COLLECTOR'S SEMINAR

Nº 28 ---

Printed Matter of the Bauhaus Era



babauhaus dessau

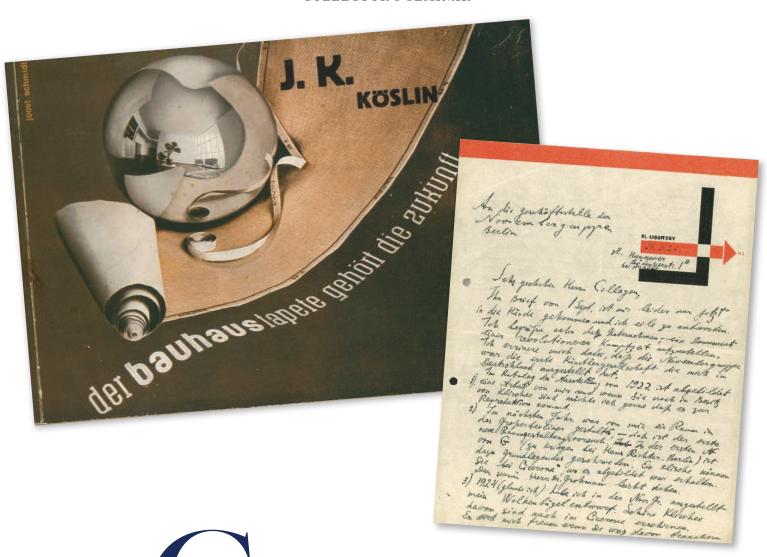
SMERZ9 DIESES DOPPELHEFT IST ERSCHIENEN UNTER DER REDAKTION VON EL LISSITZKY UND KURT SCHWITTERS REDAKTION DES MERZVERLAGES KURT SCHWITTERS, HANNOVER, WALDHAUSENSTR, 5" NATUR VON LAT. BAND2, Nr. B.D APRIL JULI 1924

Invitation cards, stationery, visiting cards, prospectuses, and advertising leaflets: many "commercial print" products from the 1920s are great typographic works of art. Interest grows, and prices are within reason

BY THOMAS DERDA







Preceding double page: 1-2 Robert Michel designed print products for the Kahl seed company in Frankfurt, 1927-30. In 2013, \$1,560 was paid out for 50 items at Swann 3 This sheet of stationery by the great typographer Jan Tschichold, ca. 1926, is on sale at M + R Fricke for €1,500 4 Piet Zwart, folded advertisement for the NKF in Delft. €3,500 at Kuyper 5 Prospectus of the Dessau Bauhaus, 1927, designed by Herbert Bayer, sold at Bassenge in 2005 for €550 6 Hannes Meyer, Bauhaus prospectus, ca. 1928, fetched €5,500 at Nosbüsch & Stucke 7 "Merz" magazine by Kurt Schwitters and El Lissitzky, 1924, €6,000 at Bassenge 8 In 2011, this ticket to the Dada Fair in Berlin, appraised at €200, sold for €3,600 at Hesse 9 Letterhead by Jan ("Iwan") Tschichold, went for €1,500 at Fricke

Catalog no. 606 has it all. The design of the letterhead announces that this is no ordinary letter: along the top, a red strip; in the upper-right corner, a backwards L-beam, pierced by a red arrow that points toward the abbreviated "el," used by the sender and designer. Above the arrow, his full name: El Lissitzky, the revolutionary avant-garde artist from the Soviet Union. In September of 1928, he stayed in Hanover, and the letter in question was addressed to the Berlin branch of the November Group, which wanted to exhibit his works.

exhibit his works.

In May of 2008, Lissitzky's letter was offered at the Hamburg auction house Hauswedell & Nolte for an estimated 1,000 euros; from the first moment, I was entranced by its lucid, Constructive design. I very much wanted to acquire it. And I was not alone in being thunderstruck when the hammer fell at 23,000 euros. Of course, the contents of this artist autograph may have contributed to the spectacular result, but the real draw was Lissitzky's stationery itself—a small but marvelous work of art, a typo-

graphic icon of the 1920s, and moreover of the most exceptional rarity. Lissitzky may well have had hundreds of these sheets printed, but where are they now? I have never set eyes on another.

