

Thoughts from the Murky Depths



by Jacaeber Kastor

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by

George Sargent

INTRODUCTION

This is not intended to be a finely produced book, but rather a readable document for those who are interested in in this series on concert poster artists and graphic design. Some of these articles still need work.

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THOUGHT BUBBLES FROM THE MURKY DEPTHS

PITFALLS OF THE SUPPLY/DEMAND WHEEL

By Jacaeber Kastor

What happens when a very specific, very refined and focused demand arises, for a service or merchandise in which supply is exceedingly scarce? Or a situation where demand far outstrips supply? (Such as plywood in southern Florida at the moment.) What happens is it's tempting for a supplier to let the price rise as high as the demand will take it. Only the ones willing or able to pay the inflated price can play the game. Sellers of posters are not unlike other merchandisers in this respect. Consumers of posters must realize their attitudes/behaviors do affect the market.

The demand for rare posters in the utmost pristine condition is the dilemma I write of. One cannot expect a poster dealer not to jack up the price in response to high demand for posters in this condition. There aren't too many early posters around in "A" condition. Furthermore, this customer is usually very demanding, and is rejecting 99.9% of the available supply of posters. The demand for utter perfection drives the cost of handling up considerably in many ways. These posters require a lot of extra energy to keep them pristine. They are extremely fragile thin sheets of paper and when a poster arrives to a consumer with the slightest bit of damage due to shipping/handling, it is of course returned right away as non-perfect. This can lead to the supplier raising the prices of "A" condition material in general as a sort of insurance against the potential costs of having it shipped back, and exchanged and reshipped, or against the possibility the merchandise will get damaged in the return shipment. (This can be avoided by using the "Kuzich}" method outlined in OFF the WALL} #3, pg. 8, but this way is cost prohibitive for large mail order business, etc., but lest I digress...) It is reasonable to imagine someone willing

to pay a bit more for an item in better condition. There is nothing seditious about this concept. My point is just that you must realize the "values" we set up are going to affect our reality. Money spent this way is well and good except it could be spent on rent, or the mortgage, or food, or relaxation, or feeding the whales or... you get the idea. Money is useful. So why would anyone want to create a situation where we have to spend more if it, if we don't have to? Do we want to let a "piece of paper" put us on a little hamster wheel? I personally don't want to see my hobby eat up an increasingly larger percentage of my income! Times seem to be getting harder, not easier. We are only going to live so many years. Some decisions have to be made, or at least thought about.

Well, there are probably some who think that the top 1% of rare posters in top condition are probably the best investment, and are speculating. If these parties have a lot more capitol than most people and don't have to sell, perhaps they don't mind seeing the prices get out of reach of the average collector, because then more rare posters would find their way to them and eventually these parties could possibly control the pricing and availability of rare material. A bit like what has happened to the top players in baseball and the upper end of the art market. Sort of a "rich boys/rich toys club". It hasn't been proven yet that only posters in this untouched condition are able to be sold at high prices. In the world market of posters for instance, some of the highest prices received for posters (in excess of \$100,000.00) were paid for posters in very used condition. Old movie posters and various WW1 & WW2 propaganda posters are a very popular and are not often pristine, nor are the turn of the century French posters or the Vienna Secession} ones. I'm sure perfect copies exist of these types, I just don't hear of people wanting only perfect ones. They seem to want specific ones. My friend at M.O.M.A. was so proud of the Russian posters they just spent \$20,000 for and they were really folded up.

Let me reiterate: The public hasn't been crying out for only pristine posters. Historically they have cried out for: Artistic Brilliance, Important or Historically significant pieces, or scarce or key pieces for collections. In our area of posterdom I would add: certain Bands. Why would we want to follow coin collectors down that road, where only the scarcest pieces untouched by human hands are generally considered worth anything?

My thoughts are: Why can't we consider everything, say, B+ condition or better, to worthy of collecting? Just this slight downgrading of our standards opens up a world of great slightly used posters for collecting, investing/speculating and general appreciation. It definitely loosens the noose to the concept that the valuable ones can be controlled, as the amount of available collectable posters increases exponentially when you consider all the great posters that have 1 tack hole or so in each corner. It also is less wasteful in that less time is needed to find the ones you need, and you can get your ear away from the phone for a while. A certain tolerance towards actual real life conditions can be beneficial. We do live in a "used" world and not a dust free test-tube. We are not perfect. Neither are most of our great posters.

What will actually happen if our attitudes towards posters with regard to condition, does not loosen up, is that the price of "mint" or "A" condition top pieces will go up very high, and there will be a huge depreciation (like with luxury cars) with the slightest defects. This can be good in that a collector who doesn't care if the poster is pristine, would probably be able to find lots of good deals. But their collection would not bring much money if they tried to sell it. The pile of used posters we all have around the house won't be worth very much and will not be liquid. If you are poor and anal, the high cost of top condition posters could make your goals unattainable. It just seems that a general mass perception shift could keep a more healthy attitude prevalent in our little niche in posterdom, and

could keep the market active and more widespread; perhaps inducing more growth and new collectors who aren't necessarily rich. It's a question of how this hobby will grow and how the business of posters will affect collectors. There are people who still love the subject and honor to some degree the tenets of the Psychedelic underground (!?). Will psychedelic posters become the new playground for the detached financial investor? Obviously some of both. The point again is you should be aware that your attitudes and concepts mold the future. Does the collector/speculator of the future want only perfect posters because they are just inherently better? Or is it because there is a trend being created in a trade now that "Mint ones are the only valuable ones". This buyer in the future is not yet formed. Probably what you have in the way of posters will determine how you want them to think...Any way you look at it the market should expand. It is just a question of do we want it to be built like a skyscraper or like a park?

[Note: This article originally appeared in Wes Wilson's publication "Off The Wall," and is used with permission of Wilson and the author. Copyright © Wes Wilson and Jaceber Kastor]