



# **American Art Posters of the 1890s in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, including the Leonard A. Lauder Collection**

*David W. Kiehl, Phillip Dennis Cate*

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In 1893 a poster advertising the April issue of *Harper's Monthly Magazine* appeared in newsstands and bookshops throughout the United States. The subject matter was unlike that of French posters of the period; this poster was modest and the style restrained. It was unlike other American posters because the product advertised was not so much commercial as it was intellectual. Despite this quiet beginning, the Harper's poster started a revolution in the history of American poster-making.

The book and magazine publishers who commissioned the first posters of this type gave free rein to their artists, many of whom, like Edward Penfield, Will H. Bradley, Maxfield Parrish, and Ethel Reed, were well-known illustrators of the time. Most of them signed their posters, which sometimes included the name of the printer as well. In other words, from the beginning the creative personalities responsible for the artistic statements were acknowledged in the American art posters of the 1890s.

Although the obvious purpose of these posters was to advertise magazines, books, and other products, they were from the very start designed to attract collectors. One poster collector wrote in 1896 that he owned about fifteen hundred American posters, although unfortunately he did not catalogue them and now many are lost to us. The first scholarly catalogue of the American 1890s art posters did not appear until 1972 in Germany. This present volume, which catalogues the holdings of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, including the impressive collection amassed by Leonard A. Lauder, is an important addition to the literature. Included here is information about nearly three hundred posters, each of which is illustrated, fifty-six in full color.

David W. Kiehl, associate curator in the Museum's Department of Prints and Photographs and compiler of the catalogue, has contributed an essay about the phenomenon of the American art poster, biographies of each artist, and a bibliography. Nancy Finlay, assistant curator at The Houghton Library at Harvard University, is the author of an essay on American posters and the publishing trade of the 1890s, while Phillip Dennis Cate, director of The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University, has written about French poster antecedents, including works by such artists as Toulouse-Lautrec, Chéret, and Steinlen. Leonard A. Lauder has contributed a brief introduction describing the evolution of his collection, and Philippe de Montebello, director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, has provided a foreword.

(This title was originally published in 1987/88.)

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