POSTERS FROM LATIN AMERICA

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BY MILDRED CONSTANTINE

A poster is a combination of picture and word which intends to convey a message in a passing glance. Repetition of facts and ideas, a basic factor in education, is also a fundamental principle in the art of poster-making and poster display. The poster may be, and frequently is, a medium of education and it may be also a clue to the environment in which it is produced. The poster's message, as well as its manner of presentation, is an indication of a point of view, a desire or a need. Because more and more the fine artist is turning his superior talent to posters, and because in commerce the poster has been used so successfully to "woo" the public, governmental departments in Latin American countries have "discovered" the use of the poster in the relationship between government and people.

Throughout South America I rode in endless *tranvias, camiones, subterraneos,* and *collectivas* (that is, streetcars, buses, subways). I visited artists' studios. I visited the offices of governmental departments. I haunted every park, post office, health center, nursery, and other public buildings to see what posters were being shown, how they were being shown, and why they were being shown. Everywhere, repetition of display was a dominant form of presentation. On the wall of a building which extended from the end of one street to another, there would be stretched one poster, repeated as many times as space would allow, and this countless duplication of posters throughout almost every city in South America convinced me that repetition gave



Summer Festival and Carnival, Montevideo Uruguay. By A. Gonzalez.

Poster for Municipal Theatre, Santiago de Chile. By Camilo Mori.

Census poster for Brazil. By C. Mendes Junior.

power to the poster as a medium for education, propaganda and advertising. This repetition in the mind's eye seemed like a film strip being run through a projector with the same picture refocused again and again. Thus, the mind retained the important picture and accompanying words, the message almost automatically being imprinted on the mind.

I remember once reading a dramatic paragraph written by Edgar Allen Poe. I read this paragraph at least a dozen times. It was a healthy paragraph of about 600 words. After many readings I discovered that one phrase of about six words was repeated fourteen times, and those few key words, stripped of their poetic dressing, had the very same terse character that is essential to the poster, for in them was the whole message of the paragraph. The words of a poster are thus, in a sense, a communication stripped to its pith.

The repetition of posters through the cities of South America was a general characteristic regardless of subject matter—whether the poster referred to a fiesta held during *Carnaval,* or whether it referred to the importance of knowing how many people in a given country could read and write; it is true if the poster is selling a moving picture based on the life of Napoleon or if it is advertising an exposition of French XVIIIth Century art; it is true if the poster asks for public assistance in rehabilitating cities destroyed by earthquakes or if it is a plea for pilots for national defense. All of the themes are important.

Newspapers in the Americas fill a great need, but because of politics, because of the varying points of view, the "voice" of the paper has not always been the voice of the city or the voice of the public. The press publishes news, but not always is it concerned with the general welfare of the people. Modern invention, too, has shortened the use of many of our faculties and all of us today do not have the time or the patience (and the census reveals, the ability) to read our newspapers every day. Consequently, the poster, serving a visual, pictorial need, must be addressed directly to the public without the coloration, bias or omission that we find in newspaper reports and editorials. Consequently, the poster is a more direct method of speaking to the public and, of necessity, must be a more honest and simplified method of reaching the public.

The artist has always spoken to the public in his work but has not always presented his work in a language in which the layman can understand his message. In the poster, the artist finds that by simplification of theme he can

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Summer Festival and Carnival, Montevideo, Uruguay. By Y. Bonelli.

Poster for fourth centenary celebrations, Santiago de Chile. By Camilo Mori.

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Gala Dance, Carnival, 1941. Municipal Theatre, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. By Julio Senna.

For Tourist Department, Oaxaca, Mexico. By Miguel Covarrubias.

"Confidence, Unity, Work, to Fortify Economic Independence." By A. Cervantes, Mexico.

speak to the public—whether the subject is entertainment, better housing, theatre, defense, or any other topic of general appeal. The artist has proved that he can maintain his integrity and still communicate with the public. Such famous painters as Diego Rivera, Rodriguez Lozano, Carlos Merida, Carlos Orozco Romero, Leopoldo Mendez, Pablo O'Higgins of Mexico; Camilo Mori of Chile; Julio Senna, Santa Rosa, Lasar Segal of Brazil; Lino Palacio and Dell'Acqua of Argentina, have produced posters of great merit many of which are reproduced here.

There is no fixed poster style. Within the limitations inherent in the poster as a means of rapid communication through the eye, the artist has a free hand. This is evident in the posters reproduced here which are only a small portion of more than 100 examples I collected in the Latin American countries.

But the poster (the lack of or preponderance of) may be proof, too, of the point of view of the government toward the people in its various governmental functions. It may be proof, as in Brazil, that only the most basic and elementary point of view can be used to insure public reaction. It may prove as in the Argentine, where I saw only two official posters, that the Government is always so completely master of the public that it feels no need for communication with it. It may prove, as in Ecuador, where I saw no government posters, that there is need for the Government to use other means of mass education and propaganda. It may prove, as in Mexico, that the swiftness with which the Mexican people react to visual material can be judged from the types, the quantity and quality of posters which line the street walls day after day, a fresh poster sometimes covering layers of seven or eight deep.

In the United States we have not yet "discovered" the poster to a great extent except as a commercial advertising medium. I feel that we have much to learn from the southern countries in our hemisphere about the "art" of the poster and I believe that the exhibition which is being planned will be an introduction to a better understanding of the everyday life and thought of the peoples of Latin America.

The collection of posters which I assembled in Latin America form a part of the WILLIAM MORRIS COLLECTION and they will be exhibited together with other posters of the Americas during October in New York City (the place of exhibition to be announced at a later date). Thereafter, the entire collection will be sent throughout the United States, Canada, and possibly the Latin American countries.

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Poster for Flexil men's hats. By Dell'Acqua, of Argentina.

"One, two— how many are we?" Brazil census poster.

For the newspaper "La Razon." "New format, new type—renovated." By Lino Palacio, Argentina.

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