Today, the "New Typography" has evolved into a multifaceted and fascinating area of collecting. These often quite small or fragile sheets of paper are marvelously designed artifacts, in every way on par with great classical graphics production. Brochures, advertising leaflets, visiting cards, menus, alongside admission tickets, theater programs, postcards, and flyers of all kinds: the printer refers to them as commercial or "occasional" print products; and in museums or on the art market, they are classified as ephemera, as casual or impermanent creations. They constitute an independent artistic universe, and under the influence of the pioneering reforms of the Bauhaus and other avant-garde circles in Europe, one that was especially innovative and fruitful during the 1920s. Growing numbers of collectors specializing in classical modernism are integratAdvertising prospectus for the city of Dessau, ca. 1932 by Joost Schmidt. Sold at Swann for \$1,560 including fees.

Left page: rare catalog for Bauhaus wallpaper, available at Thomas Derda for €7,000 (left). El Lissitzky's letter of 1928 (right) brought in €23,000 at Hauswedell & Nolte

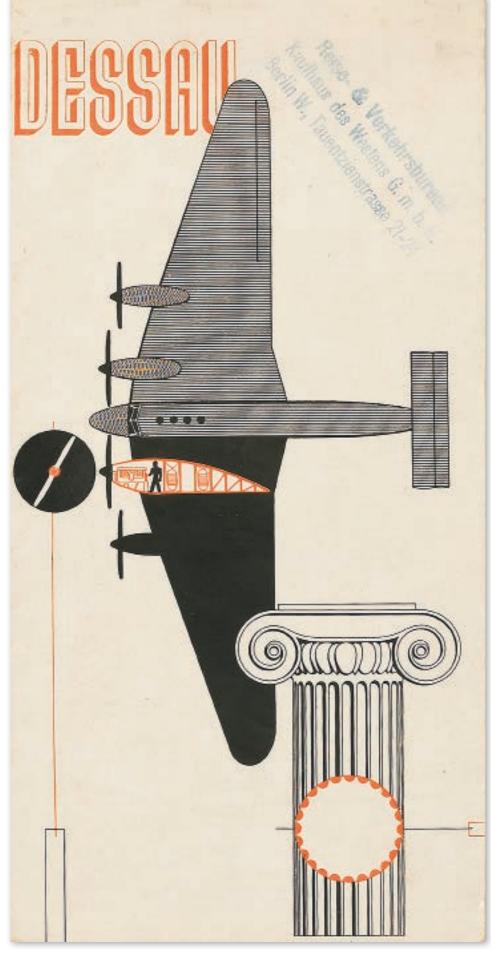
ing typographic works into their collections. Alongside a photograph by László Moholy-Nagy— which goes so well with a Wilhelm Wagenfeld lamp by or a silver pitcher by Marianne Brandt—you might easily find an invitation card to the Metallic Festival held at the Bauhaus in 1929. Another collector may have indulged in hoarding an entire parade of typography, from the work of Jan Tschichold to that of Herbert Bayer, from Wilhelm Deffke to Piet Zwart. To each connoisseur his own.

In the end, one can see Modernism as a holistic movement: it unabashedly encompassed all fields. The design of industrial products—and hence the layouts of printed matter—grew steadily in importance. It was the mission of these artists, after all, to endow all areas of modern life with a contemporary look. Ergo, the widespread interest in printing: how many people realize, for example, that Willi Baumeister was an important typographer? Incidentally, more and more museums are devoting space to—and upgrading the value of—innovative commercial print products alongside the already-celebrated paintings of Schlemmer, Kandinsky, Moholy-Nagy & co., or the iconic and ever-loved tubular steel furniture by Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer.

