AN ICON YOU SHOULD KNOW...

Lucian Bernhard

German-American poster and type designer, 1883 to 1972

Lucian Bernhard cut posters down to two things: the product and its name. His winning poster for the Priester match company in 1905 helped launch the style known as Sachplakat, or object poster. He ran a large studio in Berlin, taught graphic design, then moved to New York, where he designed typefaces such as Bernhard Gothic and Bernhard Modern. Read this page in about five minutes, then use the links at the end to look deeper.



Lucian Bernhard. Wikimedia Commons, public domain in the US. Full credit on page 3.

FURTHER LOOKING

Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum: His biography and the 1909 to 1910 Adler typewriter poster. collection.cooperhewitt.org

Museum of Modern Art: His posters in the MoMA collection, including *Stiller* (1908) and *Manoli* (1910). moma.org

Neue Galerie New York: An exhibition page on German advertising posters that tells the Priester story. neuegalerie.org

Priester Matches: A catalog record for the poster in the Minneapolis College of Art and Design Library, shared by Pratt Institute. omekas.prattsi.org

Website: Seduced by an Object Poster

Reference: Lucian Bernhard on Wikipedia

Video: The Historic Poster Stamps of Lucian Bernhard

01 Fact Sheet

1883	Born Emil Kahn in Stuttgart, Germany.
1898	Visits a large design exhibition at the Glaspalast in Munich with posters by Jules Chéret, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Alphonse Mucha and the Beggarstaffs.
Early 1900s	Settles in Berlin after a bitter fight with his father.
1905	Wins a poster contest held by the Priester match company. The poster launches his career.
c. 1906	At age 23, opens his own studio, with 30 employees.
1908 to 1914	Designs posters for firms such as Stiller shoes, Manoli cigarettes, Adler typewriters and Bosch.
1914 to 1918	Designs posters for German war loans and home front campaigns during World War I.
1920	Becomes the first professor of graphic design at the Berlin School of Arts and Crafts.
1923	Travels to New York at the invitation of the poster printer Roy Latham and decides to settle in the United States.
1928	Signs a contract with American Type Founders (ATF).
Late 1920s	Founds the design group Contempora with Rockwell Kent, Erich Mendelsohn, Bruno Paul and Paul Poiret.
1929 to 1930	ATF releases his sans serif typeface Bernhard Gothic.
1937	ATF releases Bernhard Modern.
1972	Dies in New York City.
1981	Inducted into the Art Directors Club Hall of Fame.

Life and career Milestones tied to the key works

FIVE KEY WORKS, PAGE 2

1914 to 1918	1915 to 1918	1917	1918	1937
Hier zeichnet man die Kriegsanleihe	Spare Seife!	Spar-Prämienanleihe	Achte Kriegs-Anleihe	Bernhard Modern

02 Five Key Works

His best-known product posters, such as Priester, Stiller and Adler, are shown on the museum pages linked under Further Looking. The five works below come from public archives, so they can be shown here in full.

1914 to 1918: Hier zeichnet man die Kriegsanleihe

A war loan poster made only of letters

The title means "You can subscribe to the war loan here." A poster like this marked a place where people could buy war bonds. There is no picture at all. Bernhard made the word *Hier* (here) the largest thing on the sheet and set the closing date in orange at the bottom.

LOOK FOR One word much larger than everything else | An orange frame that holds the type together



Hier zeichnet man die Kriegsanleihe, 1914 to 1918. Wikimedia Commons, public domain in the US.

1915 to 1918: Spare Seife!

A home front poster with a lot to say

During the war, soap was scarce because it was made from oils and fats needed elsewhere. This poster, issued in Berlin by the War Committee for Oils and Fats, asks people to save soap. Unlike his product posters, this one carries a long list of tips. Bernhard still makes it easy to scan. The two largest lines are in red, *Spare Seife!* (Save soap!) and *aber wie?* (but how?), and the advice sits below in smaller black lines.

LOOK FOR Two sizes of red headline before any small text | Every line centered on one axis



Spare Seife!, 1915 to 1918. Wikimedia Commons, public domain in the US.

1917: Spar-Prämienanleihe

Numbers as the main image

This poster sells a savings bond that came with prize drawings. The headline reads "10 times 1,000,000 in top prizes every year!" Bernhard puts the numbers on two dark ribbons that curve across a yellow field. A red label on top says the offer was extended until December 10 at 1 p.m.

LOOK FOR Numbers treated like a picture | A red label that adds news on top of the design



Spar-Prämienanleihe, 1917. Wikimedia Commons, public domain in the US.

1918: Achte Kriegs-Anleihe

The eighth war loan, in two colors

The text reads "Eighth War Loan: the bigger the result, the sooner a good peace!" It was printed in Munich in 1918. Again there is no picture. Heavy black lettering, one orange capital, a wide orange bar and a small orange flourish do all the work.

LOOK FOR A single orange letter that starts the poster | A solid bar that splits the headline from the slogan



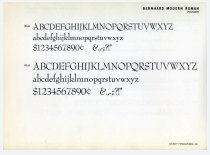
Achte Kriegs-Anleihe, 1918. Wikimedia Commons, public domain in the US.

1937: Bernhard Modern

A typeface from his American years

After moving to New York, Bernhard signed with American Type Founders in 1928. His sans serif Bernhard Gothic came out in 1929 and 1930, and Bernhard Modern followed in 1937. Bernhard Modern is a serif face with a small x-height and tall ascenders. The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History holds an ATF drawing for it dated 1937.

LOOK FOR Short lowercase letters with tall ascenders | Wide, angled serifs



Bernhard Modern, 1937. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0.

TRY THIS

Bernhard often kept only the product and its name. Pick something you use every day. Make a poster with three parts: the object, its name and one background color. Stop when you want to add a fourth thing, and ask what that fourth thing would really add.

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REFLECT

Think About It

Bernhard left out almost everything except the product and its name. Choose one of the posters on this page and one ad you saw this week. What does each one leave out, and what does that choice do for the message?

03 Sources

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