

## PRESS RELEASE



# The Cleveland Museum of Art

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FOR RELEASE ON RECEIPT

TURN OF THE CENTURY POSTER EXHIBITION IS ON VIEW AT  
THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

Selections from the History of the Poster, an exhibition produced by The Cleveland Museum of Art's Department of Art History and Education, with works from the Museum's prints collection and extensions collection and private collections, is on view through May 6 at The Cleveland Museum of Art.

The modern poster was born in the latter half of the nineteenth century with the rediscovery by Jules Chéret of the creative and artistic possibilities of lithography--in particular color lithography. Chéret revolutionized the process of making posters in 1869 by overprinting an image several times, each time using a different color. He then spattered, shaded, and blended the inks, obliterating the harsh mechanical effects of the printing process. Chéret also made use of the tone of the paper in his compositions. As a result of these innovations he achieved a bold yet simple effect that captured the attention of critics and the public.

Poster artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries took their images from the scenes that surrounded them: theatrical performances and celebrities, commercial establishments and products, and even the ordinary man in the street. While those images might vary--from Chéret's beguiling females to interpretations by other artists of harsher realities: dimly lit cafes, prostitutes, and the plight of the poor and oppressed--they possessed a common characteristic. They were all a colorful contrast to the bills and placards posted in public places that had preceded Chéret's innovations in color lithography.

Lithography was invented in 1789 and is based on the principle that water and oil will not mix. A design is drawn on a special stone with a greasy

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## 2-selections from the history of the poster

crayon, ink, or wash. The stone is then treated with a mixture of gum and nitric acid so that the drawing is etched into its surface. This "positive" design retains the greasy ink that is rolled over it, while the "negative" portions of the image are protected by a thin film of water. The main obstacle to the early development of color lithography was the inability to accurately and easily insure color registration. Throughout the nineteenth century lithographers and printers worked to overcome this problem, with the greatest success occurring in England, where Chéret went to learn the new technical developments in lithography. He returned to France and in 1869 produced his first color lithographic poster, an advertisement for Lydia Thompson's performance in Faust.

Before the development of Chéret's integrated color printing system, lithographic posters were either black and white only or had color printed on the white background as a highlight. The color was incidental to, rather than a part of, the composition.

The perfection of color lithographic techniques by Chéret made feasible the mass reproduction of posters with integrated text and images. The result was a blossoming of color posters that attracted many artists to the new found medium.

The 24 posters in this exhibition by such renowned poster artists as Chéret, Georges de Feur, Eugéne Grasset, Alphonse Maria Mucha, Théophile Alexandre Steinlen, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec span some of the most creative years in the history of the poster. They give an indication of the revolution that color lithography brought to the art of the poster, making it a part of the avant-garde of the late nineteenth century and the poster a collectable work of art.

A free pamphlet describing the exhibition is available and free gallery talks are scheduled in the exhibition on March 21 and 25 at 1:30 p.m.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Relations Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.