

die neue linie

mai
1930



print, power,
and persuasion

graphic design in Germany, 1890-1945

on view May 24 through August 26, 2001

THE BARD GRADUATE CENTER
FOR STUDIES IN THE DECORATIVE ARTS,
DESIGN, AND CULTURE

PRINT, POWER, AND PERSUASION: GRAPHIC DESIGN IN GERMANY, 1890–1945

When graphic design emerged as a profession in the early twentieth century, Germany was at the vanguard. The country's rapid industrialization was accompanied by an explosion in the printing arts, with the rise of mass circulation advertising, magazines, and packaging design. The exhibition, *Print, Power, and Persuasion*, selected from The Wolfsonian's collection, examines how graphic design contributed to visual and material culture in Germany from 1890 to 1945. Many of the design strategies employed in Germany had parallels in other industrialized nations eager to exploit the new forms of mass media. This was the time when the graphic arts evolved as an essential element of the urban experience, transforming how business and government communicated with the public.

The "graphic designer" was an invention of the period—the person to plan and oversee the design of printed matter, from the smallest ticket to the coordination of a corporate identity. In the 1890s, many artists advocated the integration of design into daily life, using the graphic arts to promote newly established artist associations. Over the next decade, advertisers developed cohesive marketing strategies to promote sales. Manufacturers and retailers commissioned graphic designers to create a corporate identity or "house" style.

During the First World War and in the turbulent years that followed defeat, Germany's leading graphic designers turned from commerce to propaganda, utilizing advertising strategies to build political consensus. During the years of the Weimar Republic (1919–33), designers joined forces with other cultural figures in the hope of establishing an international exchange of ideas. They adapted concepts from the fine arts, such as universality and abstraction, and applied them to the graphic arts. In 1933, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) consolidated its power, and rejected the international, avant-garde styles associated with the Weimar years. The National Socialists (Nazis) advocated a return to native Germanic traditions in the graphic arts, such as Gothic lettering, the woodcut, and traditional lithographic printing techniques.

The exhibition presents new ways of thinking about graphic design, especially as it relates to key trends of the modern age—tradition versus modernism; nationalism versus internationalism; and artistic values versus commercial ones.

DESIGN REFORM AND THE GRAPHIC ARTS

In the 1890s, many artists embraced design reform, rejecting what they considered to be the poor quality of mass-produced goods. Their goal was to improve standards through the application of art to industry. Reformers joined the quest for simplicity and design unity initiated by leaders of the Arts and Crafts movement in Great Britain. They also promoted the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the total work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*). According to Nietzsche, principles of design and decoration could be applied across all media to create an aesthetic whole.

This new generation of artists distanced themselves from official academies of fine arts. Instead, they established cooperative workshops to promote the integration of design into daily life. The posters in this section demonstrate the harmonious combination of word and image into a complete design. Important developments in lithography at this time gave artists the freedom to draw their own letterforms. Some artists used repetitive geometrical motifs to express the inherent beauty of form. Others used longstanding symbolic figures, such as those representing art and industry, an indication of the growing nostalgia for traditional imagery that was popular at the time.



Poster, *Deutsche Kunst – Ausstellung, Dresden, 1899*.
(German Art Exhibition), 1898. Designed by Moritz Weinhold.
Color lithograph. 85.4.99.

GRAPHIC DESIGN IN THE COMMERCIAL CONTEXT

Mainstream commercial graphic design quickly responded to the design reform movement. The Deutsche Werkbund (German League of Work), established in 1907, promoted the link between art and industry, encouraging manufacturers to embrace design reform and artists to focus more on commercial needs. Its members advocated the use of a coherent graphic design strategy to promote sales of German goods at home and abroad. The Werkbund sponsored journals, illustrated yearbooks, and exhibitions, and advocated *Reklame Kunst* (advertising design). Over the next decade the Werkbund model was adapted by other European nations who shared the goal of building and propagandizing a national design identity.

Manufacturers realized that to improve sales products had to be instantly recognizable in the marketplace. Graphic designers were hired to coordinate a unified visual identity, including the design of trademarks, logos, business stationery, posters, press advertisements, packaging, display graphics for salesrooms and store windows, and printed ephemera, such as postcards and advertising stickers.

Companies combined art, science, and technology—using psychology and the new “science” of marketing developed in the United States—to formulate powerful advertising strategies to catch the public’s attention. The graphic arts were emblems of progress, comfort, and affluence; they captured the vitality of popular culture and affirmed Germany’s rapid industrialization.



Poster, *Kronleuchter-Fabrik. Möhring*. (Möhring Chandelier Factory), 1909.
Designed by Julius Klinger. Color lithograph. 86.4.24.
Photo: Willard Associates.

