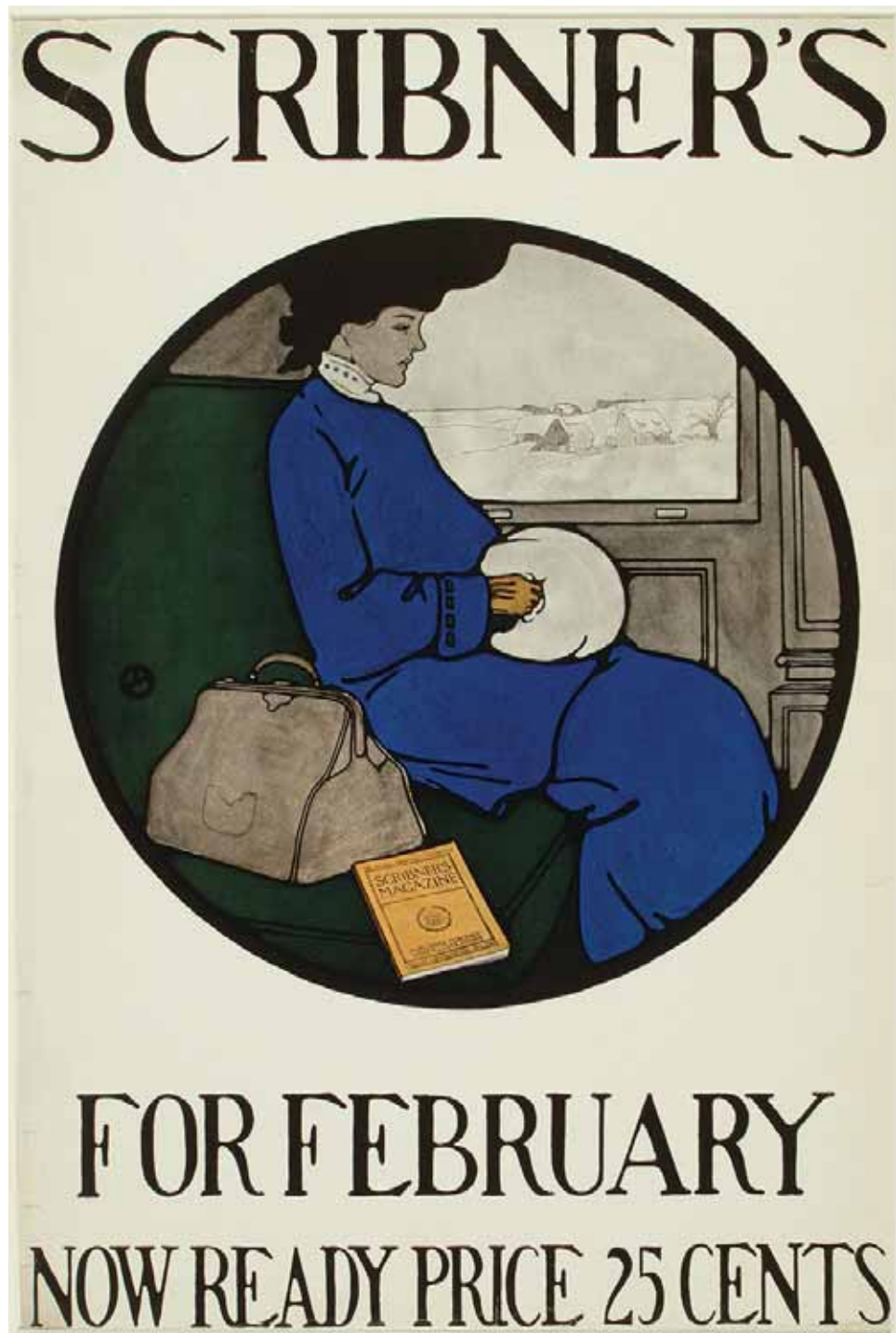


Alfred Morrow,  
*The New Woman*, 1896  
 DAM 1986-150  
 Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

Perceived as a draw for both men and women, then as today images of poster girls – beautiful, stylish, young women – abound in advertisements from 1890s. But these women were more than mere fashion plates; their clothing and activities speak to the various roles of women in society. James Moore Preston depicted a woman on a train for the February 1904 issue of *Scribner's*; the image presents an independent woman, self-assured and traveling on her own. Edward Penfield placed an attractive woman among pots of roses, drawing a parallel between the figure and her decorative surroundings. Although the woman's beauty is the focus, the artist displayed her independence as well: the woman appears confident as she moves through the city unaccompanied. However comfortable they might appear,

Preston's and Penfield's women occupied spaces — the streets and trains — typically associated with men, and are pictured as charming sights to be appreciated by the male gaze.

