

VINTAGE POSTERS

Street Art With Impact That's Making a Big Comeback

FAIRFIELD HOME

9 8 M A R C H



Plastered on exterior and interior walls and prominently displayed on billboards and kiosks, poster art has belonged to the masses since Jules Cheret, father of the poster, first tacked the colorful notices throughout the streets of Paris.

Dramatic, decorative and highly collectible, vintage poster art is making quite an impact on the collectible art scene with selling prices greatly appreciating in value every day.

According to Mickey Ross of The Ross Group, Inc. at The Vintage Poster Gallery in Westport, vintage posters are hot. They're considered "vintage" if they are at least 50 years old, and they're

considered a hot ticket by individuals, businesses, hotels and office complexes with an eye for design and decoration.

"People are buying them as collectibles as well as decorations for their homes and their businesses. Many homes today have cathedral ceilings and the over-sized posters lend themselves well to the large space," explained Mr. Ross, who finds that many of his clients purchase posters for specific subject matter, while others look for particular color schemes or the style of a specific artist. Mr. Ross pointed out that some businesses use the posters to promote their own products or to create an atmosphere pleasing to their clients or employees. "In the past 10 years the popularity of these antique images has

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PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY THE ROSS GROUP INC.



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grown enormously," said Mr. Ross.

Posters debuted in Europe when Cheret developed stone lithography. This method of printing enabled Cheret to produce posters inexpensively. He distributed them throughout the boulevards of Paris in the late 1860s.

Originally, European poster art used art and design to command the viewer's attention, but in a pre-radio, pre-television world, posters quickly became prime public messengers. They promoted theatrical productions, cafe menus and interesting new products like bicycles and typewriters.

Poster popularity spread to America making its way quickly to the publishing world where posters advertised books and magazines on a grand scale. According to George J. Goodstadt at The Antique Poster Collection Gallery in Ridgefield, Americans incorporated the "message" concept into the art form.

Soon bigger-than-life size posters with stunning graphics and cleverly designed images advertised, instructed and persuaded all those who gazed upon them. Posters came into their own in a big way during the "Gay 90s." They were used extensively in America to advertise the theater, circuses, wild west shows, commercial products and books and magazines. "Posters accurately reflect the history and culture of the times that produced them," said Mr. Goodstadt, describing posters promoting women's magazines as prime examples.

Magazine publishers competed with one another for the country's leading artists and illustrators. They wanted the work of Louis Rhead Penfield, Hazenplus, Dow, and Blanche MacManus on their covers. *Lippincott's*, *Harper's Weekly* and *Scribner's* were counted among those magazines.

Since most of the magazines catered to a feminine readership, many of the posters advertising the magazines featured women in swirling Art Nouveau dresses and fabulous fashions of the times. The posters were so popular that they often sold better than the magazines they advertised.

Nonetheless, Mr. Ross, who has a specialty in European posters, and Mr. Goodstadt, who specializes in American posters, encourage people to purchase vintage posters for personal pleasure.

"I advise people to buy a poster because they like it," said Mr. Goodstadt who added that he talks down the investment angle. Mr. Ross emphasizes the decorative value of the vintage posters. Both dealers find that the majority of

their poster sales fall between \$500 and \$2,000.

No one seems to know for certain how many copies of any given poster exist, since posters were often produced in the hundreds, then torn up, ripped down and discarded after they served their usefulness.

Since the rarity of a poster can't be fully established, people with an inclination towards serious antique poster collecting look to the artist, the age and condition of the poster as well as the image itself to determine the buying and selling price of an individual piece.

"The key in collecting vintage posters is the artist," said Mr. Goodstadt during a tour of his 5,000-square-foot gallery that was jammed packed with posters. "I acquired a huge collection of posters from the Huntington Hartford Museum. There were literally thousands of posters in that acquisition and none were catalogued or sorted in any way," said Mr. Goodsadt, who has been doing both since he got the posters in 1974.

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If the artists are key to the collections, then it should be noted that perhaps the most famous of many great poster artists was Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. His use of bright colors and arresting blacks made his posters more compelling than many of the other artists. He sought the simple, vital elements in his subjects and discarded all the nonessentials.

Eugene Grasset, Alphonse Mucha and Pierre Bonnard were other early poster painters. Jean Dupas, Paul Colin, Charles Gesmar, and Georges Lepage were among the Art Deco period painters. "Contemporary themes and strong graphics also influence today's market value," said Mr. Ross, pointing out that vintage posters featuring coffee and cigar smoking are bringing in steeper prices than posters promoting furs.

Mr. Ross, who has an extensive background in textile design, started collecting vintage posters when traveling through Europe. His collection started as a hobby, developed into a passion and grew into a business. Although vintage poster art has never had snob appeal, it is now actively sought after by an elite following of art and antiques collectors and dealers.



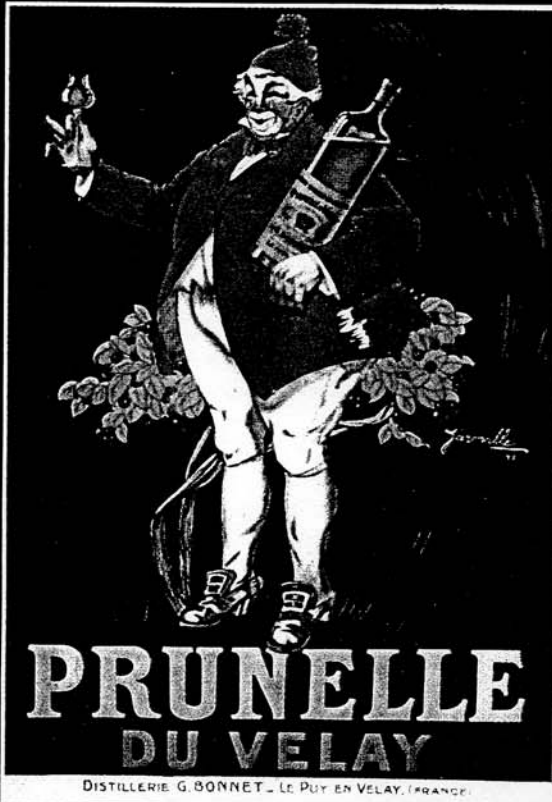
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TREASURE HUNTING
The Message Meets the Medium In Westport

As more and more people discover the wonders of vintage posters, they turn to experts and professionals in the field for verification of authenticity. They look for reputable and knowledgeable people to help them.

In Connecticut people can turn to The Ross Group's Vintage Poster Gallery located at 611 Riverside Avenue in Westport (203.222.1525 or www.postergroup.com)



ANTIQUE POSTERS, LIKE THOSE SHOWN ON THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE, SOLD FOR ANYWHERE FROM FIVE CENTS TO A DOLLAR IN THEIR HEYDAY. CONSIDERING THAT NOT TOO LONG AGO A BAUHAUS POSTER WAS EXPECTED TO BRING IN A \$100,000 SALE PRICE AT AUCTION, THE PRICE OF POSTERS HAS COME A LONG WAY. THE MAJORITY OF ANTIQUE POSTERS, HOWEVER, SELL FOR BETWEEN \$500 AND \$2,000, SAY DEALERS IN FAIRFIELD COUNTY.