

## 'Print, Power and Persuasion'

Graphic Design in Germany:  
1890-1945'

Bard Center for Studies in the  
Decorative Arts, Design and  
Culture

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Manhattan

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Given two major German contributions to the worldwide spread of words and images, the inventions of movable type by Johann Gutenberg and of lithography by Aloys Senefelder three centuries later, it's small wonder that when graphic

design emerged as a professional field in the early 20th century, Germany was in the forefront.

But before the field (it acquired the "graphic design" rubric only in the early 1920's) exploded into today's aggressive art of persuasion, it was a staid and traditional enterprise, carried on in Germany and elsewhere mostly as a fine arts activity, like typography.

What made it the meld of disciplines that now covers a vast territory were the needs of a growing industrial complex to make better connections with prospective consumers. In Germany the boom after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1 spurred the expansion of advertising and promoted the notion of "corporate identity."

This show covers the development of the graphic arts in Germany into a distinctively German style, one that was influenced by fine arts movements as well as printing technology. Organized by the Wolfsonian-Florida International University in Miami Beach and drawn from its outstanding graphics holdings, this exhibition surveys the use of graphic design in Germany for book arts, information, advertising, illustration, industrial products, packaging, propaganda and other functions.

The curators are Jeremy Aynsley of the Royal College of Art in London, whose book, "Graphic Design in Germany: 1890-1945," accompanies the show, and Marianne Lamonaca of the Wolfsonian.

High on the roster of talents are distinctive stylists like Peter Behrens (1868-1940), a pioneer in the field of industrial design who went from typography to the design of factories and electrical products, and Herbert Bayer, a Modernist influenced by Dada and Surrealism who tried, before leaving Germany, to reconcile his work with the retrograde ideas of the Nazis.

Not scanted either are the works of Jan Tschichold, a typographic reformer who fled to Switzerland when the Nazis came to power, and the leftist John Heartfield, who used his pioneering photomontage — images he reassembled from photos and other graphic material into new and subversive readings — to attack German fascism.

Other exhibits range from turn-of-the-century specimens of typography, with its emphasis on history and craft tradition, to a shocking poster depicting the Nazi stereotype of a Jew. More positive pitches include Ludwig Hohlwein's wonderful lifestyle poster of 1924 for an exhibition of electricity in the household, showing a man dressed in a dapper tuxedo, holding a telephone to his ear in one hand and a cigarette in the other, as a lamp burns brightly behind him.

There's a lot to absorb in this comprehensive show, together with its book, but it will clue you in to the

power, political and otherwise, that good graphic design can exercise.

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