

THE ORIGINS OF MASS COMMUNICATION: Modern Advertising Posters in France and Italy

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ABSTRACT

Advertising posters emerged in the late 19th century and became the primary medium of mass communication until World War I. This study contextualises and justifies their cultural impact in France and Italy, which were the principal centres of artistic poster design. It analyses the socioeconomic, technological, and artistic factors that contributed to the rise of posters as a mass medium, as well as the works of the most significant poster designers in both countries. The findings demonstrate that these posters coherently reflected the profound transformations of the era. The leading poster designers, selected for their popularity, include Chéret, Mucha, Toulouse-Lautrec, Dudovich, Cappiello, and Hohenstein. They produced works of considerable artistic value that transcended the ephemeral nature of the medium. These posters not only transformed the urban landscape but also left a lasting imprint on collective memory, one that continues to resonate more than 100 years later.

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1. Introduction

Numerous studies agree on the importance of analysing the visual culture of an era to fully understand it. In this context, Max Gallo emphasised the significance of the poster as a reflection of the social changes of its time. Other authors have also highlighted the "importance of the advertising poster as a document for understanding and contextualising consumption and culture" (Rodrigo-Martín et al., 2021, p. 221) and even politics (Fernández Martín, 2023) during a historical period. Thus, the poster can be conceived not only as an aesthetic and commercial expression but also as a historical document that reveals the values, habits, and aspirations of the society in which it was created and consumed.

On the other hand, the first posters were designed by artists, and their aesthetic quality was considerable in most cases. The streets of major European cities were adorned with these striking advertisements, which, in vibrant colours, proclaimed messages of modernity and innovation to passers-by. Consequently, there was a highly positive reception of advertising from the public, creating a symbiotic relationship between posters and citizens that flourished until World War I, when propaganda overshadowed the prominence of commercial posters as they had been known until that time.

From the late 19th century until the First World War, the advertising poster emerged as the first medium not only for advertising but also for mass communication (Checa and Garrido, 2017; Rodrigo-Martín et al., 2021). This medium, which combined text and images in vibrant colours, was fundamental to the development of modern advertising. Some of the advertising artists who created these posters also theorised on how to enhance advertising effectiveness, making significant contributions to the discipline (Bueno Doral, 2012). As industrialisation progressed and consumer society expanded, the poster fulfilled its persuasive function while becoming a genuine social phenomenon. It even came to be regarded as an ephemeral art form, which was reflected in the phenomenon of poster collecting that led to numerous exhibitions and periodicals featuring reproductions of posters (Bartolozzi and del Mar, 2015; Gutiérrez Espada, 1998).

1.1. *The Modern Poster as an Object of Study*

The analysis of this study is complex due to its ephemeral nature. However, its artistic quality distinguished it during its time, leading to phenomena such as collecting. This appreciation for advertising posters among contemporary consumers has facilitated their preservation. In fact, researchers in the field of communication often attribute significantly higher value to posters compared to other advertising formats (Checa and Garrido, 2017). It is essential to recognize that during the period examined in this research, persuasive communication and art were combined in unprecedented ways.

The intersection between art and design has been the subject of numerous essays from interdisciplinary perspectives, recognising the complex interplay between aesthetic expression, cultural context, and practical application. Rahat et al. (2023) refers to the concept of 'symbiosis' between art and design, not as separate entities but as interconnected modes of creative expression that influence one another.

After compiling the contributions of Checa and Garrido (2017) and Gutiérrez Espada (1998), we can describe the modern advertising poster using the following aspects:

1. Concentration on the main motif.
2. Reduction of details, rejecting the superfluous and forgoing interior drawing.
3. Image composition based on the juxtaposition of blotches.
4. Clear outlines and very sharp contours.
5. Vivid colours that maximise the possibilities of chromolithography, though limited in number for technical and cost reasons.
6. A break with previous academic conventions.
7. Integration of text and image, featuring easy-to-read text and attractive typography.

1.2. *Objectives and Methodology*

The general aim of this research is to contextualise and justify the cultural impact of the modern advertising poster in the cities of France and Italy, which were the original hubs of artistic poster design.

To this end, two specific objectives have been established:

1. To analyse the socio-economic, technological, and artistic factors that facilitated the development of the advertising poster and defined its success as a means of mass communication, as well as a social and cultural phenomenon.
2. To analyse the poster works of the three most prominent authors in France and Italy, based on their popularity at the time.

To achieve these objectives, the methodology employed consists of a documentary review of both secondary and primary sources from the period, as well as selected works by the leading French and Italian poster designers found in private archives and museums.