Prices Remain within Reason

Although they too were products of the socalled "New Typography" movement, this "Collector's Seminar" excludes books and posters from the 1920s. They constitute a special field of interest, and on the market, different laws apply. In surveying the prices for occasional print products, we witness a veritable boom developing over the past 15-20 years. Awareness is growing: typographic works belong to art history. It seems only natural then that they occupy a segment of the market. But well into the 1980s, such letters, invitation cards, and advertising brochures were regarded as archival material rather than works of art. In many cases, printed matter changed hands gratis when a painting or celebrated design object was sold. The market for such items had yet to be created.

In the 1970s, however, there were dealers who did pioneering work in this area. Alongside Egidio Marzona and Torsten



Some artists were so fascinated by typography they even abandoned painting (at least temporarily).

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Bröhan (both formerly of Düsseldorf, today Berlin), there was Arthur Cohen and Elaine Lustig Cohen with their antiquarian bookshop Ex Libris in New York, John Vloemans in The Hague, and the Frankfurt (later Berlin) antiquarian Jürgen Holstein, as well as the Dada and Surrealism expert Hans Bolliger in Zurich, whose catalogs are are still consulted as standard works. All of them should be credited with providing a forum for the ephemeral printed matter of the 1920s and 1930s—and with

getting the ball rolling on the market. Let no one be put off, however, by this growing interest or by rising prices: exciting discoveries are still possible. Few things remain minimally documented, if at all. With a trained eye and a bit of luck, you can arrive at attributions for pieces whose designers are not explicitly mentioned. It is also worth

having a look at the second or third tiers.

Here, we find superb pieces by anonymous designers, or ones who never enjoyed the spotlight, but are nonetheless extremely attractive.

Available for 300 to 400 euros, for example, are the works of Robert Michel, who designed printed matter for the Kahl seed company in Frankfurt during the mid-1920s. With its semicircular arrow, a number of variants of Michel's corporate design have entered the collection of MoMA in New York. Some antiquarian dealers offer them for less than 100 euros. It goes without saying, these undervalued designs are found at dealers who obviously don't specialize in modern commercial print products. In any case, compared with other genres from the Bauhaus milieu, the prices for printed matter are moderate. It's possible to acquire original works by Kurt Schwitters, El Lissitzky, Herbert Bayer, and others for well under a thousand euros. Five-figure prices are still rare.

When Typography Becomes Art

Original editions of brochures, admission tickets, or stationery were often quite large. But, as a rule, since they were intended for temporary use, only a few copies survive. Many such ephemera are precious rarities, and only a few examples can be documented worldwide-many of which are even unica. Walter Benjamin, who developed a

sociology of modern art in his legendary essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," written in 1935, would doubtless have been keenly interested in this area of collecting.

Fortunately, no forgeries of printed matter have been documented to date. But it remains to be seen whether higher prices fuel criminal energies here as well. Recommended to preserve these often delicate items are storage boxes and folders offered by the firm Monochrom, which are provided with various inlays for sorting

and a range of quality up to museum standards. Container materials must be acid-free so that they do not affect the paper. Naturally, one can hang these finds in your home like any other art. To protect them, however, when framed, they should be provided with UV-proof museum-quality glass—and never hung in direct sunlight, of course.

stundenplan

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In 1923, László Moholy-Nagy was the first to use the term "New Typography" in a Bauhaus text. Jan Tschichold coined the

A postcard for the Spartakiad in Moscow, 1928, designed by Gustav Klucis, sold for €2,500 by Rotes Antiquariat. Below: experimental printing from Bauhaus advertising students, sold in May 2015 at auction house Schneider-Henn for €600



name "Elementary Typography," and others called it "functional typography." It was not merely a question of the placement and design of text with moving letters—common since Gutenberg's invention of the printing press—but instead of the design of the page using type, linear elements, surfaces, photographs, and other images.

