

London Transport Museum Poster Collection

Glossary



Sizes

DOUBLE CROWN

Double crown is the descriptive name for posters that are 30 x 40 inches. This is slightly smaller than the double royal size, which is the standard poster size used by London Underground. Double crown posters were originally displayed on the front panels of buses and the side panels of trams.

DOUBLE ROYAL

Double royal is the descriptive name for posters that are 40 x 25 inches. It has been the standard poster size used on London's Underground since 1908. The double royal format is used almost exclusively by railway companies.

FOUR SHEET

Four sheet (or 4 sheet) is the descriptive name for posters that are 60 x 40 inches. This is largest of the poster formats. Four sheet is the most commonly used size for **Art on the Underground** posters.

PAIR POSTER

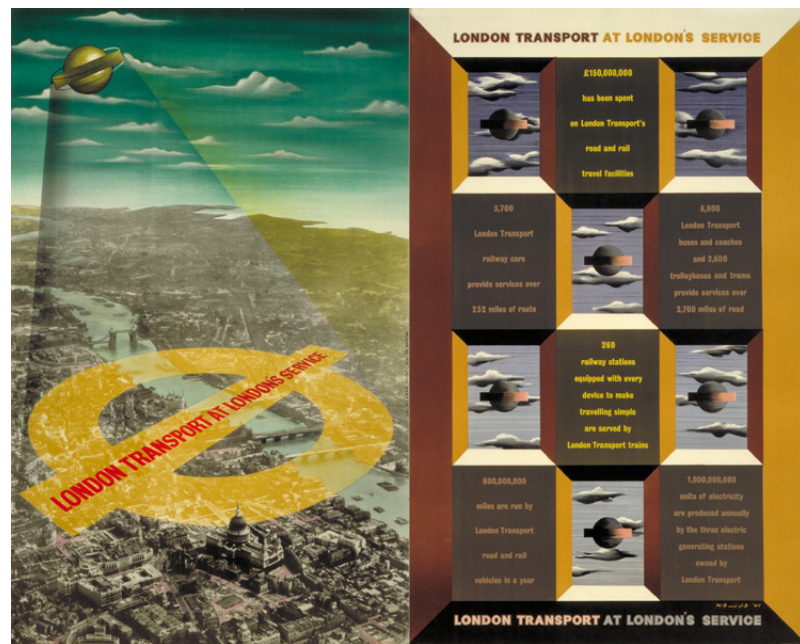
When a design is made up of two posters, we call this a pair poster. In the 1940s, London Transport's Publicity officer, Harold F Hutchison, standardised the format so that one half presented text and the other displayed an image. Pair posters were used on prime sites such as Underground station entrances.

PANEL POSTER

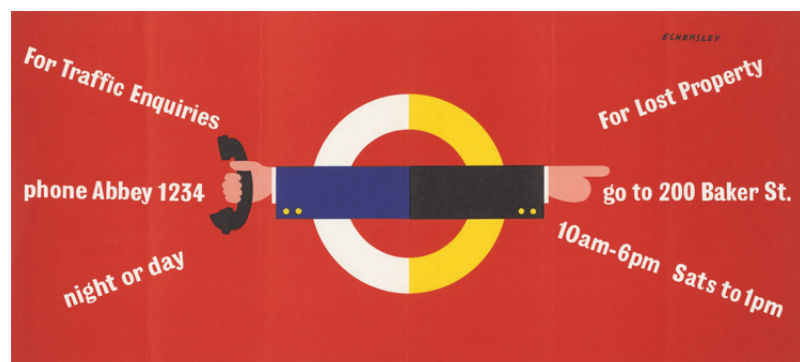
Panel posters were produced in the 1920s and 1930s for display in London Underground car or carriage interiors. They were smaller than other poster formats, to fit the glass draught screens adjacent to the sliding doors. Because they did not have to fit a standard frame or wall space, their sizes varied slightly.

QUAD ROYAL

Quad royal is the descriptive name for posters that are 40 x 50 inches. It is the standard size used by London Underground for maps and is the preferred size for designs requiring fine detail, such as decorative maps.



