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INTERNATIONAL



CIRCUS POSTERS



INTERNATIONAL CIRCUS
POSTERS

QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY
May 4th - 28th, 1976

This exhibition has been arranged to form part of the programme for the 1976 Queensland Festival of the Arts, for which the statement "The Child in Us All" is the main theme. We are indeed grateful to an enthusiastic Collector of circus posters for this colourful and interesting display.

THE CIRCUS POSTER

For decades now circus companies have relied heavily upon the art of the poster for their survival. Posters have become the pre-requisite planning and promotion of a circus and for weeks prior to the arrival of a circus in a town, large and small posters are randomly pasted over any suitable fence or blank wall, whilst every second shop window or door features handbills or single sheeters.

The poster helps to create a major part of the magic that the circus dispells in suburbs, towns and cities - capturing the lively imagination of the inquisitive young and reviving the dreamy, halcyon days of the older generation when circuses were the greatest and cheapest shows on earth.

Good advance publicity meant good houses and the possibility of excellent word-by-mouth recommendations depended on the quality of the performance. John Rennart in "100 Years of Circus Posters," believes that the circus fathered the billboard industry for in some instances in America the amount of 'paper' (posters) put up in a single day for one circus could be anything from 5000-8000 pieces, from single sheeters (28 x 42 inches) to sixteen sheet billboards.

At the peak of the circus age from 1880 - 1910 there was no way to reach the people except through posters; no film, radio or television, and few zoos exhibited half the animals that the circus brought to town.

John Ringling in the American Magazine of 1919 clearly sums up the feeling people have for the circus as well as many of his own.

"The psychology of the circus really is simple: Our appeal is to the elemental instincts, to the child that is in every man. What they call 'the lure of the circus' is merely the great, unexpressed yearning of every human being to be young again. The circus is a drop of water from Ponce de Leon's spring. It takes people back to childhood for two hours, and makes them boys and girls again, makes them forget as nothing else will do. This fact accounts for many seemingly contradictory features of the circus. The humorists make fun of the man who borrows a small boy to take to the circus; to us in the business this is not funny. We see two things in it - the universal protest against growing old and the desire to give pleasure to others. A man or a woman enjoys the circus because the child enjoys it. Their great pleasure is in giving the child pleasure. The great pleasure of a circus man is that he gives pleasure to others.

"Men and women approach a circus in the spirit of throwing away age, and becoming the child for an hour or two. You never see men dress up to go to a circus; they put on their old clothes ... That man is going to the circus, and he is going to take the kiddies - his own or someone else's - and he is going to the circus of all forms of amusement, appeals to the elemental in man... In recent years, I have been asked often whether the circus will be modernized, whether the universal use of the automobile will change it. It never will be changed to any great extent, because men and women will always long to be young again. There is as much chance of Mother Goose or Andersen's Fairy Tales going out of style as of the circus altering greatly.

If we desired to change it, the people would not permit it. Clowns, elephants, pretty ladies in fluffy gowns riding white horses. That is the circus!... In performance you will discover, if you analyze the acts, that in practically everything, the circus man is playing to this child-interest in grown people...

"I have spoken elsewhere of our policy of honest dealing with the public, and perhaps some may criticize the statements, and argue that we are not strictly honest in our advertising, especially on billboards. Such a charge would be unwarranted. We insist upon honesty, and never have - nor ever shall - advertise any attraction that is not shown. But, you may charge, the billboards exaggerate. That is true, and there is a very simple reason for this; the public likes and demands such exaggeration and the flamboyant language of the posters fills this demand.

"The language of the circus poster is unique. Originally it was the result of opposition shows striving to outdo one another in startling announcements... We understand now, although we did not at the time, that we had struck upon the child-appeal in another form. All children and all primitive minds, love big words, and love exaggeration. The boy who sees four dogs in the back yard invariably says there are a thousand dogs out there. When he offers to bet, he always wants to bet a hundred million billion dollars. He is not striving to deceive, but to express bigness in his own way.

"The circus posters do the same thing: There is no effort to deceive the public - but to express the hugeness of everything in figures that carry the idea. If we have fifty elephants, and say a hundred, it pleases rather than offends. On circus day, everybody wants to think and talk in big figures, because on circus day we are boys and girls again, and we want to believe that there are a hundred million trillion elephants in the parade, and a billion funny clowns, and whole bushels and bushels of beautiful ladies on white horses."

BRIEF HISTORY

The history of poster making itself is both fascinating and stimulating, but the development of the modern poster quite possibly has its beginning a little over a century ago.

