

THE ARTS

Parting Glances

Now Playing: Classic Queer Movie Posters

By **TRENTON STRAUBE**

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Downtown company Posteritati has taken a collection of its LGBT movie posters out the celluloid closet and put it on public display.

The exhibit, titled "Queer as Film: Classic Gay and Lesbian Movie Posters," comprises only a handful of prints culled from the company's entire stock, which can be perused and purchased at posteritati.com. About 150 of that collection are flagged as LGBT films; countless others are of gay and lesbian interest.

A selection such as "Festa Per Il Compleanno Del Caro Amico Harold," a 39-inch by 55-inch print of two dapper young men rendered in brush strokes of red, orange and brown, is indeed worthy of proud display in a home, office or museum. What, you haven't seen that film? Perhaps you don't recognize the Italian translation. The American title is "The Boys in the Band." (I'd suggest you Netflix it, but I'm shocked to report that the 1970 classic isn't available on DVD.)

"Queer as Film" includes not only original U.S. posters but also posters created for U.S. films in foreign markets. And the differences are fascinating.

"One of my favorites in the collection is the Polish 'My Own Private Idaho.' It's so evocative," said Posteritati owner Sam Sarowitz. Eastern Europeans are particularly good at capturing the film's tone, he said, explaining that designing posters for U.S. films in foreign markets was seemingly left up to the designers in those markets.

Unfortunately, that individual artistic flair is fading as homogenization and globalization take over. The foreign market accounts for an increasing share of a film's gross, Sarowitz said, leading Hollywood to take more control of marketing abroad.

Why don't we enjoy more variety in the U.S. film poster market anyway? "American posters are dictated by contractual obligations," Sarowitz explained. For example, a star's contract may stipulate that his or her face must be a certain size on the film's poster. "It's the curse of what we call the Floating Heads."

Posteritati viewers don't suffer that curse. A British print of the 1968 U.S. documentary "The Queen" portrays the transformation of a man into New York drag queen Sabrina (who is still alive and high-kicking in Gotham). A Hong Kong edition of 1997's "Happy Together" shows two soccer lads tumbling on the green. Drool over Brad Davis in the French poster to "Querelle" or over lesbian lovers "Ameé and Jaguar." The list goes on, and each poster usually costs between \$45-\$400, depending on size, condition, rarity and other variables.



Film poster for "Forbidden Love" (1992, U.S.). Photos: Posteritati.

VALUABLE INVESTMENTS

To many collectors, film posters are an art form, and sought-after prints often command a high price. The genre has only become more popular in recent years. Tomorrow's treasure may be headed for the trash bin tonight at your local cineplex.

"Film posters are collectible and can gain in monetary value as an investment," Sarowitz said. A poster for an iconic film such as 1961's "Breakfast at Tiffany's" would go for \$200-\$300 15 years ago. Today, it could fetch \$9,000. The most expensive film poster sale was three months ago, according to Sarowitz. It was a poster for the German film "Metropolis," and it sold privately for \$690,000.

Understandably, Sarowitz won't divulge his sources, saying, "I've collected since I was a teenager, wheeling and dealing and traveling around the world." But he knows his stuff. A collection of his gallery was published as "The Independent Movie Poster Book." He also worked in film production; the last movie he worked on was Oscar-winning director Ang Lee's debut, 1992's "Pushing Hands."

Which brings us to Lee's gay juggernaut, "Brokeback Mountain." That already-iconic film poster does not hang from the Posteritati gallery walls.

"We've had so many people ask for the original that there's now a waiting list," Sarowitz says. "The original is very hard to find. Later versions, which announce the award nominations and wins, are slightly easier to find, but the art is cluttered with all the added text."

'Queer as Film: Classic Gay and Lesbian Posters,' though April 30, at Posteritati, 239 Centre St, 212-226-2207, posteritati.com.