



THE BOSTON ATHENÆUM *News Release*

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For Immediate Release

“OVER HERE: WORLD WAR I POSTERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD” OPENS AT THE BOSTON ATHENÆUM SEPTEMBER 10, 2014

(Boston, MA, August 19, 2014) “Over Here: World War I Posters from Around the World,” on view at the Boston Athenæum September 10, 2014 through January 31, 2015, is timed to coincide with centennial observances of World War I in Europe and the United States. The exhibition features 44 framed posters from Great Britain, France, Germany, the United States, Canada, Ireland, and other nations as well as cases with leaflets, maps, magazines, postcards, and a recently acquired, printed French handkerchief given to American soldiers serving in France. The selection presents striking but rarely seen images from one of the most critical moments in world history.

The works are drawn from several important World War I collections now in the Athenæum, started during the war by Boston collectors who were as young as ten.

World War I Posters at the Boston Athenæum

Catharina Slautterback, the Boston Athenæum's curator of prints and photographs, organized the exhibition. She also composed the essay in the illustrated booklet that accompanies the show. The exhibition is supported by Susan and Matthew Weatherbie, and a grant from the Florence Gould Foundation. A related exhibition, "Over There! Posters from World War I," is on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, through June 14, 2015.

During the war, the posters were mounted in public buildings, subways, on city streets, and wherever else there was space for them. "A poster has to be understood in a few seconds because there is a lot of competing stimuli in the street," says Slautterback.



After C.R.W. Nevinson (1889–1946), **Now Back the Bayonets with Your War Savings Certificates**, 1918. Color lithograph. Boston Athenæum. Gift of Bartlett H. Hayes, 1985.

The posters in “Over Here,” she explains, were aimed at very broad audiences and were designed for purposes beyond recruiting volunteer soldiers or provoking nationalist emotions. Their messages were often tailored to specific issues, including war funding, work, food conservation, charity efforts for orphans or animals, women’s role in the war effort, and personal sacrifice. In the exhibition, posters encouraging compassion for the sick and wounded hang alongside posters inciting fear and hatred of the enemy.

The strength of the collection lies in its completeness

Since the 1920s, scholars have studied World War I posters, along with other types of propaganda from the Great War, as one of the earliest examples of modern “mass media.” The posters are also important visual documents. The exhibition will explore the eclectic and inventive graphic styles of the early 20th century as traditional, narrative approaches gave way to bolder, abstract techniques. During World War I, poster artists used many different styles and tactics to engage their targeted audiences. The works in “Over Here” range from cartoons to realistic depictions to bright, colorful abstractions.

The exhibition’s contents are drawn from an extraordinary, but rarely exhibited, group of 1,800 posters and printed material from fourteen countries, all from the Great War period, one of the earliest and finest collections of its kind anywhere. Many were acquired during the war itself by Athenæum staff or by far-sighted private collectors.

“The strength of the Athenæum’s collection lies in its completeness,” Slauterback says. “It includes all types of examples, different themes, different artistic styles, from so many different countries. So, in an exhibition like this

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one, you are able to compare different styles, techniques, and messages.” Slautterback has deliberately chosen to include works that are visually striking but less well known, and which show the diversity of styles, messages, and points of view produced by different countries as part of their war effort.

Famous artists and anonymous designers

Among the works on view will be Edward Penfield’s *Will You Help the Women of France? Save Wheat. They Are Struggling against Starvation, and Trying to Feed Not Only Themselves and Children, but Their Husbands and Sons Who Are Fighting in the Trenches* (1918). Penfield, one of the leading illustrators of the early twentieth century, is widely known as “the father of the American poster.”

Penfield was part of the “army of artists” recruited for the U.S. Government’s Division of Pictorial Publicity by another famous American illustrator, Charles Dana Gibson. Penfield’s *Will You Help the Women of France?*, produced at a time when America’s ally was facing serious food and labor shortages, was one of 700 posters, 287 cartoons, and countless other visual materials produced by 318 artists during the division’s short history. This huge output helped make the United States the most prolific producer of war-related posters during the war.