After WWI, the interplay of text and image in particular led to entirely new forms. The reigning design principles now were the beauty and elegance of composition, not necessarily legibility as such. Suddenly everything was radically different: initiated by the Futurists (Marinetti propagated a "free, expressive orthography") and slightly later by the Zurich and Berlin Dadaists, graphic configuration went fully haywire.

A network of artists began to emerge from Dessau to Amsterdam, from Magdeburg to Moscow—so fascinated by these new design possibilities that more than a few abandoned painting temporarily to devote themselves fully to the new typography. Among them was Max Burchartz, who founded one of the first German ad agencies in Essen in 1924 together with Johannes Canis (Werbebau), Johannes Molzahn in Magdeburg and Breslau (Wrocław), and Walter Dexel in Jena. Others, such as Moholy-Nagy, Schwitters, and Baumeister, engaged in typographic work parallel to other art forms. The protagonists of new typography came from highly diverse tendencies. Moholy-Nagy, Joost Schmidt, Herbert Bayer, and Josef Albers, for example, taught at the

Gesolei

laus der Frau Halle 62

Bauhaus, where they shaped the image of "Bauhaus typography." Founded in Weimar by Walter Gropius in 1919 and relocated to Dessau in 1925, the revolutionary design academy brought together major architects and artistic personalities, and attracted students from across Europe.

"Art and technology—a new unity" was Gropius's rallying cry, and in this spirit the Bauhaus pursued a universal conception of design that encompassed all facets of product and practical culture in modern everyday life. The design of printed materials was of course a part of this program, predominated by constructive forms and geometrically configured bands and lines, often in red and black.

Forms of Modern Life

Blank surfaces as well were consciously deployed as compositional resources. Grotesque and sans serif type fonts—configured not just horizontally, but vertically as well insured clarity. After the Bauhaus moved to Dessau, photographs were incorporated into the designs of printed materials to an increasing degree. The "typo-photo" was born.

Even artists not normally associated with this field of activity worked as typographers. During the Weimar years, for example, Oskar Schlemmer designed an outstanding brochure for the Bauhaus Week of 1923. Wassily Kandinsky designed a marvelous signet for the Gesellschaft der Freunde junger Kunst (Society of the Friends of Modern Art); and in 2013, the Hamburger auction house Christian Hesse sold a copy of this quite rare flyer for 3,200 euros.

At the same time, proponents of the new typography came together in the Ring Neue Werbegestalter (Circle of Modern Advertising Designers), launched in 1927 by Kurt Schwitters and others: Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, Georg Trump, Max Burchartz, Robert Michel, Willi Baumeister, Jan Tschichold,





Walter Dexel, César Domela, El Lissitzky, Ladislav Sutnar, Johannes Molzahn, and Piet Zwart. In their designs, they strove to endow a worldview with aesthetic expression. Very much in the spirit of the sociologist Georg Simmel, who had sought in his essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" to describe the new type of the urban individual and his "heightened nervous stimulation" in the fast-paced city. This corresponded to Moholy-Nagy's demand for a contemporary typography that would reach a "hitherto unachieved height of expressive force" in order to keep pace with the medial upheavals represented by film, the gramophone, and radio. It was a question of clarity, concision, and precision.

The arts reacted to the conditions of the modern economy, and even museums took up the theme: in 1927, the Kunstverein Jena organized the exhibition "Neue Reklame" (New Advertising). This was followed in 1928 by a show at the Cologne Museum of Applied Arts, "Neue Typographie" (New Typography) in Magdeburg in 1929, and, in Stuttgart, the epochal panorama "Film und Foto" ("Fifo" for short), where many artists were represented by typo-photo designs. Numerous publications propagated the relevance of the new medium, among them "Die Form," the widely distributed magazine of the Deutscher Werk-

bund. Its cover for 1925–26 was a sensational design by Bauhaus typographer Joost Schmidt: a finely balanced, constructivist conception in black-and-orange-red bars which, like the type itself, extends both in breadth and in height. This composition casts a spell on the beholder, almost burning itself into the retina.