Pair poster; London Transport at London's service, by Misha Black and John Barker (Kraber), 1947



Panel poster; For traffic enquiries, for lost property, by Tom Eckersley, 1959

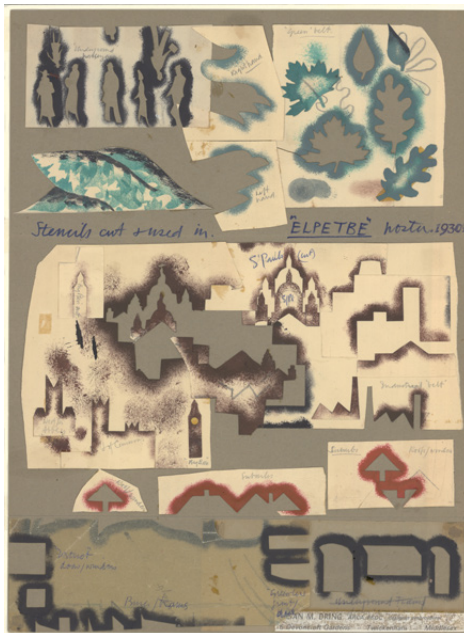
Techniques

AIRBRUSH

An airbrush is a small hand-held tool that sprays paint, stain, ink, dye or glaze. It is operated by a source of compressed air. Used by commercial artists, airbrushes create smooth gradations of colour and tone. A stencil can be used to create sharply defined outlines.



Charing Cross isn't the end of the line, by unknown artist, 1980



The modern god of transport, by Lilian Dring, 1939

COLLAGE

Collage comes from the French verb 'coller', to stick on. Popular with amateurs and children, it first became an accredited artistic technique in the early 20th century. Almost any material can be applied to a collage, from card and paper to found objects and textiles. When photographs are used, this is referred to as 'photomontage'.

STENCIL

A stencil is a template used to draw or paint an exact letter, symbol or shape. Early examples of stencilling in poster design involved applying paint through the stencil with a dry brush. In the 1930s the airbrush was becoming popular and stencils were often used to ensure sharply defined outlines.



How to get there; art galleries, by Victoria Davidson, 1961

Medium

ACRYLIC

Acrylic paint is a versatile medium, first used in the 1940s. Like watercolour, it can be used as a thin wash, is quick drying, and soluble in water. Like oil, it can also be used thickly in a concentrated form. Acrylic can be applied to a variety of surfaces and offers a matt or gloss finish.

ACRYLIC INK

Acrylic ink is a water-resistant, acrylic-based ink. It is resistant to fading over prolonged exposure to light, making it ideal for pictures intended for permanent display. Consequently, acrylic ink is rarely used for poster design since posters are viewed as ephemeral.



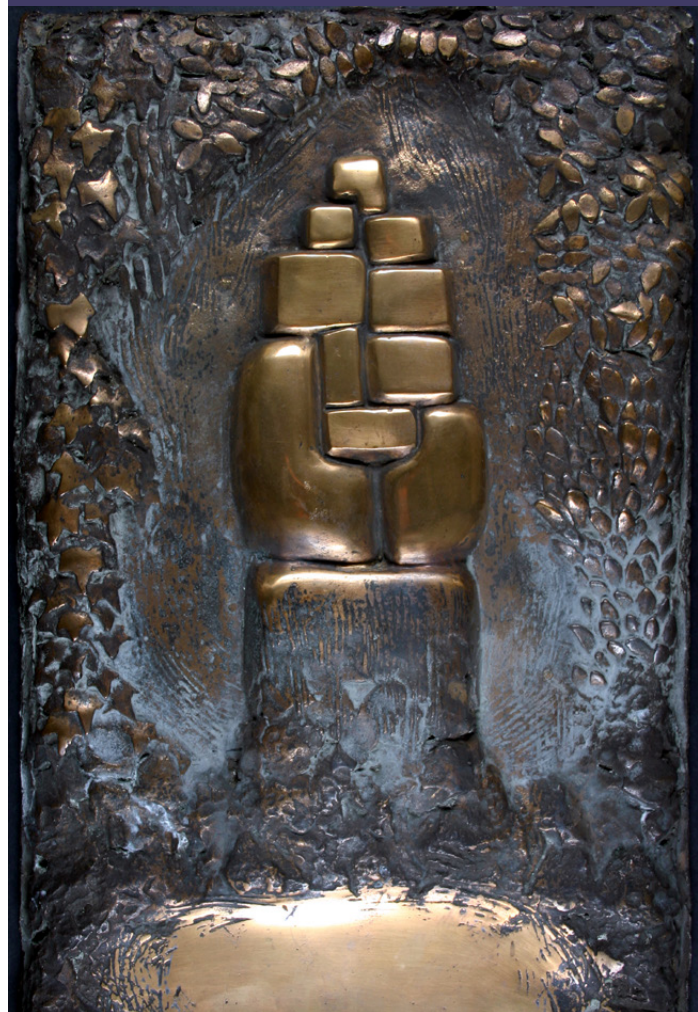
Embankment Gardens, by
Jennie Tuffs, 1995