Don’t Stand Looking at This, Go and Help! (1915), designed by an unknown artist, was printed in Adelaide for the government of South Australia. Australia had only been self governing for a few years when war broke out in Europe. Inspired in part by posters like this one, young Australians were at first enthusiastic contributors to the war effort. Over 50,000 Australian men volunteered in the war’s early months, more than double Britain’s request

for 20,000. As word of high Australian casualties reached home, however, enlistment slowed to a trickle and the Australian legislature refused to approve conscription.

C. R. W. Nevinson's striking yellow, black, and red *Now Back the Bayonets with War Savings Certificates*. (1918) began life as an exhibition poster for Nevinson's 1918 exhibition in London, at which he showed work he had created on the front lines in France as an official war artist and volunteer ambulance driver. The poster, seen all over London and in the Underground, became so popular that the National War Savings Committee appropriated the image for their 1918 campaign.

Before the war, Nevinson worked closely with the Italian Futurist artist Marinetti and the radical British modernist Wyndham Lewis. He is now considered one of the most important war artists of the First World War.

Far-sighted collectors form a remarkable collection

Like several other Boston Athenæum collections, the World War I poster holdings began in real time, while the war was still unfolding. Starting in the fall of 1914, only a few weeks after hostilities began in Europe, Boston Athenæum Librarian Charles Knowles Bolton began acquiring "pro-ally" books, pamphlets, maps, and other material related to the Great War for the use of future researchers. In December, he placed the first of many orders for war posters.

Bolton, fully familiar with the important European poster movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had organized poster exhibitions before the war. In 1915, the Athenæum held the first of several exhibitions of World War I posters, which included French and English

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posters from the Athenæum collection and loans of Russian posters from Clark University.

Another avid early war poster collector, the socially prominent Bostonian Mrs. (Gretchen) Fiske Warren, was a friend of Bolton's and a Boston Athenæum member. In 1915, Mrs. Warren exhibited her war poster collection for sale to raise money for war-related charities. With her help, Bolton selected a number of her posters to join the Athenæum's growing collection.

Between 1915 and 1920, the Athenæum acquired nearly 500 war posters, but only two of these were pro-German. Nations on the "other side" of the conflict were, for the most part, not represented. The collection did not grow substantially again until the 1970s, when a series of important bequests enlarged and broadened the collection dramatically.

At the start of the war, while Bolton was collecting his first war posters for the Athenæum, Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr., came across a grouping of framed war posters in a stairwell of Filene's Department Store in Boston. Hayes, later a distinguished art historian, art educator, and long-time director of the Addison Gallery of American Art at Phillips Academy at Andover, was ten years old at the time.

Fascinated, Hayes began his own collection of war posters by writing directly to the printers and asking for copies. Many obliged and Hayes' enthusiasm and acquisitions grew. In 1985, he bequeathed to the Athenæum 1,134 World War I posters from fourteen countries, acquired over most of his lifetime. These additions were especially important because they included posters from so many warring and neutral nations not previously represented, including Scotland, Australia, Ireland, and Germany.

All these donations along with Bolton's original purchases have made the Boston Athenæum's collections of World War I posters "among the most extensive and remarkable in the country," Slutterback says. Thanks in large part to a poster fund established by Bartlett Hayes, the collection continues to grow to this day.

About the Boston Athenæum:

Founded in 1807, the *Boston Athenæum* is one of North America's oldest cultural institutions. Until the end of September 2014, the first floor of its National Historic Landmark building at 10 1/2 Beacon Street, Boston, including the Norma Jean Calderwood Gallery, is open to the public Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Thursday and Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Saturday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Starting the first week in October 2014, these facilities will be open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Saturday 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and Sunday 12:00 noon to 4:00 p.m. There is a \$5 admission fee for non-members to special exhibitions. Other public events at the Athenæum include exhibitions, lectures, readings, panel discussions, films, and concerts. For membership, events, and other information, please visit www.bostonathenaeum.org or call 617-720-7604.

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