THE POLITICS OF GRAPHIC DESIGN: THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

Propaganda posters reflect the tensions within a society. In Germany, the enormous political upheavals of the first years of the twentieth century—war, economic crisis, mass unemployment, and women's suffrage—compelled the government and others to build political consensus. Graphic designers investigated new strategies to influence public opinion. The street was transformed into a forum for political agitation through mass demonstrations and a constantly changing display of propaganda posters.

During the First World War (1914–18) Germany's leading graphic designers turned from commerce to propaganda. Lucian Bernhard and Julius Gipkens, for example, made distinctive designs for political parties and the military, adapting the technique of branding that had been developed for commercial products.

Following Germany's defeat in the war and the Kaiser's abdication, the seat of government moved from volatile Berlin to provincial Weimar, center of the eighteenth-century German Enlightenment. Several cities experienced Soviet-style Communist revolutions that were countered by agitation for the cause of extreme nationalism. The posters in this exhibition demonstrate some commonly used design strategies of the period. They include an expressionist figurative drawing style, often depicting the heroism of labor; the extensive use of red ink, indicating Communist affiliation or an emergency or dangerous situation; and animal symbolism and grotesque caricature to identify the political opposition in an exaggerated, forceful way.



Poster, *Deutsche Luftkriegsbeute Ausstellung*. Delka.
(German Exhibition of Captured Aircraft), 1917.
Designed by Julius Gipkens. Color lithograph. XX1990.3334.

MODERNISM AND THE NEW TYPOGRAPHY

After the First World War, modern artists and designers consciously broke with the styles of the past. They championed a rational and international response to a world changed beyond recognition by the "Great War." Many aligned themselves with revolutionary politics to support the ideals of Socialism and the integration of the arts into daily life.

Radical artist associations such as the *Novembergruppe* (November Group) included among its members Walter Gropius, director of the Bauhaus, and El Lissitzky. Believing that they had a critical role to play in building the new world order, artists explored new approaches to graphic and typographic design with the aim of reaching a broad public.

Innovations in graphic and typographic design in the 1920s and 1930s were known as *die neue typographie* (the new typography). Building on the ideals of simplicity and "fitness for purpose" embraced by early design reformers, proponents of the new typography also espoused the concepts of universality and objectivity. While mass unemployment and extreme currency inflation in Germany limited commercial opportunities for designers, some experimental ideas had an impact on commercial design. Graphic design was seen as the expression of a mass society in the machine age. Graphic designers welcomed new technologies in the belief that the machine would establish a new structure for society. Some took up photography, claiming that it was free of the class connotations associated with fine art printing techniques. Spare imagery, geometrical composition, bold colors, and sans-serif typefaces characterize their rational and objective approach to design.



Poster, *Hut ab vor dem neuen Chrysler 65*.

(Hats off for the new Chrysler), 1929. Designed by Ashley Havinden.
Color lithograph. 87.1136.4.1. Photo: Willard Associates.

THE POLITICS OF GRAPHIC DESIGN: NATIONAL SOCIALISM AND CULTURAL CONSERVATISM

On 30 January 1933 Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany. Following the elections of 5 March 1933, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) consolidated its power and inaugurated the Third Reich. With democracy suppressed and Germany a one-party dictatorship, the National Socialists (Nazis) orchestrated a massive propaganda campaign to win the support of the German people.



The Nazis introduced a comprehensive and reprehensible range of so-called “reforms” in most areas of public and private life. They mandated membership in official state organizations with the aim of eradicating “undesirable” elements in the workforce and professions, such as Socialists, Communists, and Jews. Recognizing the persuasive power of mass media, the Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda was established under the direction of Joseph Goebbels. Goebbels cunningly combined propaganda and terrorism in his mission to control all forms of communication—print and broadcast media (newspapers, magazines, books, and radio); cultural programs (film, visual arts, and music); and public meetings and rallies.

Goebbels denounced the artistic styles associated with the liberal Weimar years, rejecting the radical experiments of *die neue typographie* and *die neue photographie* as “Jewish” or “Bolshevik.” He advocated designs that reflected native Germanic traditions—Fraktur or black letter type based on medieval letterforms, traditional lithographic techniques, and heroic imagery. The Nazis manipulated the past, using both traditional folk and classical imagery. The most potent example is the Nazi appropriation of the swastika—an ancient symbol of good fortune and prosperity—for the party emblem. The posters in this exhibition contain images that supported the invention of a “pure” Aryan race and provided associations with stability and enduring values that the new state needed to establish its legitimacy.

Poster, 4. Reichsnährstands
Ausstellung München.
(Fourth State Food Producers'
Exhibition), 1937.
Designed by Ludwig Hohlwein.
Color lithograph. XX1990.2850.
Photo: Bruce White.