BRONZE

Since antiquity, bronze has been the metal most used in cast sculpture due to its strength, durability and because it is easily workable. At the beginning of the 20th century, modern sculptors moved away from using bronze. In the 21st century, the medium has a renewed sense of tradition.



View from a RM bus, by
Virginia Costa, circa 2006



London's open air sculpture,
by Geraldine Knight, 1972

CARD

Card, or very thin paper, can be cut into identical, uniform blocks of colour. In the early 20th century, poster artists used black and white card to create the appearance of intricate silhouettes. From the 1970s, larger blocks of coloured card were employed. This technique, sometimes referred to as 'paper cut-out', was favoured by Tom Eckersley.



Hampstead Heath, by
Molly Moss, 1950

CONTÉ CRAYON

Conté crayon is a very hard, grease-free type of crayon, available in a wide range of colours. It was named after Nicolas-Jacque Conté, who invented it.



The Escalator No 12/50,
by Cyril Power, circa 1930



Museum of London, by
Tom Eckersley, 1977

GOUACHE

Gouache is an opaque paint. It is one of the most popular mediums for poster design because it dries quickly, creates bold blocks of matt colour and allows mistakes to be painted over. Gouache is sometimes referred to as poster paint.



Tunnel, by Charles Pears, 1923

LINOCUT

Linocut is a traditional printmaking technique in which a knife or engraving tool is used to cut an image into a piece of linoleum. Ink is applied to the remaining raised surfaces and then printed onto paper. Colours can be built up by overprinting with a different block for each colour.

LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT

The lithographic printing process is based on the principle that oil and water do not mix. An image is drawn in an oily medium onto stone or metal. The surface is then treated so that the image will absorb ink and the background will repels it. It can then be printed onto paper.



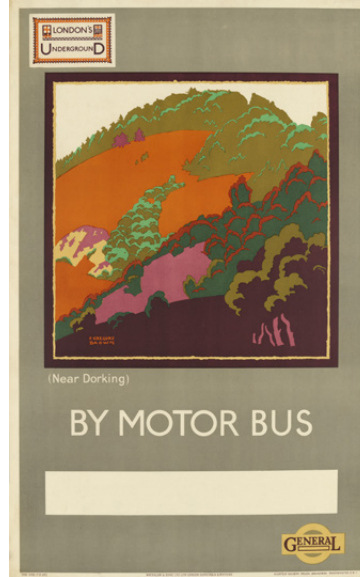
Theatre travelcard,
by Trevor Caley, 1986

MIXED MEDIA

Poster artworks can be executed in a combination of different media. Unlike in fine art, the constancy or status of a medium is unimportant. The finished design is essentially an ephemeral stage in the production of a printed poster. The ultimate medium is lithography. Artists use whatever mix of media is necessary to achieve the perfect effect.



Untitled, by Susanna
Bolt, circa 1961



Dorking by motor bus,
by F Gregory Brown, 1922

MOSAIC

Mosaic is an ancient decorative art using inlaid glass, stone, or ceramic fragments. The technique was first used for a poster design in the 1960s. By this time, photography was the principle method for transferring artworks into printed posters. This gave artists freedom to work in more varied, textured and even three-dimensional media.



Music, by Hans Unger, 1951

OIL

Oil paint has been the dominant medium in fine art since the 16th century. Although it is extremely versatile, oil paint takes a long time to dry. In poster design, oil has only been used when the artist is commissioned solely to produce a painting. This is then transformed into a printed poster with the addition of text.

PASTEL

Pastel is a powdered pigment, like that used in paint, bound together in the form of a stick. The type of binder used dictates the hardness or softness of the pastel and the character of the stroke. Pastels are favoured for their wide range of colours and immediacy in application.



Flamingoes, by
Kay Gallwey, 1987

PEN AND INK

Historically, pen and ink involved applying ink with a quill pen made from a large feather or hollow reed. Metal pens succeeded the quill in the 19th century. The technique enables artists to achieve intricate yet clearly defined outlines, which translate well into printed posters. Pen and ink are commonly used for cartoons.