Visionary Entrepreneurs

Appearing in 1928 was Jan Tschichold's legendary volume "Die neue Typographie" (The New Typography), whose subtitle announces its program: "A Handbook for Contemporary Producers." Alongside Georg Trump, Tschichold was the only progressive typeface designer who did not come from the fine arts. For the first time, his book provided a comprehensive overview and systematization of the new type design of the Bauhaus period. He was equally influential as a designer of advertisements . Tschichold's books remain standard reference works for graphic artists, book designers, and printers.

The New Typography made an impact everywhere. Cities like Hanover, Karlsruhe, and Magdeburg had their forms-from collection demands to cremation certificates designed by artist typographers, giving them a unified and modern visual appearance. In Celebration as typographic event: invitation to a costume party at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Hanover, designed by K. Goldbach and H. Sasse, 1927, €1,500 at Linke

Hanover, Schwitters developed a stylized cloverleaf as a logo and recognizable symbol for all of the city's business stationery. As important were visionary entrepreneurs who recognized the potential of innovative printed materials, which allowed them to present themselves as forward-looking.

Particularly advanced was factory-owner Carl Benscheidt in Alfeld near Hannover. In 1911, he commissioned Walter Gropius to design the buildings of his Fagus Factory for making wooden shoe lasts. With its light-flooded, self-supporting glass façades, the building heralded the arrival of Bauhaus architecture. But the factory pioneered the way in another sense as well: the industrial photographer Albert Renger-Patzsch scenarized the Fagus Works through dramatic steep-angle views and analytical precision, creating, in the meanwhile, a veritable 20th century icon of photography. Meanwhile, Benscheidt had the firm's printed materials designed by three of the best talents of the day: Herbert Bayer, Johannes Molzahn, and

Advertisement by Max Burchartz, 1926, offered by Hesse for €450. Right: the fairytale "Die Scheuche" (The Scarecrow), designed by Kurt Schwitters, Theo van Doesburg, and Käte Steinitz, €10,000 at Derda

COLLECTOR'S SEMINAR



Meanwhile, fans of typographical treasures are prepared to pay impressive sums: the Dada magazine "Mecano." 1923. designed by Theo van Doesburg, appraised at €3,000, sold recently for €12,000 at Kuyper. Below: rare as well is Jiři Taufer's postcard for a student competition in Prague, 1932, offered by Günter Linke for €1,000

the Dutch De Stijl artist Theo van Doesburg. The result was a multiplicity of visiting cards, letterheads, and invoice forms, all highpoints of modern graphic design. Today, a large assortment of Fagus typography is to be found in MoMA in New York, and can be viewed on the museum's website.

Further west, in Wassenaar, the multitalent Piet Zwart created a unique visual cosmos for the Nederlandse Kabelfabriek (Dutch Cable Factory - NKF) in Delft. In contrast to the typography for the Fagus Works, which achieves a high degree of constructive equilibrium with the help of beams and angles, Zwart integrates photos and photomontages into his diagonally-oriented designs, assembling image and text at the highest level to form his typo-photos. Today, it is difficult to acquire a catalog published by the NKF firm for less than €20,000. But other printed matter related to NKF product promotion is expensive and sought-after as well. Recently, the Haarlem auction house of Bubb Kuyper recorded a hammer price of 3500 euros for a small and very rare folding advertising card designed by Zwart.

In 1926, Kurt Schwitters, the Dadaist and self-proclaimed "Merz" artist, promoted the New Typography on a postcard on his own behalf: "Dear Sir! Bismarck liked to say: Beer has no purpose if it is not drunk. By the same token, an advertisement has no pur-

tisement provides us with the most effective visual display, textually and typographically. Both artistically and in terms of promotional techniques, our designs are thought through down to the last detail. We supply designs for newspaper ads, prospectuses (text and content), window displays, packaging, envelopes and letterheads, postcards, paper bags, publicity texts, etc.)." Schwitters was the ideal artist-typographer, and his contribution to typeface and commercial print profoundly shaped by the new media.

pose if it is not read. The signed Merz adver- product design was unprecedented. Occasional printed materials from the Bauhaus era provide a fascinating cross-section of the art of typography during this dazzling epoch. They reflect the heady atmosphere of the 1920s, characterized by new departures, rapid tempos, and dynamism.

