

THE UNION CATALOGUE OF SWISS POSTERS ELAG 2003

BY IRIS H. MARTHALER SWISS NATIONAL LIBRARY

THE SWISS NATIONAL LIBRARY IN SHORT

The Swiss National Library (SNL) was established in 1895. Under the terms of the law by which it is regulated, it is charged with collecting, cataloguing and conserving information in all fields and disciplines, and in any medium, connected with Switzerland, as well as ensuring the widest possible accessibility to and dissemination of, such data. The Swiss National Library is intended to be open to all, and, by the breadth and scope of its collections, it aims to reflect the plurality and diversity of the Swiss culture.

Beside ca. 3½ million paper documents, the Swiss National Library holds special collections, among which the Swiss Literary Archives and the Prints & Drawings Department are the most prominent. The Poster collection is part of the latter.

TIMELINE OF THE POSTER COLLECTION AT THE SWISS NATIONAL LIBRARY

1901: The Swiss National Library acquires its first poster;

1914: Posters on National Exhibitions are added;

1919: Acquisition of political posters such as those to promote the right for Swiss woman to vote; ... and against it

1924: The library buys for the first time a private collection of 3'000 posters;

1934: Mr. W.S. Kündig, Geneva donates 2'500 foreign war-posters;

1943: The Museum of art and history, Geneva donates 300 posters;

1945: The collection has grown to around 9'000 including pieces from Eugène Grasset, Jules Chèret, Puvis de Chavannes, Frank Brangwyn, Ferdinand Hodler, Cuno Amiet.

2003: The collection includes ~45'000 Posters and it is constantly growing. It is the third biggest collection in Switzerland.

Content of the collection

Reflecting the SNL mandate to collect Helvetica, the majority of the posters in the collection are Swiss. Some are very rare or even unique. The collection also includes preliminary drawings or mock-ups for posters, notably for the National Exhibition of 1898. A small collection of foreign posters covers the two world wars and the period between.

The collection is organised as follows:

- Historical collection
- Contemporary collection
- Foreign Posters
- Prize winning posters
- Small posters
- Duplicates

The largest collections are the historical and contemporary collection.

Historical collection

This collection covers the posters published between 1850 up to 1985 and is subdivided into the following themes:

1) Cultural Posters

- Exhibitions
- Festivals and Celebrations
- Parades
- Theatre
- Assemblies

2) Publicity Posters

3) Tourism Posters

4) Social welfare

5) Sports

6) Political Posters

7) Typographic interest

Contemporary collection

This collection contains posters from 1985 until today and is the 'active' part of the collection to which new posters are added. It is organised chronologically by the date the poster entered the collection.

The collection of **foreign war** posters is organised by theme.

For 50 years, from 1941 to 2001 a competition was held each year to select the best Swiss posters. These **prize winning** posters (about 1'500) are stored apart. After a gap in 2002, the competition was relaunched in 2003.

The collection of **small posters** are those that do not have the standard format 90 X 130 cm.

THE UNION CATALOGUE PROJECT

By their nature, posters are ephemeral. Their value lies not only in the quality of the artists mandated over the years to provide the designs but also in their portrayal of the evolution of a country: not just in the political arena but in other areas. For example, the sports posters of the 1930s accurately reflect the prevailing philosophy of the time, while publicity and political posters are a valuable indicator of the status of women throughout the century.

There are several large collections of posters in Switzerland and numerous other smaller, specialised collections. It is known that there is overlap in the holdings but until recently there was no way to check this as none of the collections were available online. It was also difficult to serve users requiring posters for an exhibition or for study – handling was difficult and it was sometimes necessary to allow the user to sort through several hundred items in the absence of detailed descriptions, with the risk each time of damage to items. Therefore a group of institutions came together with the goals to reduce dispersion of effort in cataloguing, to coordinate the collections, and to improve access while at the same time protecting the posters by digitising and cataloguing them in a union catalogue. In addition it was felt that this would be an excellent way to promote the Swiss poster. Thanks to initial funding by Memoriav (Association for the preservation of the audiovisual heritage of Switzerland) a prototype was set up containing records and digital images of the 1'500 prize-winning posters mentioned above. Since then the system has moved into production and currently holds around 11'000 records and images, with an about 5'000 to be added in 2003.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Today there are 7 partners, with holdings of an estimated 250'000 posters. The amount of duplication is as yet unknown but considered to be relatively high.

Bibliothèque universitaire et public Genève
Bibliothèque universitaire et public Neuchâtel
Mediathèque Valais
Museum für Gestaltung Zürich
Schule für Gestaltung Basel
Swiss National Library Bern (Project leader)
Verkehrshaus der Schweiz Luzern

TECHNICAL REALIZATION

IBM RS/6000 FS80 with 4 processors and 5GigaBytes of Memory

- The software used is VIRTUA® (from VTLIS Inc. Blacksburg, Virginia US) running on the above system.
- Bibliographic entries are stored in an Oracle database (MARC21 format, Cataloguing rules drawn up by partners (Museums and libraries)).

