hershenson-allen archive

THE ACCLAIMED MOVIE POSTER IMAGE COLLECTION

Prospectus

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Introduction

The Hershenson-Allen Archive is a comprehensive collection of over 41,000 chemical photographic movie poster images of extraordinarily high quality coupled with digital scans of each image and a fully-searchable database. It is thought to be the most comprehensive image bank of its kind, a unique treasure of world cinema. Nowhere is there as complete and high-quality an inventoried and catalogued visual archive of film posters. The collection includes images for posters from a large number of the commercial movies known to have been made between 1894 ("Faust") and the early 2000's. The work of over 100 graphic artists is represented in the collection's poster images.

The Archive is the result of a decades-long collaboration between two of the most important figures in the movie poster/film ephemera field; Richard C. Allen and Bruce Hershenson. The Hershenson-Allen Archive was created in 1997 as a visual resource of movie poster images to be used by film lovers of all sorts as well as experts and scholars in film and media, art and graphic design, communications, popular culture, social and media history, political science, and other disciplines.

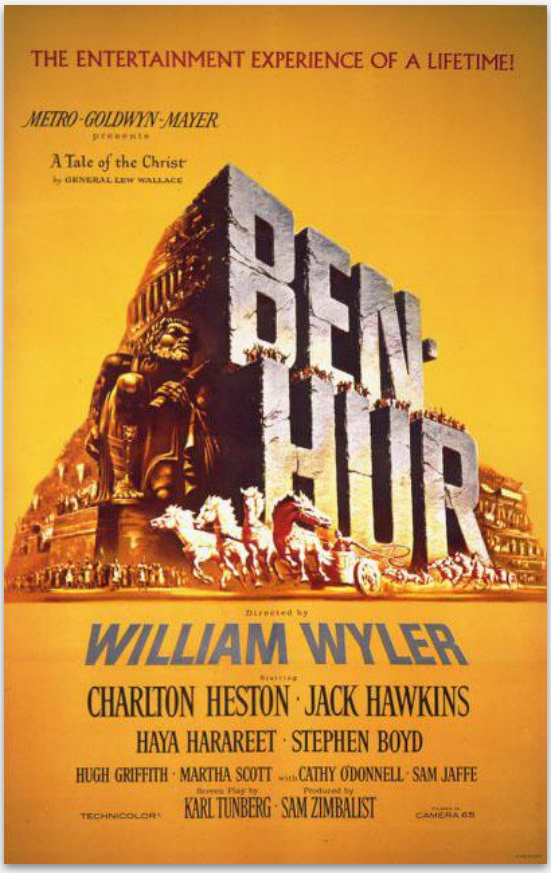
The Archive was born when Hershenson and Allen decided to merge their extensive and complementary collections of movie poster images. For years, each of them had been having their collections of professionally-restored original posters photographed to produce high quality 4" x 5" color transparencies.

Hershenson has been a successful movie ephemera dealer and collector for decades. He has been an expert advisor to Christie's Auction House - East in New York and is the founder and owner of the highly successful online movie memorabilia auction site, eMovieposter.com. Like Allen, Hershenson recognized early-on the value of preserving poster images on film so they could be studied and enjoyed by future generations – regardless of whether the poster itself ended up in a museum, a university, or a private collection, or was lost or destroyed.

Introduction

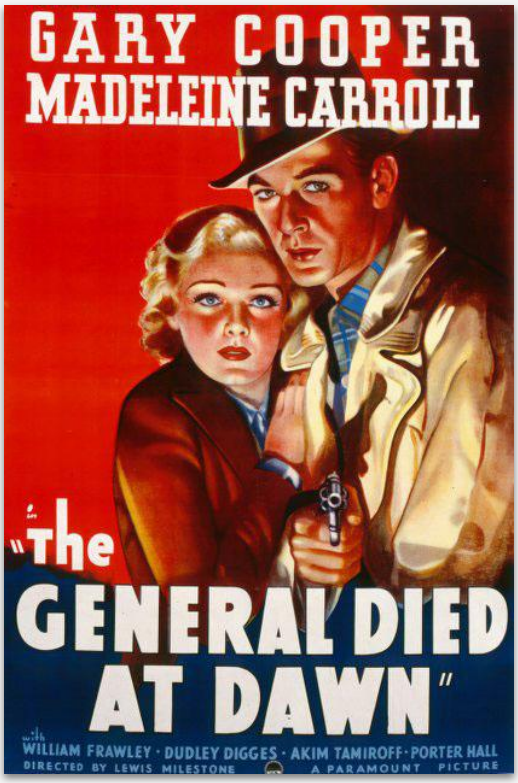
Allen, a former Marine Corps lieutenant colonel and senior corporate executive, was a lifelong collector of a wide variety of objects. He had a special passion for movie memorabilia and particularly movie posters and window cards. For over 25 years, Allen collected thousands of rare posters until he could no longer buy and restore more posters without selling the ones he already owned. At that point, Allen changed the focus of his efforts and began to have his extensive collection professionally photographed.

