

## The Independent Movie Poster Book: Art For (Underrated) Art's Sake

Spencer Drate could barely contain his enthusiasm. It sounded as though it was going to snake through the phone and guide me through his latest book project page by page.

"What's interesting about the book is that it's not just a pop culture book," Drate said. "The other books, you look at them and say, 'Well, it's historical.' This is historical, but very importantly, it crosses over into filmmakers. Filmmakers will tend to buy this book as a base. It has a historical base they want to know about, plus they'll want it visually."



"Not just a pop culture book": Co-authors Judith Salavetz and Spencer Drate (Photos: STV)

Drate was referencing [\*The Independent Movie Poster Book\*](#) (Abrams, \$30), a survey of some of the most artful posters to emerge from the indie world in the last 40 years. Along with his co-authors Judith Salavetz and Dave Kehr, Drate gathered roughly 200 posters from the exhaustive collection of Manhattan's [Posteritati Gallery](#)—a selection running from early Cassavetes and Scorsese through Jarmusch and Solondz, from America to Europe to Asia.

It is not the first poster book on the market and certainly will not be the last. But part of Drate's enthusiasm also stems from the book's unique tribute to an otherwise unheralded style. "The independent movement has gotten big," Drate enthused to *The Reeler*. "It's gotten huge. This obviously was not addressed in movie poster books. There's no one addressing the most cutting edge things going on right now."

The "cutting edge" is represented by the raw imagery of posters for films like *Pola X* and *Pixote*, or the iconic standard set by designs for *Dead Man* or *Eraserhead*. The cover shot of Uma Thurman symbolizes the essence of a film like *Pulp Fiction* as much as any single line or character in Tarantino's classic.

The authors caught onto this early. Salavetz attributes some of the book's genesis to her teenaged daughter's affinity for independent films; when Drate suggested they collaborate on a movie poster book, Salavetz immediately invoked indie posters as a potential subject.

The pair approached Sam Sarowitz, whose Posteritati Gallery on Centre Street features thousands of rare posters from around the world. Sarowitz recommended Dave Kehr, a film writer who has contributed to the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and who authored a book on Italian movie posters in 2003

From there, the quartet dug through Posteritati's archives, with Salavetz's and Drate's decades of professional design experience leading the way. "There was definitely a selection process, and it was based on what looked the best to us," Salavetz explained. "Sometimes, they're from different countries. It turns out that the ones that were really interesting visually were lots of the time Polish and Czech."



Posteritati owner Sam Sarowitz, master of his domain

Among the other countries standing out are Japan—with exquisite takes on Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Diva* and David Cronenberg's *Spider*—and Italy, whose suggestive take on *Blue Velvet* has to be seen to be believed. Older vintage American posters for films like *Pink Flamingos* are presented with creases they incurred during shipping to theaters, while lesser-known stateside posters representing *Magnolia* and *Short Cuts* are displayed as well.

"They tend to be more interesting from a design aspect than the big studio posters," said Sarowitz, while acknowledging that the *Star Wars* memorabilia craze enhanced movie posters' collectability almost 30 years ago. "Major studio posters tend to get bogged down with a lot of contractual stuff. The image

has to be a certain size, or the name has to be a certain size, so on and so forth."

In the end, Drate said, the book could not accommodate all of the posters the authors had wanted to include. Amid their other projects—which include album cover design and a forthcoming tome chronicling the world of motorcycle art—Drate and Salavetz are considering a second poster book. "Independent film is not a fad," Drate said. "This is not the way it was years ago. People were struggling to do a movie, right? The economics were astronomical. Now anybody can make a movie."

And as cinema is democratized, so are its posters. Maybe Drate should conserve his energy—we may need more than just one follow-up.

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