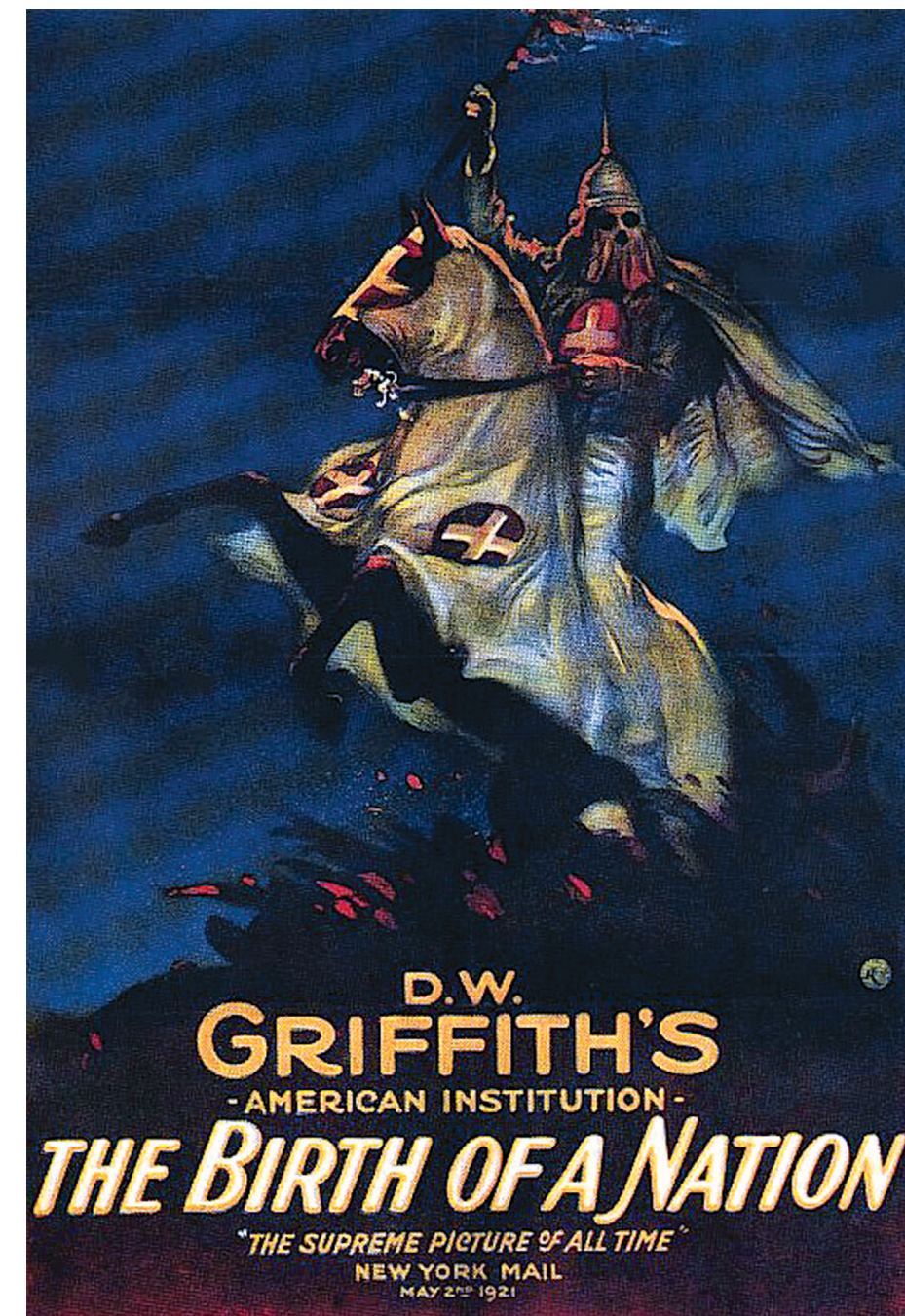
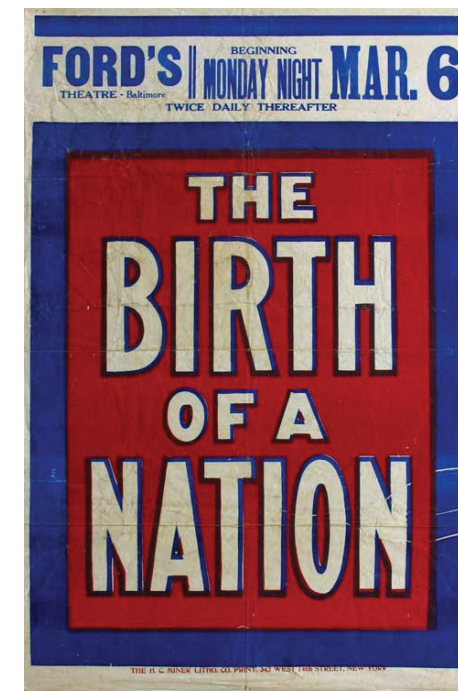