In 1866 Jules Cheret started to produce colour lithographic posters from his own press in Paris. Bal Valentino (1869) is an example of this early work and in many ways links in closely with the circus type of poster. His Theatre de L'opera Carnaval 1894 poster, Les Girard Dancers 1879 have a fresh and colourful mardigras quality.

Alois Senefelder, the Austrian had invented the process of lithography in 1798 but later modifications and faster mechanical reproductions didn't come till about 1848 when it was possible to print 10,000 sheets an hour. However it was Cheret's seven year stay in England where Senefelder's process had reached a high peak of efficiency that led him to return to Paris and set up his own press. Cheret drew his designs directly upon the stone, re-establishing lithography as a direct creative medium.

Cheret created a particular schema for a girl through his model, a dancer Charlotte Wiehe popularly called "La Chere" and her looks were imitated by young girls. She appears in Cheret's posters as a happy, laughing irrepressible girl - a fun loving extrovert. As an example of Cheret's prime mural painting ability, it is interesting to note the lettering on his posters was added by a friend Madare. As a link with the late Rococo style of painting and Tiepolo, Cheret's style looks to the past rather than forging a new style of painting. He helped to establish a new art form at a time when other painters were making major contributions to western art.

Toulouse Lautrec's thirty one posters are also a major contribution to the history of posters, and have in turn influenced many other poster artists like Steinlen, Barnard and the Art Nouveau artists Grasset and Mucha.

Lautrec dramatized his own personal experience and used the medium of the poster as a means of expression, for example, Jan Avril, May Milton, Reine de Joie, La Goulue are all fine works.

It is interesting to note that circuses were well established in the United States of America at the time of Cheret and Lautrec in Paris - in fact Cheret had been impressed with posters of American touring circuses he had seen during his visit to London. Although these posters had been printed in small sections using wood blocks - they were soon to change to lithography and at the hands of Strobridge became outstanding examples of poster art.

Unfortunately, few references give due credit to the firms of lithographers of circus posters and so many important names like Levy (Paris), Friedlander (Hamburg), Barclay (Glasgow) David Allen (Belfast) and Strobridge (Cincinnati) have been neglected. Most of the turn of the century posters were anonymously produced by designers working under contract to a lithographer. As well there seems to be some form of class distinction about circus posters and other forms of posters. Before the Second World War with very few exceptions, leading artists were not attracted to working for the circus. Whilst it seemed in order to paint or draw circus scenes as did Lautrec, he and many others didn't think the circus sufficiently important to create for them a poster. Call it snobbery or parochialism, but the truth is plain enough, art historians and museum curators have failed to appreciate the nature of posters in general, let alone the value and vitality of circus posters. This could have stemmed from the American Constitution relating to copyright laws whereby posters were not deemed to be useful arts, but were promotive arts and by which an artist could not claim exclusive use thereof. Posters had to have a connection with the fine arts to give it intrinsic value; and the courts of the time could discover nothing useful or meritorious in circus posters.

Nobody could question the quality of circus lithography itself as there was tremendous detail (too much in some cases) and the fineness of the dots which allowed close scrutiny, unlike our modern coarsely dotted lithos which are meant to be seen at a distance and at fifty miles per hour. It shows a definite pride in craftsmanship of the printers themselves and likewise that of the circus manager who insisted on the best - for good publicity meant good business.

And so from flat-bed stone lithography to zinc lithography and rotogravure. The modern photo offset lithography should have brought about cheaply produced circus posters of a dull, magazine type advertisement blown up, but this has not happened. Firstly because initially the posters were "photographically real" when painted or drawn by skilled artists for every detail and act had to be carefully represented. The reverse has happened with great emphasis being placed on the art work, and as we view the posters by Antoni (Denmark), Hans Ernie and Herbert Leupin (Switzerland) and the best of Polish poster artists. We realize that no more satisfying interpretation of the excitement and colour of the circus could ever be given. The circus poster through such artists has gained respectability, fame and acceptance.

CIRKUS BENNEWEIS

This famous Danish circus established in 1887 had as its home the large Hippodrome building which it took over from the Max Schumann Circus in Copenhagen. In 1972 Benneweis Circus decided to tent the show in that city in the beautiful Tivoli Gardens.

The two superb posters under the Benneweis banner are by Ib Antoni a Dane who used this non de plume to suggest a more international professionalism. He tragically died in 1973 in a Copenhagen fire. His colourful and amusing posters will be sadly missed from the Tivoli Gardens billboards, the circus and tourist advertising.

In both posters Antoni goes far beyond the cute or obvious so frequently exploited by circus poster artists - he shows wit, colour and superb design without losing its strong visual impact. There is an international understanding and appeal which breathes the very character of the circus. The horse/elephant poster is a masterpiece in every sense of graphic art.