2. The French Poster and Its Origins in Advertising

2.1. Technological and Economic Factors

The significant and accelerated transformations that occurred in various areas at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century prompted a profound historical change. This change affected both the mentality of the time and the creation and distribution of advertising messages, primarily through the artistic poster, which is regarded as the first mass medium of persuasive communication.

With the onset of the first industrial revolution, an enormous economic, social, and cultural transformation took place. During this period, an economy based on manual labour was replaced by one dominated by industry and mechanised manufacturing. Consequently, trade experienced remarkable expansion, driven by improvements in transport routes and the advent of the railway. The introduction of the steam engine increased productive capacity, while the assembly line made production processes more efficient. This transformative context, referred to as the “double revolution”, involved both industrial and liberal shifts, marking a critical turning point with significant social implications.

In this new landscape, advances in printing systems, particularly lithography, played a key role. Although lithography was invented at the end of the 18th century, it reached its peak of development in the 19th century, facilitating the expansion of the advertising poster. The printing presses of that time were precursors to what would later evolve into advertising agencies. The first creatives were also artists, and the work that is now managed by agencies as intermediaries between clients and creatives was conducted within the printing presses. During this period, clients began to recognise the benefits of effective advertising messages and started commissioning work from the most renowned artists, although the creative process largely remained intuitive and was based on trial and error.

The first advertising theorists emerged, and consumer society began to value and follow these incipient commercial messages. In this context, posters not only effectively fulfilled their persuasive objectives, but also became an important social phenomenon.

2.2. Socio-Cultural Factors: Bohemia and Belle Époque

The Belle Époque provided the ideal context for the rise of the Art Nouveau poster. This period, characterised by an atmosphere of debauchery, freedom, and defiance of the traditional values upheld by the bourgeois class, saw the emergence of the so-called European ‘bohemia.’ Bohemians, including both artists and those marginalised by society, carved out their space during this time. A notable example is the artist and poster designer Toulouse-Lautrec.

Paris in the late 19th century was embroiled in political and social upheaval following the fall of Napoleon III's Empire and the establishment of the Third Republic. This period also witnessed the Universal Exhibition and the construction of the Eiffel Tower. During this time, and much of the 20th century, Paris established itself as a must-visit destination for those aspiring to be recognised as artists.

Impressionism originated and developed during this era. Although it began as a marginal artistic movement linked to venues such as cafés and theatres, it quickly attracted artists who were rejected by traditional academies and faced harsh criticism. Many of these painters and their followers, deemed subversive for defying established artistic rules, found refuge in the flourishing bohemian culture of the Belle Époque and, in many cases, took on advertising work as they strove to carve out a niche for themselves in the art world.

Access to culture and entertainment in Paris was significantly expanded following the Jules Ferry Law of 1882. During this period, the capital was characterised by a fervour for beauty, modernity, and

pleasure. Two neighbourhoods emerged as the main centres of bohemia: Montmartre, a haven for painters and artists, with its cabarets and cafés, and the Latin Quarter, which attracted students, outcasts, and young Latin Americans who viewed Paris as a cradle of art.

The atmosphere of this period was immortalised in numerous posters and paintings. The interest in themes related to entertainment venues of the Belle Époque was shared by many artists, with Toulouse-Lautrec being a key example of a visual chronicler of Parisian bohemian life. According to several experts, these entertainment places were fundamental to understanding the Parisian Belle Époque (Gauthier-Villars, 1977; Morand, 1855).

Ultimately, the Belle Époque encompassed more than just social events; it represented an ideal and a way of life. The *joie de vivre* that characterised this period was particularly evident in the boulevards, cafés, and ballrooms of the great European cities. These venues not only facilitated an unprecedented mingling of social classes but also offered artists direct contact with the margins of society, allowing them to reflect this reality in their works, distinct from prevailing academic conventions.

2.3. Aesthetic Factors: Art Nouveau

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, art underwent a profound transformation with movements that challenged academic conventions. As Kandinsky pointed out, although the social surface appeared stable, a subterranean change was brewing that heralded a significant subversion (Berardinelli et al., 1985).

One of the first movements to reflect this change was Art Nouveau, which was influenced not only by the cultural, political, and economic context but also by earlier artistic movements such as Japanese printmaking, Impressionism, the Pre-Raphaelites, and the Arts and Crafts movement. Although the artistic poster emerged under the aesthetic principles of Art Nouveau, its national variants adopted different names: Liberty in Italy, Secession in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Jugendstil in Germany, and Modernism in Spain.

The term Art Nouveau was first used by Edmond Picard in 1894 to describe the work of Henry van de Velde. This style, which prevailed from the late 19th to the early 20th century, sought to break away from traditional academic styles, embracing modernity and urban identity. Its eclecticism distinguished it from mere imitation of earlier movements.