Allen was the co-author of Reel Art: Great Posters from the Golden Age of the Silver Screen, published by Abbeville Press and still considered the definitive book on movie poster art from the period 1910-1950.



The Photographic Images

The chemical photographic images are the heart of the Hershenson-Allen Archive. All of the photography was done by professional documentary photographers using stationary 4" x 5" view cameras and top-line lenses (such as the excellent Schneider G-Claron 150mm f/9 enlarging lens), and professional films (such as Kodak Ektachrome Professional 64T and Fuji Velvia 50).



As previously mentioned, each full-color photographic image in the Archive was made from an original poster, owned at the time by either Mr. Allen or Mr. Hershenson. When required, the posters were professionally restored prior to photography, thus allowing an optimal vibrant reproduction.

During photography, posters were mounted on a vertical vacuum table in order to assure complete flatness, with the film plane and table plane aligned to parallel. All images incorporated a manufacturer's color calibration card for the film being used in order to guide accurate color rendition in scanning and printing.

Large format chemical photographic images created in this manner contain an extraordinary amount of detail, particularly when compared to digital photography. Ken Rockwell, a noted photographic expert, asserts that a quality 4" x 5" image contains over a gigapixel (one thousand megapixels) of usable information. By contrast, he says that "A digital camera with Bayer Interpolation would need to be rated at better than 2 gigapixels to see things that can be seen on a sheet of 4" x 5" film."

This then is what makes the Hershenson-Allen Archive truly unique. Other movie poster image collections exist, but none incorporate anything close to the extraordinary quality of the images in this Archive.

Storage of Transparencies

The transparency for each film poster in the Archive is held in individual archival plastic sleeves and are systematically filed in archival steel cabinets. They are stored in a secure temperature and humidity-controlled environment.

Lost Films

The Hershenson-Allen Archive includes images from at least 35 films considered by film historians to be among the so-called "lost" films; films for which all archival and release prints and most other documentation has largely disappeared. It is possible that poster images in the Archive may be the only physical remnant for certain films.

While movie posters have always been considered ephemera, they are not nearly as ephemeral as the release prints for the subject movies. Until 1951, most films were made using nitrocellulose film stock. Nitrocellulose is also known as "gun cotton", a mildly-explosive, highly-flammable substance subject to self-ignition as it deteriorates. Many studios purposely destroyed all release prints due to the extreme fire danger, especially during the silent films era. MGM was an exception, but lost its trove of older films to a vault fire in 1965. The Hershenson-Allen Archive contains poster images from some of the films lost in that fire, including Greta Garbo's highly sought-after "The Divine Woman" and Lon Chaney's "A Blind Bargain." (In total, the Archive contains images from over 2,300 silent movies.)

The Database

In order to make the image collection a versatile, usable tool, every photographic image in the Archive was scanned to produce a high-resolution digital image. Additionally, metadata from the images is stored in a fully-searchable, relational, SQL database, enabling easy access to information about the images. For example, images can be referenced by film title, release year, names of stars, poster size, nationality, film genre, studio, and (when available) poster artist.

The design of the database enables complex questions about the composition of the archive to be answered with a simple SQL query (e.g. "How many unique lobby card images from 1960s Italian westerns are in the archive?)

