

REVOLUTIONARY SOVIET FILM POSTERS. By *Mildred Constantine* and *Alan Fern*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974. xi, 97 pp. Illus. 56 black and white posters, 16 color posters. \$12.95.

This collection of seventy-two posters from 1924–34, designed largely under the influence of the constructivist movement, makes a significant new contribution to our knowledge of early Soviet graphic art. The work of the Stenberg brothers is well represented with twenty-nine posters. The rest come from more than a dozen artists, including Rodchenko and Prusakov. Many of these posters are revived here for the first time since their original appearance as advertisements for Soviet and foreign films.

While the impulse to publish such a volume is laudable, the execution of that impulse leaves much to be desired. In the introduction, the authors themselves emphasize the importance of their subject. It is surprising, therefore, that they were not more conscientious about details in both the text and the body of reproductions. The pretense at scholarship in the fifteen-page text will annoy any intelligent reader. This attempt to place the posters historically and to present some analysis of their aesthetic qualities is largely irrelevant, because of disorganization, misplaced emphasis, and factual errors. Particularly disturbing is the excessive reliance upon long, poorly integrated quotations, all the more irritating because most of the quoted sources (for example, Camilla Gray on art and Jay Leyda on film), are readily available to a Western audience. Often the quotes detract from the point being made—a discussion of the relationship between color posters and black and white films (pp. 13–14) is supported by excerpts from Eisenstein's theoretical writing which postdates both the films and the posters under consideration. How, then, could the authors come to the conclusion that "when the poster artist needed to think 'in color,' he had as sources . . . the 'color thoughts' of the filmmakers themselves"? Such a glaring error destroys one's confidence in the entire text.

In the body of the book the most obvious shortcoming is the arbitrary sequence of the reproductions. A reader interested in the development of trends expects the posters to be ordered either in strict chronology or, better still, by individual artist. Instead, the authors have used what seems to be an entirely subjective sequence, grouping posters for each film (with one exception) together but out of chronological order, relying on the juxtaposition of images to give that sequence a semblance of unity. The reader who wishes to focus on the work of a particular artist is forced to flip back and forth through the book. One is also disappointed that only 20 percent of the reproductions are in color. While one can understand this circumstance, attributable, presumably, to production costs, one does expect an intelligent selection—reproducing those in color which would suffer most in black and white translation. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Finally there is the mystery surrounding the source of the posters. We are told only that the reproductions come from transparencies made in Moscow by the photographer Caio Garruba. Some readers may wonder in what archives the posters are preserved.

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