Art Nouveau established itself as a predominantly urban expression. Hector Guimard was one of its most prominent figures, particularly known for his Paris Metro stations and buildings such as the Castel Béranger and the Palais Léon Nozal. This style was characterised by an emphasis on the use of curved, organic lines. France became a hub for this movement, attracting both local and foreign artists. In this context, the advertising poster found fertile ground for its development, facilitated by the departure from academic conventions and the expansion of artistic boundaries brought about by Art Nouveau.

The adaptation of Art Nouveau to the needs of modern life allowed for its alliance with industrial production, especially in graphic design and architecture. According to Gutiérrez Espada (1998) and Weil (2015), the influence of Art Nouveau on the advertising poster can be summarised as follows:

1. Ornamentation as a distinguishing element, primarily based on plant forms.
2. The female silhouette as the central theme, embodying ideals of youth and beauty.
3. A passion for the spiritual, influenced by Gothic styles.
4. Mastery of the curved line.
5. Asymmetrical space management.
6. The drawing of stylised forms typical of graphic synthesis.

3. Leading Poster Designers in France

Considering the criteria selected in this article for the choice of poster designers, this section will analyse the main characteristics of those who had the greatest impact and influence on society at the time, as well as those whose advertising messages were most widely disseminated and accepted by the public.

3.1. Chéret: The Father of the Artistic Poster

There is a consensus among leading poster theorists about the origins of advertising. The French author Jules Chéret is regarded as the father of the modern advertising poster, supported by contemporary

written testimonies. One such testimony describes him as the “bringer of the new” and states, “He has opened up a new realm for art. He created the artistic poster” (Rodenbach, 1899).

“The walls are adorned with an invaluable collection of posters, yes, posters, signed by Jules Chéret, all protected beneath immense panes of glass. Simple strips of cardboard separate, frame, and enhance these charming *fantaisies*, composed as if they were paintings. They are perfectly decorative, characterised by crisp, clear designs, illuminated beautifully, and embellished with letters appealing to discerning collectors. Thus, it can be said that in this exhibition of his work, we must recognise Chéret as the innovator of this unique art form. A master who is perhaps the most modern, yet undeniably the least refined of the turn of the century” (De Fleury, 1888, pp. 146-147).

In summarising his biography, we find that Chéret was a craftsman with little formal artistic training but possessed extensive knowledge of lithographic techniques. He began working as an apprentice in a printing press at the age of 13. His trip to London during his youth was pivotal, as it was there that he was introduced to the grand American circus posters. Chéret began to create his own posters inspired by their popular language and large dimensions while also refining his technical skills in England. Another significant event occurred when he persuaded the cosmetician Rimmel to establish his own printing press, due to the enormous volume of graphic production required by this industrialist. It was Chéret who set up the printing press, leading to his prolific production of posters towards the end of the 1880s.

Around 1881, he joined forces with the publisher Chaix and established a workshop in which important followers of his style worked alongside him, creating an original structure akin to a creative team. His recognition as a poster artist was solidified at the Universal Exhibition in Paris (1889), where his success was so resounding that even Manet referred to him as “The Watteau of the streets” (Gutiérrez Espada, 1998). However, his decline began in the early 20th century when he abandoned advertising, as he never achieved significant recognition as a painter from the public or critics.

In terms of his communicative approach, it is important to note his focus on integrating text and image within advertising messages, which is one of the defining elements of the modern poster. With the assistance of his collaborator Madaré, he crafted the texts, which are regarded as a precursor to contemporary copywriting. The letters evolved from being mere typography to designs that became inextricably linked to the image. This integration reinforced his creative and persuasive intentions.

Chéret's innovation lies in his presentation of subjects, employing dominant close-ups reinforced by intense, fading colours that allow secondary images to complement the main advertising slogan without diminishing its prominence. He replaces the traditional black outline with gradients, favouring blue tones during his so-called ‘blue period.’ These striking contrasts effectively capture the attention of passers-by in streets filled with competing messages. Additionally, he often utilised a low viewpoint, which some attribute to the influence of Tiepolo, along with large vertical formats that enhanced the visibility and impact of his posters.

Chéret was a pioneer in transforming the representation of women, challenging conventional gender stereotypes and incorporating a more modern image into the social imagination of his time. Inspired by the Danish actress Charlotte Wihe, Chéret created a recurring advertising figure that, while consistently displaying similar physical characteristics, was adapted to reflect the specific product or service being advertised. In his favourite female character, Chéret embodies the spirit of the Belle Époque: modern, carefree, and always laughing and dancing. This character, along with its widespread dissemination in the streets of major cities, popularised a representation of women that diverged from the traditional female models of the era, which is an aspect thoroughly explored in the doctoral thesis of one of the authors of this article (Bueno Doral, 2012).

