

Old posters say more than a thousand words

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Beatrice Müller has a passion for vintage posters (swissinfo)

An advertising professional in Zurich has rediscovered the value of vintage tourism posters.

The simple but strong images found in Beatrice Müller's vast collection is proof of the old adage that a picture says more than a thousand words.

Tucked away in the basement of a tidy, three storey house near Zurich's art museum, the gallery is not easy to find, and some of the treasures it contains are not for sale.

I am honoured to be shown a rare copy of a poster from the early 1920s promoting the wonders of touring the Swiss Alps by Postal Bus.

Müller says she could have found a buyer for it many times, but admits she cannot bring herself to sell it.

"Its graphics are simple yet the image is very strong," she enthuses. "I really love it."

Alpine splendours

About one-third of her collection of 3,000 posters praises the splendours of holidaying in the Swiss Alps in the early 20th century.

The posters that are for sale range in price from a few hundred to a few thousand Swiss francs.

Having worked at leading Swiss advertising agencies, Müller values more than anyone the quality of vintage posters.

"Nowadays about a hundred different type faces are used in posters," she says. "They include a lot of text and explanation, but the early poster artists just worked with the visual."

Poster art

"That's why I think it's poster art, because they were artists."

Among the leading poster artists of the early 20th century were Emile Cardinaux whose images of members of high society hard at play in St Moritz helped solidify the resort's upper class reputation.

In 1920, Cardinaux challenged advertising wisdom of the day by painting a purple sky behind the Matterhorn to promote Zermatt in what is now a classic of advertising art.

Then there was Otto Baumberger and his impressions of holidaying on Lake Lucerne.

Many tourists in the 1920s took home mental images strongly influenced by his posters contrasting a glass blue lake and gleaming white mountains.

Müller says the reputation of these artists is one reason Swiss vintage posters are among the most sought after by international collectors.

"The importance in the world of the Swiss poster not only in terms of artists, but in the quality of the lithograph printing, especially by two or three printers we had around Zurich, has never been achieved by other printers in the world," she says.

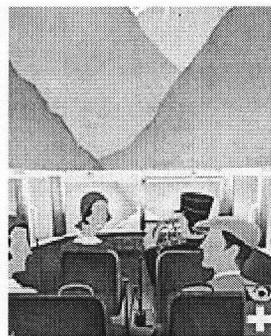
False advertising

Advertising posters then, as now, were not always honest in their portrayal of the product being sold.

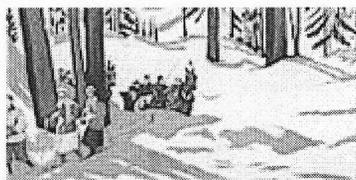
Müller has many examples of scantily clad women lounging on the lakeside. Even with snow-capped mountains forming the background, the message is more Mediterranean than alpine.

In that sense, they are very contemporary, since then as now, alpine resorts were trying to convince holidaymakers that the Alps were not only a winter playground but a summer paradise as well.

Müller says she is surprised most buyers come from abroad, with many of her tourism posters winding up in collectors' homes in the United States.



Poste Alpine Svizzera, lithograph (Artifice Gallery)



ST. MORITZ
A 1920 poster for St Moritz by Emile Cardinaux (Artifice)

"Collectors of vintage posters know unfortunately much more about the Swiss poster industry than a lot of Swiss graphic designers or advertising agencies do and I believe that's a shame."

swissinfo, Dale Bechtel

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