Archive Uses

While the digitized images are themselves immediately usable and useful, the high quality and data density of the photographic images supports a variety of other creative uses. Truly enormous exhibition prints of whole posters or of poster elements are possible - scanner technology has developed well beyond what was available when the Hershenson-Allen Archive was originally digitized. At the other extreme, the level and clarity of detail is such that what amounts to microscopic examination is possible.

An exciting new use for the high-resolution images in the Archive would be for environmental projection in the increasingly-popular immersive graphical exhibits.

Advances in the luminosity, resolution, price, and computerized synching of LED projectors has allowed the development of large-scale six-surface "immersion rooms" allowing museums and other entities to completely change the way they share images with the public.

Perhaps the best recent example of this are the many "Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience" exhibits touring the country. Banks of powerful LED projectors project images of Van Gogh's paintings and writings on the walls, ceilings, and floors of huge rooms, completely engulfing spectators and fundamentally changing the way that the public engages with the material.

The extraordinary native resolution of the Archive negatives mean that extremely high resolution digitized images can be made that would allow tack-sharp projection, even at distance and with high resulting magnification. The scope of the Archive would allow a broad variety of vivid and exciting shows, bringing the history of the cinema accessibly alive for broad audiences.

Archive Uses, cont'd

Perhaps the most exciting potential use for the Archive would be as the foundation for a more comprehensive collection of movie poster images extending up through the present.

Such a project would be daunting. However, it would be impossible without the Hershenson-Allen Archive as a base. As hard as the rest of the work would be, the truly hard work has already been done by Hershenson and Allen.

In the United States, between 2000 and 2021, on average some 600 commercial films have been released each year, for a rough total of 12,600 films. The movie posters for all of these films are photographic prints, not the lithographic prints that represent the majority of the posters in the Archive. Therefore there is a master photographic file for every one. Thus, posters for modern movies are more accessible, more widely-available, and also inherently available in their native maximum photographic resolution.

In contrast, it would be essentially impossible to recreate the Hershenson-Allen Archive today. Simply tracking down and gaining access to over 40,000 original movie posters would take thousands of hours, assuming that collectors of rare posters would freely share their collections, which might well not be true. Moreover, as lithographs, these images are analog and would require photography. High-quality photography would require either that each poster be shipped to a central location or that a photographic team travel to a large number of global destinations.

The sheer volume of posters would also mean that the photography itself would be quite expensive. As an example, if each poster were immediately available and if it took even ten minutes to mount, verify proper exposure, photograph, and demount, this would entail over 6,500 hours of photographer time, to say nothing of the time and cost associated with film processing and quality control.

By the Numbers

Number of Poster Images: 41,987

Number of Unique Films Represented: 29,809 (More than one design was created for many movies; often, unique posters were created to market films internationally)

Number of actors represented: 6,668

Number of studios represented: 19

Number of images from top countries:

- U.S. - 37,089
- U.K. - 1,118
- Italy - 741
- France - 516
- Sweden - 425
- Australia - 394
- Germany - 284
- Belgium - 232
- Argentina - 203
- Denmark - 185

Number of Images by Genres:

- Thriller/Adventure - 12,607
- Romantic - 12,047
- Comedy - 10,258
- Crime/Detective - 8,336
- Horror/Sci-Fi - 11,923
- Animated/Fantasy - 3,863
- Western - 4,315
- Musical - 4,131
- War - 4,008
- Sports - 1,400
- Documentary - 994
- African-American - 478

Number of Oscar Nominees Represented: 2,885

Number of Oscar Winners Represented: 744

Average Number of Images Per Film: 1.4

Average Number of Images Per Actor: 6.3

Number of images by decade:

- Pre-1900 - 10
- 1900's - 14
- 1910's - 514
- 1920's - 2,321
- 1930's - 6,756
- 1940's - 7,348
- 1950's - 7,628
- 1960's - 5,572
- 1970's - 5,408
- 1980's - 3,636
- 1990's - 1,868
- 2000's - 790

Number of Images by Poster Format:

- One Sheet (27" x 41") - 25,565
- Lobby Card (14" x 11") - 5846
- Three Sheet (41" x 81") - 1207
- Half Sheet (28" x 24") - 1031
- Insert (14" x 36") - 973
- Window Card (14" x 28") - 710
- Six Sheet (81" x 81") - 363