In his posters, women are depicted engaging in various activities, such as smoking and driving—actions that were deemed inconceivable at the time, as underscored by the analysed social sources. Chéret was a trailblazer in presenting this innovative model of women, making it highly visible throughout Paris.

Figure 1. Poster for *Job* 1895.



Source: Gutiérrez Espada, 2000.

Figure 2: Poster for *Benzo-Moteur* from 1900.



Source: Gutiérrez Espada, 2000.

Figure 3: Poster for *Pippermint*, 1899.



Source: Gutiérrez Espada, 2000.

3.2. Mucha: The Most Popular Ornamentalist

Following the classification made by Gutiérrez Espada (1998), a leading expert on artistic posters at the international level, we have selected Mucha for this article due to the significant impact he had on the advertising of his time. Furthermore, Mucha's transcendence as a poster artist is well recognised, and he is currently regarded as one of the most popular poster artists, alongside Toulouse-Lautrec.

Although Mucha was influenced by the ornamentalism of George de Feure and Manuel Orazi, he managed to develop a unique style that continues to impact contemporary graphic proposals, allowing any student of the subject to recognise his work. Mucha's success is closely tied to his association with the internationally renowned actress Sarah Bernhardt. By chance, he produced a poster for her when

he was the only poster designer available in the print shop during Christmas 1894, and he continued to work with her for six years thereafter, even participating in the design of her jewellery and set designs.

The keys to Mucha's popular success can be summarised as follows:

- Soft and delicate colours, with a preference for gold, bronze, and silver, reflecting a Byzantine influence.
- Stylised and elegant female figures characteristic of the Art Nouveau style.
- Preference for a large vertical format.
- Incorporation of decorative or ornamental elements.
- Effective integration of image and text.
- Rich expression in the depiction of the scenery.

Mucha received numerous commissions throughout his career for a wide range of products and services, including perfumes, cosmetics, theatrical performances, tourist services, and food. He undertook commissions for various countries and even toured the United States. In 1910, he returned to his native Czech Republic, where he is now regarded as one of the most renowned artists.

Figure 4: Poster for *Job* 1897.



Source: Gutiérrez Espada, 2000.

Figure 5: Calendar for *La Plume* in 1896.



Source: Gutiérrez Espada, 2000.

3.3. Toulouse-Lautrec and Parisian Bohemia

Among the most important and popular French poster artists, Toulouse-Lautrec stands out for his connection to the society of his time and for being one of the poster artists who has had the most enduring impact. Although he arrived relatively late to the advertising poster scene, developing his work in this field during the last decade of his life, Toulouse-Lautrec executed a comprehensive renovation of the medium. Some authors, such as Paul Colin, overlook Chéret's contributions and regard him as the "creator of the modern poster" (Gutiérrez Espada, 1998).

From a technical perspective, his mastery of direct drawing on lithographic stones was extraordinary. In terms of content, he developed an illustrative journalistic style that expertly captured and documented the nightlife of Paris during that era. Coming from a bourgeois family, Toulouse

gradually immersed himself in the bohemian world of Paris, developing a lifelong passion for it. He frequently sketched the scenes he observed in his notebook, which established him as a remarkable chronicler of Parisian life. This sentiment is echoed in the words of Gustave Geffroy, "Lautrec has created overwhelming paintings, devoid of nightmares or hallucinations... and with the firm intention of telling the whole truth" (Felbinger, 1999).

On the other hand, Toulouse-Lautrec accentuated Chéret's style by renewing the advertising medium, despite having produced only 32 posters due to the brevity of his life; he passed away at the age of 38. He regarded Chéret as a master, and thus we can view Toulouse-Lautrec's posters as an extension of Chéret's achievements in terms of advertising effectiveness. Toulouse-Lautrec reinforced the directness of the poster as both a means of persuasive communication and an artistic expression. Additionally, he continued to emphasise a sense of movement already present in Chéret's work.

In terms of his style, Toulouse-Lautrec preferred black outlines and areas of unmixed colour for his posters and graphic work. He abolished shading and textures in favour of clear, vividly segmented colours, influenced by Nabis and Japanese prints.

One of Toulouse-Lautrec's greatest innovations was his treatment of characters. He demonstrated remarkable skill in defining a portrait with as few strokes as possible, often incorporating a caricatural, ironic, and satirical element. These qualities, along with simple, smooth forms, were techniques that the artist could effectively employ in a poster but might not have been able to express within the conventions of painting at the time. The advertising medium offered him greater freedom, allowing for transgressive content that became highly appealing to the public of the era. Additionally, his posters exhibit innovations in composition influenced by photography, such as framing, the use of diagonal lines, and cropping parts of the human figure.