Luckily, such printed ephemera last longer than the name suggests. A part of our cultural memory, they are the building blocks and precursors of contemporary society, so



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Jackin Barker - Charles Landelschillung 1994, wird under er beschand, 75 s 125 cm

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Good to Know

What is a commercial print product? What is a typo-photo? And why were Magdeburg, Hanover, and Frankfurt so important for typography? A brief overview

Glossary

Commercial Print Products

In German, "Akzidenz": invitations, postcards, stationery, invoice forms, advertising supplements, and brochures of all kinds. Referred to as ephemera, emphasizing their transitory character, since most were intended for temporary use.

De Stijl

Dutch artists' association around Theo van Doesburg, Piet Mondrian, Bart van der Leck. As of 1917, a magazine of the same name. Doesburg's cover designs were typographic wonders.

Film und Foto (Fifo)

1929: one of the most important photo exhibitions of the 20th century. Jan Tschichold was a member of the selection committee.

Hanover

During the 1920s, a modern climate developed around the progressive Kestnergesellschaft (Kestner Society) and under the influence of visionary collectors. Many firms had their print products designed in the spirit of the New Typography.

Lowercase

In their print products, Herbert Bayer and Jan Tschichold advocated small letters, arguing: "why write in large letters when you cannot speak in large letters?" The lowercase style, however, never established itself in the German-speaking world.

Magdeburg

Modernization in Magdeburg has been unjustly neglected. Besides modern housing estates, the image of the city took shape during the 1920s in the typographic designs of Johannes Molzahn, Wilhelm Deffke, and Walter Dexel, among others. In the late 1920s, the Bauhaus-trained artist Xanti Schawinsky assumed



The Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin displays numerous print items in its galleries

directorship of the graphics department of the municipal building authority. 1929: "The New Printing" exhibit included a section on the New Typography. This year, the Forum Gestaltung in Magdeburg invokes this history with the show "maramm Magdeburg: Advertising and Exhibition City of Modernism" (June 1 to Dec 11).

New Frankfurt

In 1925–30, the name of an ambitious urban planning and housing development program. Hans Leistikow modernized the city's print products. For the municipal coat of arms, he designed the "New Frankfurt Eagle," abolished by the Nazis in 1936. Paul Renner, Walter Dexel, Willi Baumeister, and Robert Michel further shaped the city through advertisements and ephemera. The Museum für Angewandte Kunst Frankfurt addresses the theme (March 25 to September 18).

Photomontage

Images composed entirely of individual photos, or combining

photos with other pictorial elements to form a new unity. Especially innovative here were John Heartfield, Willi Baumeister, El Lissitzky, Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, and Max Burchartz.

Typefaces

Modern fonts derived from the family of Grotesque/Sans Serif typefaces took shape in Paul Renner's Futura and Herbert Bayer's Universal. The Grotesque features nearly uniform line thicknesses and—in contrast to Antiqua typefaces—no serifs, that is to say, no transverse embellishments at the termini of characters.

Typo-photo

Emerged during the 1920s as a novel synthesis of typography and photography.

Vkhutemas

State-run art academy in Moscow, 1920–1930. With workshops for painting, architecture, sculpture, printing, textiles, and ceramics, a counterpart to the German Bauhaus. Active were artists such as Klutsis, Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Tatlin, all of whom experimented as well with the New Typography.