Zoo, by Arnríd Johnston, 1934

PENCIL

Pencil is often used to draw the outlines of a poster design before filling with colour. In preparatory work, pencil is used for sketching out and annotating ideas for designs. After the design is finished pencil can be used to give instructions to the printers.



Our Heritage Series; Haig, by
Robert Sargent Austin, 1943



Kew, by Fiona Elias, 1976

PHOTOGRAPHY

In the 1970s, a photograph often provided the principal image on a poster. Photography has also been used in preparatory work before a final design is produced in another medium. Some artists have submitted a photograph of an artwork as their final design.

PLASTIC

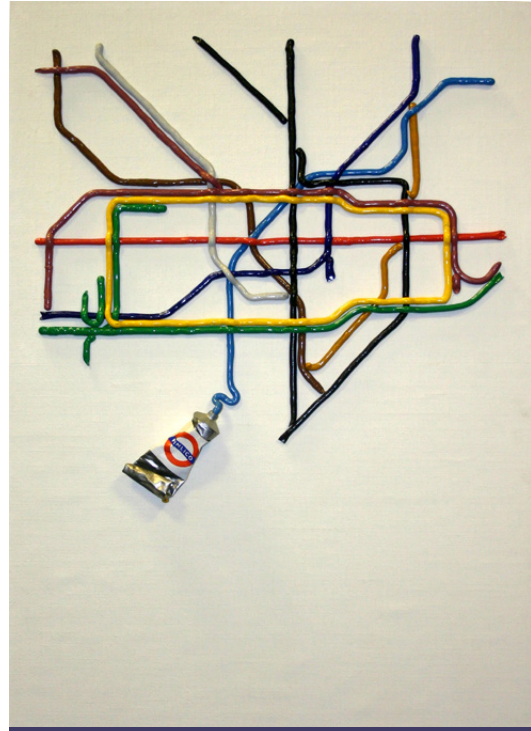
In the second half of the 20th century, the printing of posters became dependent on photographic processes, rather than traditional lithography. This gave poster artists more freedom to work in varied, textured and even three-dimensional media. Moulded plastic was used for the first time in a poster design in 1986.



Covent Garden, by Elizabeth Baranov, 1987

TEXTILES

Now that posters are mostly printed using photographic processes, rather than traditional lithography, the materials used in the design process have become more varied. Texture, depth and even three dimensional elements no longer pose a problem. Textiles, including collage with material, needlework and appliqué have been used in designs since the 1960s.



The Tate Gallery by tube, by David Booth of Fine White Line, 1986

SCREEN PRINT

Screen printing is a technique which involves forcing ink through a fine screen of fabric. Areas of the screen are blocked off by a non-permeable stencil. Screen printing can be applied to a wide range of surfaces, including paper, fabric, metal, and plastic. It has been used in commercial and fine art since the 1900s.



Picnic, by Victoria Davidson, 1960

WATERCOLOUR

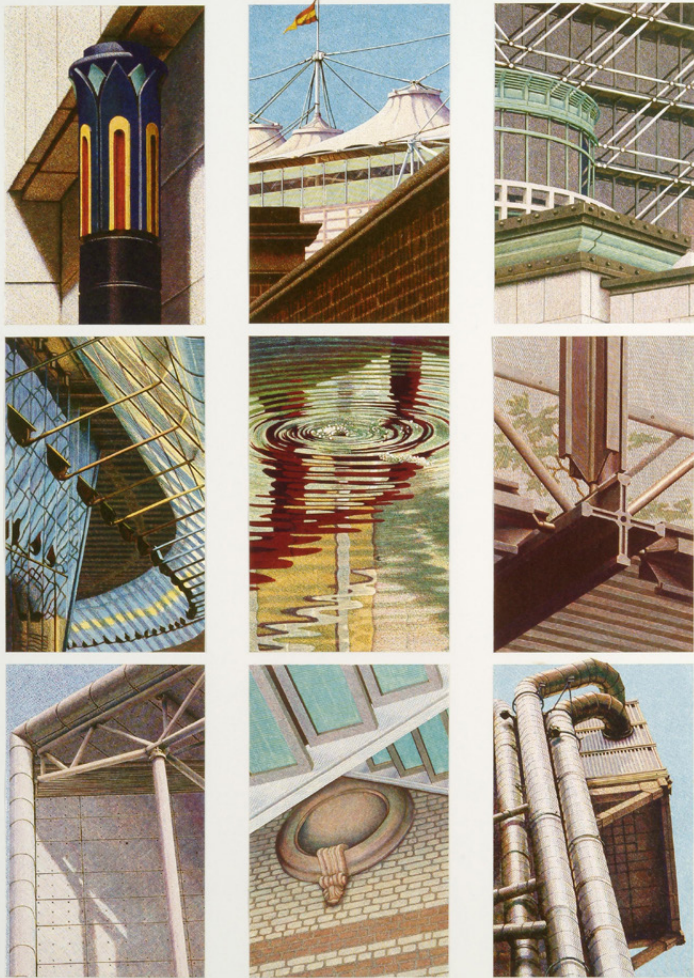
Watercolour is a traditional medium, favoured in 18th and early 19th century England for landscapes. Lighter tones are obtained by thinning the paint with water, rather than by adding white pigment. It is the paper beneath that gives the appearance of light. In 20th century poster designs, watercolour has also been combined with ink, pastel, and pencil.