Figure 6: Poster for *Moulin Rouge*, 1891.



Source: Gutiérrez Espada, 2000.

Undoubtedly, one of Toulouse-Lautrec's greatest innovations was his representation of women. Female representation was a defining feature of both his pictorial and poster work. Most notably, Toulouse brought visibility to the marginalised women who were part of the artistic and cultural environment of Montmartre. He gave a feminine face to the marginality of Parisian bohemia, and that face, emerging from the streets of Paris, denounced the prevailing 'double standards,' as exemplified on the cover of *Elles*.

Figure 7: Poster for *Elles* from 1896.



Source: Gutiérrez Espada, 2000.

In the series of engravings entitled *Elles*, which portrays the reality of prostitution in Paris, Toulouse succeeded in creating images imbued with tenderness and profound humanity. These works represent a forceful critique of the morals of his time, exposing people who were marginalised and excluded by society.

The women of Toulouse-Lautrec's time gained recognition through the realistic, albeit sometimes poignant, approach he employed in his work. In his posters, one can observe postures, attitudes, clothing, and even gazes that reflect this realism. It is important to note that the bourgeois women, who adhered to the moral standards of the time, maintained a rigid composure, evident in their gestures and expressions. In contrast, the new female model emerging in Western society at the end of the century, one that artists like Toulouse-Lautrec daringly depicted without moral judgement, exhibited a direct gaze, diverse gestures, and representations that could be described as possessing 'personality.'

Thus, the innovations introduced by the artist into the advertising medium occurred on several levels: aesthetics, content, composition, feminine claims, and a connection with the so-called *esprit du temps* (the spirit of the times). It is safe to assert that, after his death, no poster designer in France matched his calibre.

4. The Origins of the Italian Poster

4.1. Technological and Economic Factors

With industrialisation and Taylorism, the production and supply of various goods increased, and advertising played a pivotal role in encouraging consumption. Although the 19th century was largely characterised by a subsistence economy, advertising managed to generate aspirations for social mobility through the purchase of certain products. In this capitalist society, objects previously revered or restricted to the upper classes began to flood the streets and were prominently advertised on posters: cookers, gramophones, creepers, bathtubs, liqueurs, food supplements promising specific benefits or remedies for ailments, bicycles, and sewing machines among others. Access to these products and forms of entertainment started to become democratised. All this occurred in an atmosphere of optimism and confidence in the emerging technological advancements, which proliferated across various sectors until the outbreak of the First World War.

Italy was far from socio-economic uniformity. The north was more industrialised and therefore possessed greater wealth than southern Italy. Nonetheless, printing companies in the north collaborated closely over time with entrepreneurs in the south. The most significant printers, including Chappuis, Istituto d'Arti Grafiche, Armandino, and Ricordi, the latter being the foremost, were located in northern Italy.

Founded in 1808 as a music copy shop, Casa Ricordi adeptly adapted to foreign technological innovations, establishing itself as a benchmark in the production of advertising posters. They imported the first offset printing machine and employed new techniques, such as photolithography and chromolithography, which enabled the creation of large-scale posters with high print quality. This

development marked the inception of graphic advertising in Italy, which expanded significantly from the Officine Grafiche Ricordi.

Ricordi's growth was substantial, with branches established in Italy, Europe, and South America. The company began developing advertising posters for its lyrical creations. Its advertising division, Officine Grafiche Ricordi, which was dedicated exclusively to poster creation, soon surpassed the music publishing and printing branch in terms of prominence. Officine Grafiche Ricordi achieved notable success with projects such as the creation of the world's largest advertising poster for the Olympia Circus, a technical feat commissioned from England and carried out by the Italian workshop, which was the most advanced in Europe at that time. Officine Grafiche Ricordi established itself as a pioneer in the advertising industry, and its legacy continues to be examined for its artistic and business impact.

4.2. Socio-Cultural Factors: Subsistence and Consumerism

Italy did not experience a Belle Époque comparable to that of other European cities such as Paris, London, or Berlin. The process of industrialisation in the country was delayed, commencing in the late 19th century and extending beyond 1914. From the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861 until the rise of fascism in 1922, Italy was a constitutional monarchy with an economy that, despite a degree of liberal openness, faced significant challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, and considerable cultural disparities.

From the second half of the 19th century, Italian cities began to expand rapidly, becoming populated with workers, immigrants, and the bourgeoisie in search of entertainment. This growth resulted in an increase in traditional forms of entertainment, such as opera and theatre. In the early 20th century, Italy's economic recovery facilitated colonial expansion, particularly in Somalia.