Staff access via PC

- The database is accessible via the VIRTUA® Client for data-entry and update.
- The VIRTUA software is divided in several modules (Cataloguing, OPAC...). To configure the software for the Union Catalogue a software called VIRTUA® profiler is used

Compaq Deskpro with 1 GBytes of Memory

- The images are encoded with the MrSid software
- The Hi-Res Image Navigator makes the images navigable
- 10'000 images with their corresponding thumbnail take approximately 10 GBytes of disc space.

The bibliographic entry is linked to the image via the 856 tag.

The posters are accessible to the public via the VIRTUA® Chameleon Gateway at <http://www.snl.ch/posters>

PROJECT STATUS

One of the most difficult part of the project was to define common cataloguing rules, taking into account the needs of both libraries and museums: the approaches were often very different, especially in the area of subject indexing. The rules are still evolving as different types of poster are catalogued but the basic core is stable.

As indicated above about 11'000 posters have been digitised and catalogued and are searchable online.

COPYRIGHT

A watermark is combined with each image in a very translucent form. It is seen as a deterrent but cannot guarantee that images will not be captured and re-used. The SNL is studying other methods including invisible, trackable indications.

DIGITISATION AT SNL

Following the success of the prototype, the SNL received funding to digitise part of the collection in 2001. The SNL did not have the equipment nor the staff to carry out the digitisation itself, so an external supplier was required. There were a number of factors that need to taken into account when choosing the supplier:

- a local (Swiss) supplier was required
- the posters could not be removed from the Library : all digitisation had to be inhouse
- since budgets are allocated on an annual basis the work had to be carried out in a short time-frame.

During Spring / Summer 2001, the SNL carried out a study to choose a supplier to digitise 3'400 publicity posters. The goal was to provide a good quality image for access that would allow print reproductions up to A3 size but not to create an exact digital copy of each poster. The digital images were planned as an access tool not a preservation method nor an exact substitute for the posters which remain the preservation object. Three companies were considered for the task: each was required to digitise the same 3 posters and provide print outs. Two of the companies proposed a solution using a digital camera, the third suggested a hybrid solution based on colour microfilm and scanning. This company also proposed to carry out summary cataloguing. After analysing the results and comparing the prices, the best quality/price was considered to be the hybrid solution proposed by the Gubler Imaging Company (Märstetten, CH <http://gubler-imaging.ch/>). A team of 6 worked at the library to microfilm and catalogue the posters. The microfilms were then scanned at the company's

premises and the SNL received for each poster: a colour microfilm (lifespan estimated at 500 years), a TIFF file (for print outs) and a JPEG file (for access). The latter was then compressed with MrSid, a watermark added and loaded into the system.

Impression of the working process

10 people had to carry up the camera to the second floor of the building because it was too large to fit into the elevator.

The posters are microfilmed from above and can be put flat on the table. Very fragile posters are even covered by a glass plate to protect the poster during microfilming.

In parallel the posters are catalogued → see PC's in the background.

Each poster has a unique call number

e.g.. BN_1963_03 BN = prize-winning
 1963 = year of winning
 03 = poster Nr 3

This number is also marked on the corresponding microfilm → is used as file name for the image and is part of the URL.

Following the success of the operation, and after the Conservation department had seen that the company handled the posters correctly, the SNL was permitted to transport future sets of posters to the company's office for treatment. The work has continued in 2002 and 2003.

OPEN QUESTIONS

- Long-term preservation of digital files: although the poster remains the preservation source, SNL wishes to maintain the TIFF files as these permit print outs. They are currently stored on CDRom in the stacks, but will need to be moved to disk and incorporated into the long-term preservation policy at SNL (eHelvetica).
- JPEG2000 has been announced (though is not yet supported by IE) and in the short to medium term the SNL will have to take decisions about moving to this - and see if conversion of the current JPEG/MrSid files is required.
- Watermarks, as explained above.
- Enhancing the minimal cataloguing. While the minimal cataloguing enables fast access to the posters, it lacks many elements such as subject indexing or author entries. In the longer term it may be necessary to enhance the records. However the minimal records are adequate for their purpose and represent a pragmatic solution to a well-know problem: it is faster to digitise than it is to describe. SNL opted to have minimal records rather than risk a large backlog of files to manage.
- Future funding. The partners cannot fund the digitisation of their complete collections and efforts are being made to find sponsors among poster producers or companies responsible for putting up posters throughout the country.
- Sales policy. The SNL has no policy in place for costing print outs or reproductions of posters and needs to define one in response to requests now being placed.

Conclusion

The results of the project are already making themselves felt: there have been more requests to access the collection, and requests to use the TIFF files for reproductions of posters in catalogues. 2 new partners have joined in the past year, and the visibility of the catalogue is increasing. At the beginning of this presentation I mentioned that we wanted to preserve the posters better, and now we see that there is increased demand, so this might be seen as a contradiction. However thanks to the digital images, researchers can pinpoint the exact posters required and thus reduce the handling needed previously when selecting posters for exhibitions or catalogues.

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Homepage: <http://www.snl.ch>/Union Catalogue of Swiss Posters: <http://www.snl.ch/posters>