Viewing

Many works of Bauhaus typography are on view in the permanent collection of the Bauhaus-Archiv in Berlin. In this setting, they superbly complement design icons by Marcel Breuer, Marianne Brandt, and others. The Bauhaus museums in Weimar and Dessau also include printed matter. In Berlin, a large inventory can be found in the Kunstbibliothek and the Werkbundarchiv (Museum der Dinge). Needless to say, our topic plays a major role at the Deutsches Buch- und Schriftmuseum in Leipzig, whose choicest treasure is the estate of Jan Tschichold. Another important address for typography is the Neue Sammlung in Munich. The Museum of Modern Art in New York owns outstanding items from the Bauhaus era; most can be viewed online. Also accessible online is the collection of the Busch-Reisinger Museum at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with much Bauhaus typography, alongside the estate of Walter Gropius. No less active in this area is the Cooper Hewitt in New York, and the inexhaustible archive of the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles.

Buying

Many antiquarian booksellers offer individual printed matter, but these are for the most part chance finds. A mecca and, for some collectors, the best typography address is the Berlin antiquarian bookseller Günter Linke, specializing in printed materials of the early 20th

SACHLICH KLARU. EINDRUCKSVOLL
WIE SEINE REKLAMELAM PEN
FOR DAS JEHAER STÄDTISCHE GASWERK

GAS
KOCHEN
BACKEN
HEIZEN
BELEUCHTEN

GASKOKS
BESTER BRENNSTOFF

LIEFERT DEXEL JE NA
ENTWÜRFE FÜR
PLAKATE, PROSPENTE
SIGNETE, INSERATE
KANATE, INSERATE
KANATER, INSERATER
KANATER, INSERTER
KANATER
KANATER, INSERTER
KANATER
KANA

Self-advertisement by the major graphic designer Walter Dexel, circa 1925, €1,000 at Rotes Antiquariat in Berlin/Vienna

century avant-garde. The exceptional connoisseur Christian Bartsch operates his Rotes Antiquariat at two addresses in Berlin and a branch in Vienna. He consistently offers beautiful examples of the New Typography. The young Berlin art dealer Thomas Derda is active in this area as well, and presents occasional ephemera to complement his offerings of modern paintings, drawings, and photographs. Also reliably offering high-quality printed matter from the Bauhaus era in Berlin are the antiquarian booksellers M + R Fricke and Karajahn. Hans Lindner in Mainburg specializes in illustrated children's books, but is very knowledgeable about the New Typography, so you are well advised to make inquiries. The same is true for Daniel Thierstein in Bern. A pioneer in this field is the Antiquariat Vloemans in The Hague, established in 1932. Here, you will find a wide spectrum of offerings. Ars Libri (Boston) features high-quality items in its beautifully designed catalogs. Another good resource is Földvári Books in Budapest.

Bidding

The classical auction houses for books and print works, for example, Bassenge (Berlin) and Venator & Hanstein (Cologne), appreciate the value of works of New Typography, but tend to offer them on an incidental basis. A similar case is Swann Galleries in New York, known in particular for their auctions of posters. You will always find something, however, at the knowledgeable and committed Hamburg auctioneer Christian Hesse, as well as at the new Berlin house of Nosbüsch & Stucke, Dietrich Schneider-Henn (Munich) has been offering interesting print products from the Bauhaus era for some time. A large offering, also featuring the De Stijl milieu, can be found at Bubb Kuyper in Haarlem.

Recommended Reading

A very good overview of modern typography is found in Jaroslav Andel's (three languages, English, French and German) "Avant-Garde Page Design" (2002). Specialist publications in English include Herbert Spencer's "Pioneers of Modern Typography" (1969), or the translation of Jan Tschichold's classic "The New Typography" of 1928 (first English edition 1995). "Letters from the Avant-Garde" by Ellen Lupton



The Werkbund magazine "Die Form," cover design by Joost Schmidt, 1926, €450 at Thomas Derda in Berlin

and Elaine Lustig Cohen (1996) offers a cross-section of letterheads, among other things. Anonymous designers are featured alongside the great masters. In German, highly recommended are the classics such as Gerd Fleischmann's "Bauhaus Typografie" (1984) and Ute Brüning's "Das A und O des Bauhauses" (1995).

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