CIRKUS SCHUMANN

The German circus is dominated by the Schumann family. Founded by Gotthold Schuman a horse trainer before the end of the last century. The five Rivel brothers from a travelling Spanish Circus were well known during the 1920's but the most famous Charlie Rivel became one of the greatest circus clowns rivalling the illustrious Grock. Antoni designed this particular poster for Charlie Rivel who permitted those circuses featuring him to overprint their name.

Producing something like 2000 posters during his life Antoni's tourist posters are most memorable. "The Little Mermaid" on every piece of Danish Tourist Association Stationery and tourist bureaux, The Palace Guard with birds nesting in his bearskin busby are but two popular posters but in Antoni's opinion his favourite was the Rivel Work.

THE POLISH CYRK

As would be expected the State circuses of Poland don't feature particular artists or speciality acts but endeavours to re-create the mystery, magic and charm of the circus itself. Each year about a dozen posters are chosen by the Art Director of W.A.G. (WYDAWNICTWO ARTYSTYCZNO-GRAFICZNE) or the Waraaw Graphic Arts publishers; these are published in a 5000 edition each, and distributed to the circus management. Selection is eagerly sought after by many poster artists throughout Poland where the standard of poster art is virtually unrivalled. Poland's International Poster Biennale is unique in the graphic arts, as is its permanent Poster Museum in Wilanow, the only one of its kind in the world. With this tremendous interest and appreciation in the art of the poster there is little wonder these Cyrk posters are so eagerly collected throughout the world.

Hubert Hilscher (b1924) was a graduate of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts in 1955 and has since made a name for himself in posters, book illustration and general commercial art. He has won many Polish and international poster awards, the excellence of his work can be seen in the magnificent lion with strong, brilliant colours and dominant linear patterns.

CIRCUS KNIE (KNEE)

This famous circus was founded in 1803 and is the oldest continuous circus family in the world - the management of which is now in its fifth generation. It is the largest Swiss circus, a travelling one-ring show with a strenuous itinerary from March to November, the winter months being spent in other European cities. Performing two shows daily in a 4000 capacity tent, Circus Knie or the National Circus of Switzerland (an unofficial title) it plays to one million people annually.

Each season three or four different posters are authorized by the management - their official size by Governemnt Act being 35.5/8 x 50.3/8 ins. The standardization of Swiss posters has led to a certain orderliness in bill posting - where it is no longer haphazard and unsightly - an example we Australians could well follow. The Swiss are very poster conscious as can be evidenced by the establishment of the Kunstgewerbeschule in Zurich; and the holding of annual poster competitions and awards for posters since 1942.

The artist representing the Cricus Knie is Hans Ernie (b1909). His fluid yet descriptive style, well known through paintings, lithographs, drawings and posters, is admirably suited to the circus. The two posters exhibited here show his sureness of hand and sensitive eye - they are designed with a flowing movement, sufficiently decorative without being naturalistic, light hearted without being flippant, but above all most memorable, for like the circus itself - once seen, an Ernie poster is never forgotten.

HERBERT LEUPIN (b1916)

This poster has become the monogram of the Circus Knie. Here he emphasizes the humour of the circus with the clown, but more particularly emphasizing the name (Knie - knee) with the bent leg under it. Leupin has won over 60 awards for his posters since the mid 1930's, but since 1950 his work has had a decided painterly quality and a gentle sense of humour. He has designed posters for some of Switzerland's largest companies many of which are internationally known.

AUSTRALIAN CIRCUSES

The Australian Circus has had a history of changing fortunes and strangely enough the big circuses seem to have folded up where the smaller family enterprises have survived and now flourish.

Wirths Circus the oldest and proudest name in the Australian circus was a household word with every Australian child. Their huge circus was "trained" between cities and to some extent this was their downfall as sites at stations became scarce and the cost of mobilizing the circus by trucks alone became too expensive. They had their own hippodrome in Melbourne where the cultural centre now stands and Wirth's Olympia was as famous as the Green Mill (Trocedero) Ballroom which shared its site.

Wirth's took over Ivan Bros. before the Second World War but the post war period, although it was a boom period for circuses like Wirths and Bullen Bros. they were both to feel the pinch later and amalgamate. This partnership was short lived and Wirth's became history whilst Bullens developed their Lion Safari Parks and concentrated on tenting the giant Moscow Cricus for Michael Edgely throughout Australia.