Thames Ditton by tram,
by Charles Sharland, 1911

WOOD ENGRAVING

Wood engraving is a traditional printmaking technique in which an image is cut into the polished surface of a block of wood. Ink is applied to the block and then printed onto paper. Colours can be built up by overprinting with a different block for each colour.



London's new architecture,
by Edwina Ellis, 1996

Stylistic approach

ABSTRACTION

Abstract imagery has been a common feature of London Underground poster design. The simplification and distortion of form can produce extremely striking posters, although an element of representation is usually necessary to communicate a clear message.

Geometric abstraction, inspired by avant-garde art movements, was particularly popular in poster designs of the 1920s and 1930s.



Highgate Ponds,
by Howard Hodgkin, 1990

CARTOON

Cartoons have regularly featured in London Underground posters over the last 100 years. The cartoon style was used with particular effect for instructional posters, lending a friendly tone to the necessary communication of rules and regulations. In the past, the travelling public would have been familiar with the work of many of the commissioned cartoonists, who also featured in national newspapers.



Please pass along the platform,
by Fougasse (Cyril Kenneth Bird), 1944

FLAT COLOUR

The use of bold, flat colour had become a key characteristic of poster design by the 1920s. The paring down of forms led to striking designs that could be quickly grasped and easily remembered. The reduced number of colours, applied with minimal tonal range, also made the printing of posters easier and less expensive.

TRADITIONAL ART

Some London Underground poster designs display a traditional fine art approach. But this more conventional, representation of a subject is not common in posters because it is not considered as effective at communicating as cutting-edge graphic design. However, in the past, the inclusion of traditional art provided the poster programme with the necessary range of styles to cater for all tastes.



Flowers of the riverside,
by Edward McKnight Kauffer, 1920



Hampstead Heath, by H M Wilson, 1911

Stylistic Influence

ART DECO

Art Deco, which flourished in the 1920s and 1930s, is a style more associated with the decorative arts than fine art. At its peak, the style was referred to as 'art moderne', or simply 'modernistic'. The term 'Art Deco' was adopted in the mid-1960s when the style was re-evaluated. Characterised by sleek, stylised form, simplicity of line, geometric patterns, abstract shapes and sweeping curves, the style lent itself perfectly to modern poster design.



Windsor Castle, by Clive Gardiner, 1928



Brightest London Is Best Reached By Underground, by Horace Taylor, 1924

CUBISM

Avant-garde movements such as Cubism (c1908-1919) found expression in many poster designs, particularly in the late 1920s and 1930s. In Cubist artworks, objects are broken up, analysed, and re-assembled to depict the subject from multiple viewpoints. Poster artists appropriated these formal qualities of Cubism to striking effect.

FUTURISM

Futurism (c1909-1917), and its British counterpart Vorticism (c1914-1919), influenced a number of London Underground poster designs. The formal expression of dynamism and speed is a characteristic of Futurist painting that lent itself to cutting edge developments in poster design, particularly in the 1920s.



SURREALISM

The use of Surrealist imagery in posters is rare. Frank Pick believed Surrealism obscured the clarity of a poster's message. However, some dreamlike imagery, associated with the Surrealist aesthetic, can be found in London Underground poster designs from the last 100 years.

