

Classic Posters -Tools of the Trade

Classic Posters -Tools of the Trade, the Well-dressed Poster Collector

by Michael Erlewine

You would think that the first thing one needs to begin a poster collector is some posters, right? Well, not always the case. Many collectors have no idea of what to collect, so very often the first purchase by a would-be collector is a good book on posters, of which there is just about one, "The Art of Rock," by author Paul Grushkin. Although somewhat out of date by now, it still is the one essential book that all collectors of the San Francisco 1960's poster scene must have.

As for copies of "The Art of Rock," best look to Ebay for used copies. There is a tiny much-abridged and unreadable paperback available on Amazon.com. This is useless, so don't waste your money it. Pony up the big bucks and get one of the original printings on Ebay. It turns up every week or so. This is a must have book. Once you have this book, you can look and read through it and perhaps get an idea of just what type and period of posters you like, and might want to collect.

There are other books on posters out there, and I am sure I must have them all. I can't think of one that you really have to have.

Now you are ready to get some posters. We can leave that to another section to discuss. Let's jump right to: what do you do with them?

Well, the classic response to that is to tack them up on the wall, of course. We all did that, years ago, back in the 'day'. Very few poster collectors pin them to the wall, anymore. Any kind of damage, event tack holes, reduce the value of a

poster. "Mint" condition is the preferred condition for collecting.

STORAGE

So where do you put them? In the early days, most collectors threw them in a box and shoved the box under the bed or in a closet. Today, there are several commonly-used methods of storage, perhaps the most popular being placing the posters in an album, between archivally-safe sheets of acetate or mylar. This way, the poster can be viewed, but no one can touch them. Handling posters by hand runs the risk of leaving body oil from the fingers on the paper.

However, beware that most inexpensive albums, like photograph-type albums, use a plastic that can actually react with certain poster inks and damage your posters. Therefore you want to make sure that whatever plastic sleeves you are using are archivally safe.

Putting them in an album prevents that. The only downside about albums is that posters tend to slide around in these albums, damaging corners. The heaviness of a full album makes moving it around difficult, and prone to slippage. If you use adhesive corners, they will hold the poster steady, but they have other disadvantages like: getting them in place and the poster in them can lead, through our the inherent clumsiness of the process to bent poster corners and what not. Also, these corners can slip and turn over, exposing their sticky side to posters, and so on. Nothing is free.

A better solution is the use of Mylar sleeves. Mylar is an inert, archivally safe, form of plastic sleeve, into which posters can be placed. If you use properly sized Mylar sleeves, there is

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very little danger of slippage and this is a good solution.

The only possible disadvantage (and this paranoia speaking) of all of these plastic sleeves and albums is that: should they get near a fire or even in very hot sun, and melt, they would fuse to the poster material and the poster would be rendered useless -- just a consideration.

What the conservative collector uses for poster storage are archivally safe (inert) cardboard boxes, often those storage boxes with metal corners. The posters are placed in these boxes, one on top of another, with an interleaf page (some inert paper) between each posters. In particular, silkscreens need to be interleaved.

As to what kind of paper to use as the interleaf, glassine will work, but is not recommended for color photographs. Most collectors use storage papers that are buffered to pH 8.0-8.5. with perhaps 2% calcium carbonate. You want an acid-free paper with as little sulfur content as possible. A good place to read about these is Light Impressions, which can be found on the web.

So there you have a brief run-through on where to store posters.

Measurement Tools

Some of the poster experts like Eric King and Jacaeber Kastor have special rulers that are graduated to 1/64", which is very fine. I have one, because they have one, but I find it mostly overkill. Even if their measurements are to 1/64", their readers won't have one and so what good will that do them. For almost all posters, a ruler or tape measure that goes down to 1/16" is fine.

Micrometers

For measuring the thickness of various papers, you will need a micrometer, but, again, this only comes into play ones in a very great while, for very special posters.

White Gloves

On other hand, so to speak, white cotton gloves (available from any archival web site) are not overkill. There will definitely be times when they are needed to keep body oils off a rare or delicate poster. I use these quite often.

Photo Documentation

And if you are buying and selling posters, you are going to need to be able to get snapshots of them for one reason or another. There is a whole article on that subject elsewhere on this site:

"Photo-Archiving of Concert-Music Posters"

Shipping Materials

You will need some materials to exchange and ship posters. Many of these you may acquire if you buy posters. You can just reuse what you receive. Posters are shipped in two ways, either rolled in a tube or flat - no rolling them. Shipping them flat is preferred, if you package the posters correctly, but the packages are unwieldy and you don't want the whole package to even be bent, and so on.

Tubes are convenient and if of large enough diameter (4" or greater) will not affect the poster. Beware of tightly rolling an expensive poster and jamming it in a 2" tube. Not a good idea.

It is kind of an unwritten rule of poster exchange that if the poster is very valuable, it is always shipped flat and the seller is responsible to package it

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properly. The following articles are on this site.

"Shipping Posters - Flat"

"A Safe Way to Ship"

"Mailing Tubes: Pros and Cons"

Building a Library

As for books, I have good and bad news. The good news is that you won't have to spend a lot of money on poster books; the bad news is that there are so few of them. We need more.

ESSENTIAL

Art of Rock by Paul Grushkin (BOOK)

Collector's Guide to Psychedelic Rock Concert Posters (BOOK)

COLLECTABLE IN THEMSELVES

Eureka: The Great Poster Trip (BOOK)

Get On Down: A Decade of Rock and Roll Posters (BOOK)

Masters of Rock: Psychedelic '60s (BOOK)

Freehand: The Art of Stanley Mouse (BOOK)

Rick Griffin

GOOD

Swag: Rock Posters of the '90s (BOOK)

Art of the Fillmore by Lemke and Kastor (BOOK)

High Art: The History of the Psychedelic Poster (BOOK)

High Societies: Psychedelic Rock Posters of Haight-Ashbury (BOOK)

FUN, BUT OF LIMITED INTEREST

Street Art: Punk Poster in San Francisco 1977-1982 (BOOK)

Summer of Love: Haight-Ashbury at Its Highest (BOOK)

White Rabbit and other Delights: East Totem West (BOOK)

Fillmore East: Recollections of Rock Theater (BOOK)

I Want to take You Higher: The Psychedelic Era 1965-1969 (BOOK)

DATED

Goldmine Price Guide to Rock 'n' Roll Memorabilia (BOOK)

Official Price guide: Rock and Roll Magazines, Posters, and Memorabilia (BOOK)

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