

The graphic wit of Roland Topor: posters from the Gerard Herbst Poster Collection

This exhibition presents twenty-two posters by influential Parisian artist, filmmaker and novelist Roland Topor, who died in 1997. From 1990 to 1996 Topor was commissioned by Münchner Kammerspiele (Munich Studio Theatre) manager Dieter Dorn to create posters to promote theatre productions. Each poster usually lists season dates, the title of the play and its author, the director, set and costume designer and sometimes the starring actors. For decades, the Munich Studio Theatre was considered Germany's leading drama theatre. It also staged public meetings between politicians and artists. During Dieter Dorn's leadership (1976–2001), the theatre was renowned for its modern interpretations of classic plays by Shakespeare, Kleist and Goethe, as well as its productions of new plays such as Kerstin Specht's *Amiweisen*.

Undeservedly little known outside Europe, Roland Topor is an influential figure in French art, design, film, theatre, television and literature. Initially studying painting at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Topor soon turned to drawing after deciding that 'It was hard to paint still lives when I loved Orson Welles and Buñuel. Painting was about 50-year-old things; journalism and film had to do with the future.'

Roland Topor depicts absurdities and impossibilities in his art. Influenced by Surrealism as a young teenager, Topor believed drawing should be communicated directly from the unconscious. In the Munich Studio Theatre posters here, he varies his expressive, swiftly drawn but detailed style to suit the mood and key plot elements of the play each poster promotes. Colour, tone, line, composition and figurative motifs (notably including many different plant and animal orifices) come together in each image with imagination and often macabre wit.

The Gerard Herbst Poster Collection includes more than 2000 individual posters, primarily from the post-World War II period. The collection is significant as a record of poster design, representing many international schools, designers and periods. This is the first time we have presented an exhibition of posters by a single artist. Previous exhibitions have been thematically focused, exploring travel and tourism, health and safety, opera, theatre, film or political propaganda, or international schools.