In the social sphere, the working classes began to adopt certain behaviours of the upper classes, tailoring them to their purchasing power; for instance, they took up smoking and cycling when they could not afford a car. The introduction of lamps in the home enabled women to sew late into the night, allowing for slight improvements in the family economy, as their participation in work outside the home was limited, except in rural areas, where they engaged in agricultural work alongside men.

Two significant developments stand out: women's access to reading and the interest in literacy among certain working-class groups aimed at improving their social position. Although women had limited political and civic power, they played a central role in household purchasing decisions. As consumers and promoters of everyday products, ranging from soap to ointments, women were inundated with messages that promoted beauty as a means of social advancement. Despite these limitations, Italian women exhibited a remarkable capacity for work and self-improvement, integrating social expectations into their daily lives. This period witnessed women beginning to demand equal rights, access to the labour market and education, as well as participation in suffragette movements, reflecting a gradual change in their societal roles. Dressmakers, who replicated designs from magazines or catalogues, operated from home and sold their products to local shops or customers, thereby contributing modestly to the improvement of the family economy.

The democratisation of society also impacted fashion, positioning women as central figures. Despite social differences, access to fashion and social events provided women with the illusion of social advancement. Advances in transportation, such as trains and bicycles, coupled with urban growth, enhanced mobility and tourism, which began to be democratized, even for the working classes. On special occasions, families could afford to attend concerts or visit baths near the shore or lakes, where permanent facilities began to emerge, offering services such as the rental of deckchairs, parasols, and changing rooms, as well as food and beverages. These outings, particularly on Sundays—the only day off for workers—marked a transition from a purely subsistence economy to a consumer-oriented one.

The primary form of entertainment in urban life was musicals. In Italy, censorship was stricter than in France, leading to the promotion of opera over cabaret or café-theatre. Opera became the favourite pastime of citizens, while theatre served as a reflection of society, bringing together its various strata in different tiers. Attending the theatre also provided an opportunity for socialising.

4.3. Aesthetic Factors: The Liberty Style

The Italian poster emerged later than its French counterpart, influenced by three key milestones in 1895: the creation of the first commercial poster, the inclusion of Art Nouveau in the Venice Biennale,

and the founding of the magazine *Emporium*, which promoted the Liberty style. The Liberty style drew from Art Nouveau, incorporating two-dimensionality influenced by Japanese prints, the use of flat colours, and floral motifs. These elements can be observed in various graphic manifestations of the period. In Italy, the Liberty style adopted Renaissance characteristics, evident in anatomical studies and architectural details, such as the floral cornices framing the central figure.

The term 'Liberty' derives from Arthur Liberty, a merchant whose shop played a significant role in the spread of this style. Liberty manifested in various artistic forms, encompassing architecture, posters, and book illustrations. The style gained prominence in Italy following the Paris Exhibition of 1900 and the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art held in Turin in 1902. Ernesto Quarti emerged as one of its main proponents, drawing inspiration from both French Art Nouveau and Austrian Secession.

Art historian Rossana Bossaglia (1997), who specialised in Italian Liberty, considered it more of a psychological phenomenon than a formal movement. Despite her discussions regarding its chronology, she concurred that graphic art, particularly posters, were crucial in introducing this style to the masses. The Turin exhibition of 1902 cemented Liberty as a cohesive aesthetic cultural manifestation, in synchrony with the international trends of the time.

5. Leading Italian Poster Designers

The list of Italian and European illustrators who worked in Italy is extensive. We will mention three due to their lengthy collaboration with Ricordi, the most important Italian graphic office, and their bold clients who maintained long-standing relationships with the company. Additionally, based on the selection criteria employed for this research, these illustrators also had the greatest impact on Italian society during that period.

5.1. *Adolf Hohenstein and La Scala, Milan*

Adolf Hohenstein studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, where he produced many of his early works. After arriving in Italy in 1879, he settled in Milan, which was the country's economic and industrial centre at the time. He joined the group of German specialists that Ricordi recruited to reinforce his new headquarters, expanded in 1884, and became the first internationally renowned artist to collaborate with Ricordi. In 1889, Giulio Ricordi appointed him the artistic director of the graphic section of the publishing house.

In addition to creating figurines, posters, and scenography, Hohenstein made significant progress in designing scores, libretto covers, as well as catalogues, postcards, and posters for commercial, tourist, and cultural purposes. Publicity had to be carefully elaborated, as it was one of the company's primary objectives.