Three circuses which have survived are Ashtons, Sole Brothers (with the Perry family) and the smaller Albertos. Ashtons and Sole Brothers have recently improved their shows to be comparable with many of the samller European circuses but still rely heavily upon members of their respective large families for the majority of acts they perform. Ashton's history is a long and proud one dating back to 1823 and has continued since then with only one enforced break during the Second World War.

The posters offered by the Australian circuses are varied, from the high international quality of the Sole Bros. poster in full lithography, to the superb photograde work of Albertos and the simple and unusually poor example from Ashtons. (Better posters from this circus exist but unfortunately are not available).

THE GIANT BARNUM, BAILEY AND RINGLING BROS. CIRCUS.

The Ringling Brothers, seven in all, although originally five who started in the circus profession before the turn of the century, showed by their enterprise and hard work how a great circus could be built up by astute business dealings and know-how.

It is now history how the great Phineas T. Barnum developed his reputation through promoting the extraordinary, the bizarre and the freakish. From a negress reputedly 161 years old, to General Tom Thumb "The smallest man in the world" to Jenny Lind the Swedish nightingale, Barnum exploited them all, but nothing like the lengths he took to promote Jumbo the giant elephant. James A. Bailey, a former bill-poster, joined Barnum in his circus promotions and for many years the circus enjoyed outstanding popularity and success. This story is legendary how both Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey circuses started to take over smaller circuses - thus enlarging their respective enterprises. On the death of James Bailey in 1906 the Ringlings were able to buy all Bailey's interests in circuses he owned individually. Eventually in the next year Ringlings were able to purchase for \$400,000 the entire Barnum and Bailey circus and became the all time Kings of the circus, but the names Barnum and Bailey and Ringling Bros. were not to be joined until 1919 keeping the two circuses separate until then.

Today the whole enterprise which started to ail about 1968 has been taken over by Irvin Feld, a promoter of non-circus origins and with his son have embarked on a very commercial approach to the circus, having established a "Circus World" at Barnum City, Florida along the lines of Disneyland where the centre piece of the mammoth circus show ground is a 19 storey high statue of Jumbo, with decorative blanket studded with lights visible 10 miles away and elevators to take visitors to an observation howdah on its back.

However the two Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey three ring circuses (the red and blue units) are today the most splendid and exciting shows in the world. Brilliantly costumed, with lavish props and effects, each staging thirty elephants, fifty horses, dozens of camels and other animals, scores of clowns and to quote John Ringling "bushels and bushels of beautiful ladies on lovely white horses".

These facsimile posters of Ringling Bros., Barnum and Bailey help re-create the golden age of the circus and are not only important from the point of view of the history of the circus, but reveal to us the extravagances of printing that circus managements were committed to at this time.

	<u>Circus</u>	<u>Artist</u>	<u>Nationality</u>
1.	Charlie Rivel	Antoni	Danish
2.	Cirkus Benneweis	Moll	Danish
3.	Cirkus Benneweis	Moll	Danish
4.	Cirkus Benneweis	Moll	Danish
5.	Cirkus Benneweis	Cotte	Danish
6.	Cirkus Benneweis	Antoni	Danish
7.	Cirkus Benneweis	Antoni	Danish
8.	Copenhagen Tourist Association (See text)	Antoni	Danish
9.	Cirkus Benneweis	Eried	Danish
10.	Circus Knie	Leupin	Swiss
11.	Circus Knie	Ernie	Swiss
12.	Circus Knie	Ernie	Swiss
13.	Circus Knie	Campbell	Swiss
14.	Cyrk	Miedza-Tameszewski	Polish
15.	Cyrk	Cetnaronski	Polish
16.	Cyrk	ZPR	Polish
17.	Cyzk	Swaka	Polish
18.	Cyrk	Hilscher	Polish
19.	Cyrk	Hilscher	Polish
20.	Cyrk	Hilscher	Polish
21.	Cyrk	Stachurski	Polish
22.	Cyrk	Majewski	Polish
23.	Cyrk	Swierz (?)	Polish
24.	Circus Toghi	Unknown	Italian
25.	Bouglione	Unknown	French
26.	Cirque Sabine Rancy	Unknown	
27.	Cirque Gebra Enders	Unknown	
28.	Wiener Circus	Unknown	
29.	Ivan Brothers	Unknown	Australian
30.	Ivan Brothers	Unknown	Australian
31.	Ivan Brothers	Unknown	Australian
32.	Wirths Circus	Unknown	Australian
33.	Sale Brothers	Unknown	Australian
34.	Sale Brothers	Unknown	Australian
35.	Sale Brothers	Unknown	Australian
36.	Alberto	Unknown	Australian
37.	Ashton's Circus	Unknown	Australian

A selection of Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey facsimile posters to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the parent circus in 1972.

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