So popular were the poster images of women in the 1890s that society women hosted poster parties where guests came dressed as particular poster characters, and while each posed, the other guests would guess which poster she represented. Advertisers had succeeded in creating images in which consumers literally saw themselves.



James Moore Preston,  
*Scribner's for February*, 1904  
DAM 1985-9  
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan



Edward Penfield, *Harper's March*, 1896DAM 1973-66 Gift of Mrs. J. Marshall Cole

## Orientalizing (Chinoiserie/Japonisme/Exoticism)

If the iconography of the new woman allowed the American middle class to recognize itself, images of the Orient appealed because they represented something outside the audience's daily life. The Orient fascinated the European and American populace at the turn-of-the-century, and the Near East and Far East provided inspiration for products and amusements, as well as their marketing. Removed from the experience of Europe and America (the West), China, Japan, India and Egypt existed in the Western imagination as alien, exotic, alluring places.<sup>xiv</sup> Some entrepreneurs imported products and performers from the East, while Western artists and designers incorporated Oriental subjects and motifs into their work and advertisers capitalized on the appeal of the Orient to market all types of goods.

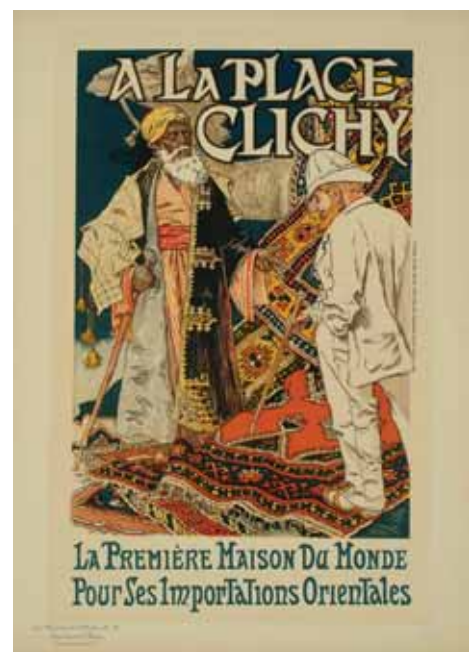
Chinese imagery and influence can be found in some of the artistic posters of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The most obvious example is The Beggarstaffs' 1895 *A Trip to China Town* created for an American musical comedy.<sup>xv</sup> The font they used is stylized to be reminiscent of Chinese characters and the Chinaman's white and black image is laid on a field of color commonly called "Chinese red." The interest in Chinese motifs and styles pre-dated Japanese influence, and as representative of the Far East, it paved the way for the more pervasive enthusiasm for Japanese imagery and style.

Beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and fed by the display of Japanese goods at the Centennial Exhibition in 1876, Americans embraced all things Japanese, especially ceramics, textiles and prints. This fad became known as the "Japan craze," and its influence can be seen in the subjects as well as the style of American posters. Edward Penfield's poster for *Harper's* for March 1896 provides one indication of the popularity of things Japanese; an attractive woman stands among a row of Japanese theatrical masks. The masks, like her dress, hairstyle and copy of *Harper's*, mark her as a cultured and stylish member of the upper middle class.

The pervasive interest in the Orient also inspired images of the Near East - the Ottoman Empire, India and Egypt. Eugène Grasset pictured a meeting of two cultures as a show of rugs at La Place Clichy, a shop specializing in goods imported from the Orient. The poster depicts an exchange: a dark-skinned man wearing traditional clothing and a turban displays a selection of brightly colored carpets before a redheaded European in a linen suit and safari hat. The multiplicity of patterns links the Arab to



The Beggarstaffs,  
*A Trip to Chinatown*, 1899  
DAM 1986-165  
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan



Eugène Grasset,  
*A La Place Clichy*, c. 1896  
DAM 1986-204  
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

his wares, and contrasts with the plain white suit of the buyer. A peaceful, commercial exchange, the men brandish walking sticks, though the Arab holds his like a sword in a scabbard, as he counts out the price on his opposite hand. The attire and the camel in the background locate the scene in the Orient, assuring the would-be visitor to La Place Clichy of the authenticity of the objects and experience offered.

Violet Oakley created a romantic image of ancient Egypt in her 1896



poster advertising *The Lotos Library* complete with decorated papyrus columns, a dark-skinned beauty and lotus flowers blossoming in the pool at her feet. Remote in time and place, ancient Egypt conjured exotic associations and – the publishers hoped – piqued the curiosity of viewers about the books in the series. *The Lotos Library* was a series of books published in Philadelphia by J. B. Lippincott that included stories by American authors Elizabeth Phipps Train and Charles King, and *Jane A Social Incident* by Marie Corelli, a popular and controversial English author of occult novels. And despite the title of the series and the image created to advertise it, none of the books appear to relate to Egypt or the Orient. Like a beautiful woman, the allure of the Orient could be used to sell most anything.

Violet Oakley,  
*The Lotos Library*, c. 1896  
DAM 1974-151  
Louisa du Pont Copeland Mem Fund

## Collecting

As the poster craze expanded in the mid-1890s, poster collecting quickly became a popular pastime. This was a natural development in a time when collecting of all sorts was encouraged and discussed.<sup>xvi</sup> Poster printers and advertisers took note of the unexpected popularity of their product, and in 1895 *The Chap-Book* began advertising sales of their posters for 25 to 50 cents each when the magazine itself sold for 5 cents an issue. Posters by American artists were being recognized and exhibited abroad, and the first American book on posters, *The Modern Poster* was published by Charles Scribner's Sons in a limited edition with a signed and numbered poster by Will Bradley included. Soon dealers specializing in posters began to ply their trade in New York, and the bookseller Brentano's opened a poster department that specialized in imported French posters.

Exhibitions of posters both reflected and encouraged the interest of collectors. In February of 1895 the *Boston Herald* reviewed a poster exhibition held at the Brookline Public Library, and in New York City that same year, the Union League Club hosted a poster exhibit.<sup>xvii</sup> In Chicago that same December there was an exhibition of posters for *The Century* and *Echo* that also produced a catalog. Other notable poster exhibitions benefited local hospitals, such as the 1895 poster exhibition and sale at Quincy City Hospital in Massachusetts and the 1896 Old Dominion Hospital poster exhibition and sale in Richmond, Virginia. By December of 1895, a Cleveland collector published a checklist of the over 600 posters he had collected, most of which were created in 1894 and 1895.<sup>xviii</sup> Ned Arden Flood of northwestern Pennsylvania gained renown as one of the three greatest American collectors of early art nouveau art. At one point, his collection held over 1,000 American posters from the 1890s. In 1897 an exhibition of Mr. Flood's collection included examples of American Dutch, English, French and

Japanese posters. This exhibit was recorded in an accompanying catalog.

In the March 1, 1896 edition of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* there was a front-page article on the "Poster Craze in Philadelphia."<sup>xix</sup> Poster art was championed in mainstream periodicals like *Century* and *Harper's* and in small literary magazines. These literary magazines – *Echo*, *Lark* and the *Chap-Book* – focused on American literature and art and were meant as both an outlet for self-expression and as a cipher for contemporary taste and aesthetics. As such they were ideal promoters of poster art equating it as a contemporary cultural phenomenon with the poetry of Bliss Carmen or the short stories of William Dean Howells. In addition to numerous exhibits and articles, in 1895 interest in posters spawned two short-lived poster periodicals – *The Poster* and *Poster Lore* – both begun in 1896. *Poster Lore* estimated approximately 7,000 collectors in North America.

With all the exhibitions and publications dedicated to them, not surprisingly the prices for posters continued to rise. At the height of the 1890s poster boom, posters sold for as much as \$10 a piece. Those who could not afford these prices might take posters off walls and out of shop windows or surreptitiously pay bill posters for them.

Another form of acquiring copies of these new and wonderful posters was developed in Paris in 1895. From 1881 the poster designer and lithographer Jules Chéret operated his Parisian shop as a branch of the large printing firm Chaix. Under the direction of Chéret, Chaix began to produce smaller versions of the world's most popular and beautiful posters. These reduced versions, printed in authentic colors by chromolithography, were issued as separate numbered sheets in groups of four every month for sixty months were sold to subscribers and collectors. Over ninety



Elisha Brown Bird,  
*The Poster*, 1896  
DAM 1977-271  
Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

artists from Europe and America had their posters recreated for this print production. The issued sets were called, '*Les Maitres de l’Affiche*' (Masters of the Poster) and ran from December 1895 through November 1900. Every month Imperimerie Chaix supplied a group of four lithographs to its subscribers and some months the packet came with a special bonus plate. Each lithograph measured approximately 11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" X 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" and bore the embossed mark of the Maitres de l’Affiche blind stamp in the bottom right corner.

