

## The character and function of the poster

Posters are barometers of social, economic, political and cultural events, as well as mirrors of our everyday lives.

Any given poster wants to bring a message to our notice, to publicize products, invite us to entertainments or advertise campaigns. In order to fulfil these tasks, it should be seen by as many people as possible – so it has to be exhibited widely, requiring an enormous number of copies.

On a practical level, a poster can give information about the political situation, government intentions, and topical financial issues, as well as conventional or imaginative solutions to problems. It can pass on information about social conditions, but can also vividly illustrate more esoteric subjects, such as the changing form of the fine arts, an area that, in turn, influences poster artists themselves.

It can give information about both highbrow and popular culture, and a fairly reliable insight into people's attitudes.

Most significantly, it demonstrates, on the one hand, consumer desires and, on the other, consumer products.<sup>1</sup> It does not, however, merely answer people's wishes, real or imaginary, it also suggests wishes of its own. To do this, it traditionally reproduces not the actual existence of the things, but a likeness which is often in such a concentrated form that it becomes reality in our imagination.

According to Max Bense, posters – their objects and arguments – are 'nets' in which the wishes of the people are to be caught. Goods are often rendered unfamiliar on a poster; they are seen in unreal surroundings

from a super-realistic point of view. So the poster glorifies things in trying to manipulate our behaviour. The poster – whether abstract or concrete, surrealistic or symbolic, modern or classical, baroque, Roman or Doric in style – solves our problems for us but also confronts us with new ones. Again according to Bense, it fixes values and standards with its assertions, emphasizes events and sees the world from without. That is what makes it so vivid. It lives almost too much in the moment. Its attraction is based on this super-reality but also, of course, on its transience. Posters play an active role in the continuing process of perfecting the artificial environment – to the point of exaggeration and distortion. New experience and knowledge repeatedly question the efficacy of the poster, but it constantly renews itself with the discovery of new forms of expression and assertion, born out of the struggle of graphic artists with the design problems of their time.

Indeed, today, the poster is one of the most important means of communication between producer and consumer, organizer and participant. It fulfils an economic, cultural, political or social purpose, albeit mainly in the subjective sense of the client's requirements and not in the objective sense of utility and necessity. As the extended arm of the client, it should lead viewers to the product and appeal to them in such a way that the message finds its way into their unconscious minds, continues to work there and suggests a positive attitude towards the thing being advertised.

To do this, the poster must establish contact

with the viewer by means of both pictures and text. The idea of its design is to awaken interest and hold it long enough for the message to get across.

It therefore has many functions according to its task. It can inform, stimulate, activate, mobilize, expound, query, provoke, motivate or convince – or all of these things.

The task of the poster should not, however, be limited to mere communication between producer and consumer, but should also improve the aesthetic sense of its viewers, thereby making a contribution to their artistic awareness and their awareness of their fellow human beings. The poster, which nowadays is present everywhere, has long been an important element forming our environment.