Hohenstein's work, closely connected with lyric theatre, became an essential component of Puccini's fame. For 20 years, he managed the scenography and costume design for Puccini's works. Earlier, the renowned composer Giuseppe Verdi had commissioned Hohenstein to create the scenography for his final work, *Falstaff* (1893). This collaboration proved to be extremely enriching for Hohenstein's professional development, as he became convinced of the necessity to conduct a historical-documentary study to provide the audience with a coherent and aesthetically integrated production, merging music, dramatic action, and stage space, while manipulating lighting to create striking atmospheres. Their mutual admiration endured, with Hohenstein depicting Verdi on his deathbed.

Figure 8: Poster for *Falstaff* from 1893.



Source: Museo Teatrale alla Scala, Milan, 2012.

Figure 9: Watercolour essays from *Falstaff*, 1893.



Source: Archivio Storico Ricordi, 2012.

Figure 10: Verdi's 1901 pencil drawing.



Source: Museo Teatrale alla Scala, Milan, 2012.

Lyric performance was promoted through all possible channels and formats. A premiere at La Scala represented the social and cultural event of the year. This period coincided with Hohenstein's most productive phase in the creation of posters and brochures for the works being presented.

Figure 11: Poster for *Tosca*, 1899.

Source: Mughini and Scudiero, 1997.

His outstanding talent and style made him a point of reference for young illustrators in Milanese publishing, with a notable influence on figures such as Marcello Dudovich and Leopoldo Metlicovitz, later internationally renowned. Dudovich, in fact, would surpass the master in notoriety. A poster by Hohenstein won the first prize for the *Esposizione d'Igiene* in 1900. Six years later, a Universal Exhibition in Milan focused on transport. Hohenstein designed the logo, while Metlicovitz won first prize for his poster *Inaugurazione del Sempione*. Dudovich also contributed a poster, although only a description by his wife, Elisa Bucchi, survives (Curci, 1976).

5.2. Marcello Dudovich: The Painter of Women

A poster designer and artist active since the final years of the 19th century, Marcello Dudovich's talent and originality revolutionised the advertising poster, transforming it into a more accessible and popular art form. Throughout his career, he collaborated with prestigious Italian publishers and renowned European magazines.

Although he did not belong to the social class he portrayed, Dudovich managed to capture its essence uniquely. His elegant and sophisticated style attracted a diverse range of clients, including Campari, Chapuiss, Ricordi, IGAP, Fiat, and Mele, as well as magazines such as *Emporium*, *Simplicissimus*, and *Italia Ride*. In his works, the female figure featured prominently, often depicting her as a beautiful, glamorous, and independent woman, both an object of desire and a discerning consumer.

He won numerous accolades, including one from Casa Borsalino in 1910, for an iconic poster that still adorns their shops. This poster evokes a palpable atmosphere using minimal visual elements, marking an innovation by making the product the central focus and suggesting a romantic encounter without showing the protagonists.

He won numerous prizes, including one from Casa Borsalino in 1910, for an iconic poster that continues to adorn their shops. This poster evokes a palpable atmosphere using minimal visual elements and represents an innovation by making the product the central focus while suggesting a romantic encounter without depicting the protagonists.

Figure 12: Poster for *Zenit* 1910.



Source: Scudiero, 2002.

For Dudovich, stylisation and simplification serve as tools in a decorative game that combines humour and responses. The text, integrated into the design of the Liberty arabesque, gains the value of an image and achieves formal autonomy. His work straddles the border of abstraction without fully crossing it, yet it creates an advertising effect that transcends traditional codes while maintaining legibility. An outstanding example of this approach is his poster *The Ghosts* (1910) for Mele, where the hands and faces of the three characters fade against a green background. Although similar techniques had been previously explored by English poster artists, no one had dared to erase the faces to that extent until then.

Figure 13: Poster for *Mele* 1910.



Source: Scudiero, 2002.

Marcello Dudovich was responsible for the majority of advertising campaigns for Mele department stores, creating a sophisticated style that remained accessible to much of Neapolitan society, balancing elements of the Ottocento and Novecento. His new posters generated considerable excitement in newspapers and magazines, akin to the buzz surrounding the clothing collections they represented. The illustrator's latest creations were eagerly anticipated and prominently featured in the local press, celebrated on par with the clothing collections themselves. The archives of the Ricordi house indicate that orders ranged from 2,000 to 4,000 copies for the launches of new seasonal collections (Francia Ferrero, 2013). Dudovich enjoyed significant public favour. In a radio interview in 1950, Dudovich said, "An artistic advertising poster can be considered a delayed action bomb. This is precisely what constitutes its artistry: it operates over time" (Curci, 2002: pp. 30-31).