These small reproductions of posters provided a popular alternative to collecting and storing full-sized posters and other similar packets of prints were produced. For example, Imprimerie Chaix also produced *Les Affiches Illustrées* which appeared in bound volumes and offered images of 84 poster designs printed in a smaller size than *Les Maitres de l’Affiche*. Because only 1,025 copies of the volume were created, prints from *Les Affiches Illustrées* are extremely rare. Another collection from the same printer, *Les Affiches Etrangères* featured only poster

designs from outside of France, including English, Belgian, Spanish and American examples. The Dresden publisher Verlag von Gerhard Kuhtmann produced their own variant form in 1897 called *Das Moderne Plakat*. This was a wonderfully printed bound volume with 52 lithograph plates by many of the same poster artists as the other publications.

The collecting of posters never completely died out, though interest has waxed and waned. In the 1920s and 1930s art deco posters reinvigorated interest in the medium, and New York’s Museum of Modern Art began to amass an important collection. The popularity of turn-of-the-century posters revived in the 1960s, and the craze for what are now antique posters is once again active. These posters are available all over the world from dealers and galleries, at auction and of course online. Designed to promote acquisitiveness, they continue to draw admirers and collectors into their spell.

- <sup>i</sup> Eventually the refinement of the photo-reproduction process assured the identical reproduction of the artist's design by the transfer of the image to the plate via a photograph. Earlier illustrated texts that did not have the advantage of photomechanical reproductions necessitated the use of a talented wood engraver as an intermediary who would transform the artist's intended image onto a wood-block from which the engraving was pulled.
- <sup>ii</sup> The centers of mass produced lithography in the United States were New York City, Boston and Philadelphia.
- <sup>iii</sup> In the late 1800s, holiday issues of both newspapers and magazines became increasingly popular. Heavily illustrated and enthusiastically promoted by publishers, holiday issues were the ideal candidates for advertising with eye-catching posters.
- <sup>iv</sup> Brander Matthews, "The Pictorial Poster" *Century* 44 (September 1892): 748.
- <sup>v</sup> Penfield continued to work at *Harper's* as art editor until 1901.
- <sup>vi</sup> Edward Penfield, "Posters," *The Limner* 1 (June 1895): 7 and 6.
- <sup>vii</sup> Jacquelyn Days Serwer, *The American Artistic Poster of the 1890s* Ph. D. Dissertation 1980, The City University of New York: 17.
- <sup>viii</sup> Claude Fayette Bragdon, "The Purple Cow Period: The 'Dinkey Magazines', that taught the Spirit of the Nineties," *Bookman* 69 (July 1929): 475.
- <sup>ix</sup> Arsène Alexandre, "French Posters and Book-Covers" *Scribner's Magazine* 17 (May 1895): 603.
- <sup>x</sup> A freethinker is a person who refuses to submit their reasoning process to an outside authority, especially with regards to religious beliefs. For the poster Twachtman created an image of a mature woman with her hair hanging down loosely and her breasts slightly revealed. At that time the woman who took her hair down for a man other than her husband was considered a seductress. Freethinking women were typically portrayed as evil temptresses; consequently this image may be interpreted as the personification of the destructive force of unchecked feminine desires.
- <sup>xi</sup> Grundy's play ran for 173 performances in London, but closed after a run of less than two months in New York.
- <sup>xii</sup> Among the issues of interest to liberated women and new women was the new form of dressing to promote easy movement and healthful life. The late nineteenth century English and American aesthetic movement promoted practically designed women's dresses created in a simple elegant style to be worn without corsets underneath.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Chatelaine is both the name of the tool on which the keys are kept and worn at a woman's waist but it is also the name of the woman who keeps the keys.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Edward Said points out the "the Orient" as understood by Americans and Western Europeans in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is a product of the Western imagination, a mythic East created in opposition to Western norms and structured in the interests of Western imperialism. The Orient is not an accurate reflection of Asia and the Near East. For a critique of Western conceptions of "the Orient" and Orientalism, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
- <sup>xv</sup> The Beggerstaffs was a pseudonymous name for the English artist Sir William Nicholson (1872-1949) and the Scottish James Pryde (1866-1941).
- <sup>xvi</sup> Janet E. Ruutz-Rees, *Home Occupations* (New York: D. Appleton, 1883): 89. Ruutz-Rees discussed the inherent love of collecting and urged fostering this taste among children and young adults. She wrote, "It is quite surprising to find how naturally interests spring up in connection with [collecting], so that in time the simple habit of taking care of things grows into one of classifying and arranging them."
- <sup>xvii</sup> Sylvester Baxter, "Pictorial Posters: Notable Exhibition at the Brookline Public Library," *Boston Herald* (February 21, 1895): 7.
- <sup>xviii</sup> *A Memorandum Checklist of American Posters in the Collection of Wilbur Cherrier Whitehead* (Cleveland: By the Author, 1895)
- <sup>xix</sup> "Poster Craze in Philadelphia," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (March 1, 1886): 1.



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