THE POLITICS OF GRAPHIC DESIGN: NATIONAL SOCIALISM AND MODERNISM

**“Without motor-cars, sound films and wireless, [there is] no victory for National Socialism.”
– Adolf Hitler**

The graphic program of the Third Reich contained inherent contradictions. Recent scholarship suggests that rather than rejecting Modernism entirely, the Nazis were selective in their anti-Modernism. To fuel the German economy and to satisfy the public's expectations of growing prosperity, the Nazis adapted techniques and strategies used for modern commercial marketing campaigns to make their messages visually appealing.

The swastika emblem is the most powerful example of the Nazis' complete mastery of modern marketing strategies. Using mass production and mass communication, the Nazis turned the swastika into a brand identity. The swastika appeared everywhere. It was carved in stone on state buildings, embroidered on party uniforms, pressed or printed on ceramics and other domestic products, and reproduced on millions of pieces of printed ephemera. Despite its original meaning as a symbol of good fortune and well being, it remains to this day a potent emblem of anti-Semitism and violent intolerance in general.

The posters on view demonstrate how the regime appropriated many modern photographic and graphic techniques. For example, photomontage, a technique pioneered in the early 1920s by John Heartfield and other members of the anti-establishment Berlin Dada group, was used to express the abstract idea of mass communication or to portray hard-working German students loyal to the regime. To illustrate the regime's economic progress, Isotype (International System of Typographic Pictorial Education)—a codified program of statistical graphics pioneered by the leftist Viennese economist and philosopher Otto Neurath—were employed despite their Socialist origin.



Poster, *Ganz Deutschland hört den Führer mit dem Volksempfänger*. (All of Germany listens to the Führer with the People's Radio), 1936. Designed by Leonid Berman. Color lithograph. XX1990.3116. Photo: David Joyall.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The exhibition, organized by The Wolfsonian-FIU and drawn entirely from its collection, was curated by Dr. Jeremy Aynsley of the Royal College of Art, London, and Wolfsonian curator Marianne Lamonaca. The Wolfsonian-FIU gratefully acknowledges Dr. Aynsley, whose research on its German-language graphics collection was supported by an International Partnerships Among Museums (IPAM) fellowship. Aynsley's *Graphic Design in Germany, 1890-1945*, published by Thames & Hudson, is available for purchase at the BGC.

For further information about the exhibition and related public programs, please contact the BGC Gallery:

Phone 212-501-3023
TTY 212-501-3012
E-mail gallery_assistant@bgc.bard.edu
Visit www.bgc.bard.edu.

Hours

Tuesday through Sunday 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Thursday 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Admission

Regular	\$3
Seniors (65 and over)	\$2
Students (with valid ID)	\$2

Exhibition Tours

Group tours of the exhibition may be scheduled Tuesday through Friday between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., and on Thursday evening until 7:00 p.m. Advanced reservations are required for all groups.

Payment must be made in advance via check or credit card. The fees for admission and guide(s) are:

1-20 visitors (single guide)	\$75
21-40 visitors (two guides)	\$100

Special Needs

The BGC complies with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act by making its buildings accessible to those with special needs. Call prior to visiting to discuss arrangements.

Transportation

The BGC Gallery is located at 18 West 86th Street between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue and is easily accessible by public transportation.

Bus	86th Street crosstown M10 on Central Park West M7 or M11 on Columbus Avenue
Subway	B or C train to 86th Street station



The aspirations and habits of civilization are revealed through the decorative arts, which are fundamental to the lives of all individuals. The decorative arts can be crucial as functional, everyday objects, or equally meaningful as articles of great symbolic importance. Despite the significance of these complex and seemingly paradoxical roles, the history of the relationship between the decorative arts and society has been explored only in a limited number of circumstances.

It is in this context that The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture has been established: to encourage new levels of scholarship in the decorative arts, to improve the training of emerging professionals, and to advance the recognition of the decorative arts as one of the primary expressions of human achievement. At the core of its methodology, the Bard Graduate Center examines this important cultural legacy on two levels: as elements in a hierarchy of connoisseurship defined by aesthetics, materials, techniques, and provenance; and as documents of material culture, analyzed through the range of interdisciplinary studies. Through the Doctoral and Master of Arts programs, the Public Programs, the publication of a semi-annual journal, the research library, and the exhibition galleries, the Bard Graduate Center will pursue its goals with the support of an international body of specialists.

BGC

18 West 86th Street
New York, New York 10024
212-501-3000
www.bgc.bard.edu

**print, power and persuasion:
graphic design in Germany, 1890–1945**

was organized by the Wolfsonian–Florida International University,
Miami Beach, Florida.

Major support for the presentation of this exhibition at The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture has been generously provided by the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation.