THE ART OF READING
American Publishing Posters of the 1890s

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PORTLAND ART MUSEUM, OREGON
Edward Penfield

The artistic poster first flourished in the United States in the late 1880s. Initially inspired by French poster designers and other European fashion, American artists soon took up the poster medium with enthusiasm. Penfield, who, together with William H. Bradley, is considered the leader of the American poster renaissance, was asked to create a poster for Harper’s Magazine. As he decided to make a poster to increase monthly sales, the magazine turned to the young Penfield for a design. As he recalled later, it was a quick experiment that he completed while the beautifully designed and integrated text speaks to the Daily Life with their bright and playful designs celebrating the industry. During their heyday, though, publishing posters were handed over to staff illustrators, who did not sign their designs. The wealth of enticing poster designs sparked a collecting fever among the latest designs. By one count, there were more than six thousand collectors in the United States during this time, and newspaper publishers, or bribed bookshop owners and newsstands for their latest in avant-garde literary trends and attracted a specialized audience.

Few artistic movements have a precise moment of origin, but in the case of the American literary poster, one can say the success of Penfield's poster gave the confidence to continue this effort; Penfield would be their exclusive poster designer, and typographer, was asked to create a poster for Harper's Magazine. One of the few women to break into the all-male world of publishing posters, Reed was praised for her “artistically refined temperament.”

These qualities can be seen in her poster for the Thanksgiving issue of Harper’s Bazar in 1895 (cat. 7). The poster features a woman in a bathing suit reaching for the copy of the latest issue of the magazine, while the beautifully designed and integrated text echoes the style of the French poster designer Eugène Grasset, whose poster for the New York Journal's morning edition are designs by the English-born artist Louis John Rhead, whose poster for the Harper's Magazine...
The artistic poster first flourished in the United States in the 1890s. Initially inspired by French poster designers and other trends pioneered in Europe, American artists soon created their own unique style. Publishers were the first to adopt this new form of advertising, employing outstanding young artists and illustrators to advertise their periodicals. Booksellers and newspapers soon followed, resulting in an explosion of publishing posters throughout the decade. Collectors took note, buying copies of these fetching designs and sparking a “poster mania” in the United States. This explosive growth was not to last, however; by the turn of the century, the American poster renaissance was already in decline. Drawn largely from the collection of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler—a major gift promised to the Portland Art Museum—as well as recent acquisitions by the Museum and other local loans, this exhibition features original posters from this brief but exciting chapter in design, art, and literary history.

Few artistic movements have a precise moment of origin, but in the case of the American literary poster, one can pinpoint its launch to April 1893, when Harper's Magazine published Edward Penfield’s first poster. Penfield was the head of the art department at Harper and Brothers, and had trained at the Art Students League in New York; when Harper’s decided to make a poster to increase monthly sales, the magazine turned to the young Penfield for a design. As he
recalled later, it was a quick experiment that he completed overnight, but it struck a chord with the sensibilities of the American public: “I think the American Poster has opened a new school whose aim is simplicity and good composition.”

The success of Penfield’s poster gave Harper’s the confidence to continue this effort; Penfield would be their exclusive poster designer from April 1893 to July 1899. His designs featured the genteel clientele the magazine hoped to attract, and depicted well-heeled men and women in leisurely pursuits, frequently with a copy of Harper’s in hand. Although the figures appear stoic in expression, Penfield allowed for hints of whimsy in his compositions, often referring to the activities common in a given month. In June 1895, for example, a serious young college graduate in cap and gown peruses the latest issue of Harper’s while thoughtfully smoking a pipe (cat. 28), while in August 1895 a woman in a bathing suit reaches for the copy of Harper’s that she has accidently dropped into the bay.

Soon other magazine and book publishers chased after the poster fad, including Charles Scribner’s Sons, the Century Company, and J. B. Lippincott Company, hiring talents such as William L. Carqueville, Joseph J. Gould Jr., and Maxfield Parrish, among others. Foremost among them was William H. Bradley, who, together with Penfield, is considered the leader of the American poster renaissance. Bradley, a talented poster artist, designer, and typographer, was asked to create a poster for The Chap-Book, one of the “little magazines” that gained favor in the 1890s. These diminutive periodicals were known for following the latest in avant-garde literary trends and attracted a specialized audience. Bradley’s posters for The Chap-Book brought him and the publication widespread fame. For the May 1895 poster (cat. 8), he created a highly sophisticated composition using just two colors. The flatness evokes the current vogue for Japanese prints, while the beautifully designed and integrated text speaks to the influence of the English Arts and Crafts movement, as does his poster for the Thanksgiving issue of Harper’s Bazar in 1895 (cat. 7).

By 1894 book publishers were commissioning posters for sensational novels and short stories, such as The Phantom Death, advertised with a poster by A. W. B. Lincoln (cat. 21). In Boston, the publisher Lamson, Wolff & Co. hired Ethel Reed, who was just twenty years old when she rose to fame illustrating books, designing covers, and creating posters in the Bostonian literary world. One of the few women to break into the all-male world of publishing posters, Reed was praised for her talent both in the United States and in Europe. A reviewer in the Art Collector noted her “great facility of line and
sweeping freedom in encircling her color masses” and lauded her “artistically refined temperament.” These qualities can be seen in her posters for the books *Folly or Saintliness* and *Miss Träumerei* (cats. 41 and 42).

Newspapers, too, began issuing posters. Among the finest are designs by the English-born artist Louis John Rhead, whose poster for the *New York Journal*’s morning edition echoes the style of the French poster designer Eugène Grasset (cat. 44). Many newspaper commissions, however, were handed over to staff illustrators, who did not sign their work. *The New York Journal* and the *New York World*, in particular, made great use of posters to boost sales of their Sunday editions, luring readers with fanciful illustrations and sensational headlines. More illustrative in style but full of wit, these ephemeral postings attracted great attention for the prosperous newspaper industry in fin-de-siècle America (cat. 46).

The wealth of enticing poster designs sparked a collecting craze. Poster exhibitions sprang up in American cities, new publications devoted to this art form chronicled the latest designs, and enthusiasts hosted “poster parties” for which guests were invited to dress as the subject of their favorite poster. Enterprising collectors purchased posters directly from the publishers, or bribed bookshop owners and newsstands for the latest designs. By one count, there were more than six thousand collectors in the United States during this time, and another one thousand in Canada. Yet despite the widespread enthusiasm, the end of an era was at hand. The reasons were multiple: publishers discovered that the posters were more popular than the books and magazines they hawked, and sought more lucrative methods of advertising; several of the major publishing firms went out of business; and the nascent field of advertising brought more standardization to the industry. During their heyday, though, publishing posters altered the visual landscape of American cities, animating daily life with their bright and playful designs celebrating the thriving world of publishing in this decade.

— Mary Weaver Chapin  
Curator of Prints and Drawings

Organized by the Portland Art Museum and curated by Mary Weaver Chapin, PhD, Curator of Prints and Drawings. This exhibition is supported in part by the Vivian and Gordon Gilkey Endowment for Graphic Arts and the Exhibition Series Sponsors.

48. Charles Herbert Woodbury

1. Artist unknown
   *Peterson’s Magazine, ca. 1895*
   Color lithograph
   14 ¼ × 10 ¾ inches
   Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

2. Artist unknown
   *New York Herald Sunday November 21st, 1897*
   Color lithograph
   19 × 12 ½ inches
   Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

3. Artist unknown
   *Sunday World April 26, 1896*
   Color relief
   18 × 12 inches
   Dan McInnis at Innis Archive

4. Artist unknown
   *Sunday World May 3rd, 1896*
   Color relief
   18 ¼ × 11 ¾ inches
   Dan McInnis at Innis Archive

5. Artist unknown
   *The Sunday World New York Feb 2nd, 1896*
   Color relief
   18 × 12 inches
   Dan McInnis at Innis Archive

6. Artist unknown
   *The Delineator October, 1897*
   Color lithograph
   11 9/16 × 16 9/16 inches
   Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

7. William H. Bradley
   *(American, 1868–1962)*
   *Harper’s Bazaar Thanksgiving Number 1895, 1895*
   Color lithograph
   16 × 11 ¼ inches
   Museum Purchase: Funds Provided by the Graphic Arts Council 2019.48.1

8. William H. Bradley
   *(American, 1868–1962)*
   *The Chap-Book, May, 1895*
   Color lithograph
   21 × 14 ½ inches
   Gift of Clifford S. Ackley in memory of Jon Lincoln and Owen Chamberlain 2018.49.1

9. William L. Carqueville
   *(American, 1871–1946)*
   *Lippincott’s November, 1895*
   Color lithograph
   19 × 12 ½ inches
   Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

10. Dwight Ripley Collin
    *(American, dates unknown)*
    *The Philistine, 1895*
    Color lithograph
    24 ½ × 18 ¼ inches
    Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

11. F. Gilbert Edge
    *(American, active 1890s)*
    *The New York Sunday World Dec 1st, 1895*
    Color relief
    17 ¾ × 12 ½ inches
    Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

12. James Montgomery Flagg
    *(American, 1877–1960)*
    *Atlantic August, ca. 1897*
    Lithograph printed in black
    16 ¼ × 12 9/16 inches
    Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

    *(American, ca. 1876–after 1932)*
    *Lippincott’s August, 1896*
    Color lithograph
    19 ½ × 14 9/16 inches
    Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

    *(American, ca. 1876–after 1932)*
    *Lippincott’s May, 1896*
    Color lithograph
    16 9/16 × 11 9/16 inches
    Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

    *(American, ca. 1876–after 1932)*
    *Lippincott’s November, 1896*
    Color lithograph
    16 9/16 × 13 ½ inches
    Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

16. Walter Conant Greenough
    *(American, active 1890s)*
    *A Knight of the Nets, 1896*
    Color lithograph
    13 9/16 × 17 ½ inches
    Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

17. William Sergeant Kendall
    *(American, 1896–1938)*
    *Dead Man’s Court, 1895*
    Color lithograph
    10 7/8 × 13 1/16 inches
    Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

18. Frank Hamilton King
    *(American, 1871–1941)*
    *The New York Sunday World Dec 1st, 1895*
    Color lithograph
    10 7/8 × 13 1/16 inches
    Private collection

19. Joseph Christian Leyendecker
    *(American, 1875–1951)*
    *Dead Man’s Court, 1895*
    Color lithograph
    10 7/8 × 13 1/16 inches
    Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

20. A. W. B. Lincoln
    *(American, active 1890s)*
    *Toxin, 1897*
    Color lithograph
    11 1/8 × 14 inches
    Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

21. A. W. B. Lincoln
    *(American, active 1890s)*
    *The Phantom Death, 1895*
    Color lithograph
    10 7/8 × 14 1/16 inches
    Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

22. A. W. B. Lincoln
    *(American, active 1890s)*
    *Dead Man’s Court, 1895*
    Color lithograph
    11 9/16 × 16 9/16 inches
    Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

23. M. E. Norton
Edward Penfield
(American, 1866–1925)
Harper’s July, 1897
Color lithograph
14 × 19 inches
Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

Edward Penfield
(American, 1866–1925)
Harper’s October, 1897
Color lithograph
19 7/8 × 14 7/8 inches
Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

Edward Penfield
(American, 1866–1925)
Harper’s July, 1899
Color lithograph
9 3/8 × 12 7/8 inches
Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

Edward Penfield
(American, 1866–1925)
Harper’s March, 1899
Color lithograph
15 1/8 × 10 1/2 inches
Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

Edward Henry Potthast
(American, 1857–1927)
The Century, July, 1896
Color lithograph
20 7/8 × 15 1/8 inches
Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

Ethel Reed
(American, 1874–1912)
Folly or Saintliness, 1895
Color lithograph
22 × 13 1/4 inches
Museum Purchase: Funds Provided by the Graphic Arts Council 2019.48.1

Ethel Reed
(American, 1874–1912)
Miss Traumerei, 1895
Color lithograph
21 1/8 × 10 3/4 inches
Museum Purchase: Funds Provided by the Graphic Arts Council 2019.48.3
43. Louis John Rhead  
(American, 1857–1926)  
L. Prang & Co.'s Holiday Publications, 1895  
Color lithograph  
21 ½ × 16 ½ inches  
Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

44. Louis John Rhead  
(American, 1857–1926)  
Morning Journal, 1895  
Color lithograph  
46 ⅞ × 58 ⅛ inches  
Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

45. Frederick Richardson  
(American, 1862–1937)  
International March, ca. 1900  
Color lithograph  
25 ⅞ × 16 inches  
Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

46. George Frederick Scotson-Clark  
(British, 1872–1927)  
The New York Sunday World, Sunday, November 17th, 1895, 1895  
Color lithograph  
18 × 12 ⅛ inches  
Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

47. John Sloan  
(American, 1871–1951)  
Cinder-Path Tales, 1896  
Color lithograph  
23 ⅛ × 13 ⅜ inches  
Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

48. Charles Herbert Woodbury  
(American, 1864–1940)  
The July Century, 1895  
Color lithograph  
19 × 13 ⅛ inches  
Promised Gift of Daniel Bergsvik and Donald Hastler

Cover: 40. Edward Henry Potthast (detail)