5.3. Leonetto Cappiello and The Caricature

Cappiello was an exceptional poster designer, exemplified by his work for Campari, following his notable expertise in fashion poster design for Mele, influenced by French masters such as Chéret and Toulouse-Lautrec. His partnership with Campari allowed him to fully unleash his creativity, largely due to the complete freedom afforded to him by Davide Campari. During this collaboration, Cappiello excelled in crafting caricatured characters against plain-coloured backgrounds, employing vibrant hues that

highlighted the brand name. His work garnered high acclaim from both critics and the public, establishing him as an artistic icon whose designs continue to adorn Campari shops worldwide.

Cappiello incorporated elements of humour and playfulness into his designs, employing saturated backgrounds that evoked an Oriental aesthetic, which had gained prominence in Europe through Japanese prints. His distinctive style was strategically leveraged by brands like Campari to enhance product recognition. Cappiello's fruitful collaboration with the company resulted in a long-lasting relationship, including the creation of a poster in its Arabic version for markets with restrictions on alcohol consumption.

Figure 14: Sketch photograph for Campari, 1909.



Source: France Ferrero, 2013.

Figure 15: Poster for Campari 1909.



Source: Vergani, 1990.

Figure 16: Poster for Campari in Arabic, 1909.



Source: Vergani, 1990.

Thanks to the international orientation of both Campari and the Ricordi Graphics Company, where his posters were printed, Cappiello's creations initially saturated the streets of Italy in the late 19th century and subsequently reached cities across Italy and America, from New York to Buenos Aires, where Ricordi had a significant presence.

An interesting anecdote can be found in the correspondence archives of Ricordi, which detail a rejection communicated to Cappiello when he applied for a position (Francia Ferrero, 2013, p. 500). The printing company informed him that they had sufficient illustrators at the time. This was one of the few missteps made by the impresario Giulio Ricordi, who was known for his keen ability to identify emerging talents in both the musical field, such as Puccini, and the graphic arts, like Dudovich. Giulio Ricordi later rectified this oversight by hiring Cappiello, who then contributed to the posters for Ricordi's primary clients.

6. Conclusions

This research successfully meets the proposed objectives by contextualising and justifying the impact of the modern advertising poster in France and Italy. The technological, economic, and socio-cultural changes that occurred in Europe between the late 19th century and the early 20th century were vividly reflected in a new medium of communication: the artistic advertising poster. This medium exhibited considerable aesthetic coherence throughout Europe, displaying stylistic variations that aligned with the distinct characteristics and flavours of each country, while maintaining a unified persuasive and aesthetic purpose.

The cultural impact of the advertising and artistic posters produced and displayed on the streets of much of Europe during the late 19th and early 20th centuries has been documented in contemporary newspapers, specialised magazines that celebrated the acclaim of critics and the public, as well as in the increasing number of collectors. The enduring relevance of these posters is still observable in 2024, more than a century later, in establishments and brands that uphold these iconic images as advertising icons.

The lithographic industry underwent a transformation from a manual, laborious, and slow process to one that enabled large print runs within a short timeframe, significantly amplifying the impact of posters on the streets. This mode of communication was primarily visual, as a considerable portion of the population was illiterate, rendering the poster an ideal medium for mass communication.

This research has examined French and Italian artists whose works are currently celebrated in illustration museums worldwide, demonstrating that the images they created have endured in the collective imagination. More than a century after their initial publication, these images continue to be reproduced in various formats, including postcards, mugs, mousepads, book covers, puzzles, and decorative posters in historic establishments in Paris, Milan, and Prague. They serve as a true reflection of a changing world: cities were expanding, women were entering the workforce, and consumer goods were proliferating and necessitated public awareness.

Chéret, Mucha, Toulouse-Lautrec, Dudovich, Cappiello, and Hohenstein were highly regarded poster designers and were creators of some of the most evocative and persuasive images of their time. In an era devoid of design schools, the artists were trained in lithographic workshops, which can be seen as precursors to what we now refer to as advertising agencies. They studied the works of their contemporaries and adapted to the significant technological advancements occurring in the printing field.

Among the numerous projects they undertook, they achieved something that remains complex both then and today: associating an image with a brand. Toulouse-Lautrec did this with Moulin Rouge, Chéret with Peppermint, and Cappiello with Campari, while Dudovich represented Mele (later La Rinascente) and Fiat. Mucha's name is intrinsically linked to the renowned actress Sarah Bernhardt and her theatrical successes. Hohenstein promoted the operatic premieres of the leading composers of the time, which filled La Scala in Milan and initiated the European tours of Verdi and Puccini.

The technological and socio-economic changes experienced in Europe from the 19th to the 20th century were vividly illustrated by artists who, although not primarily focused on this aim, succeeded in transforming the physiognomy of European cities on the cusp of industrialisation.

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