WHEN POSTER ART MET OJAI



Two art forms, full-color lithography and film, linked from stone to screen

By Anca Colbert

Ojai enjoys a long-standing love affair with film-making, “The Seventh Art.” Movie aficionados abound around here, as do actors, writers and directors. The town has a popular Film Society and its own Film Festival. This fall the Ojai Valley Museum of Art and History presents a new exhibit to celebrate the centennial of the local playhouse.

Elise de Puydt, a film history researcher, is the community curator of “The Ojai Theater: 100 Years of Movies, 1914–2014.” (Read Mark Lewis’ feature in the OQ Spring 2014 issue: “A Century of Cinema.”)

As this magazine goes to press, it will be just over 100 years since the Isis Theater opened on August 15, 1914 on the site of the present Ojai Playhouse.

It seems fitting to take a closer look at Ojai’s enduring connection with movies, and timely to research the graphic artistry of some movie posters created for films shot in Ojai. The ones selected here are four vastly different movies, spanning almost the 100-year history of our local playhouse: “Birth of a Nation” (1915), “Lost Horizon” (1937), “Smokey and the Bandit” (1977), and “Easy A” (2010).

The Internet Movie Database (IMDb) lists 69 titles of movies filmed with locations in Ojai. Of those, many are shorts, documentaries and TV shows, such as the popular “Bionic Woman” series of the ‘70s. A few other noteworthy films with Ojai locations include: “Pat and Mike” (1952); “The Two Jakes” (1990); “The Ugly Truth” (2009); “Coldwater” (2013); and “Trumbo” (2007), Peter Askins’ fascinating documentary about the life of legendary black-listed screenwriter Dalton Trumbo.

First, let’s take a closer look at the history and aesthetics of movie

posters as a distinctly original form of graphic arts, along with their collectability and value in today’s market place.

What is a film poster?

It is simply a poster used to advertise a film — traditionally displayed inside and outside of movie theaters, but also on streets and in shop windows. In recent years, film posters have grown exponentially in popularity with collectors.

Film posters come in different sizes and styles depending on their country of origin and on their marketing usage. For American movies, the classic “one-sheet” (standard size: 41”x27”) is the most commonly encountered type of poster. Other studio-produced advertisements include two-sheets, three-sheets, inserts and lobby cards, etc. See illustration (above) of various materials used for “Lost Horizon” marketing campaign produced by Columbia Pictures in 1937.

Cinema and full-color lithographic posters were born about the same time, around 1895 in Paris. The history of the two art forms was linked from their beginnings, and still is today through over a century of transformations in both media. In Europe, as in the United States, the first movie posters were designed and printed in stone lithography or by letterpress; then came the era of original illustrations, followed by photographic montages printed in offset, and, more recently, the digital age.

The growing appeal of rare, original, beautiful designs has boosted the popularity of vintage movie posters with museums, galleries and private collectors. Gallery 525 in Meiners Oaks recently hosted a show of international movie posters, which included American, French, Polish and Cuban works.

1915-16. One-sheet Poster. Simple typographical treatment for this poster makes for an interesting historic document, but not one worth collecting for aesthetic reasons. One in poor condition sold for under \$300 in 2006. Today it might fetch \$ 500-600.

Why do posters captivate the imagination of both movie buffs and art collectors? First because they speak strongly to the visual memories so cherished by film enthusiasts. Movie posters tend to seduce the viewer with the emotional appeal of ‘recognition’ used as an integral part of the design concept: viewers easily relate to the faces of the main actors in the movie and/or recognize a striking scene (illustrated or photographed) drawn from the movie. The film studios always hired accomplished artists and graphic designers to create inspired compositions and images that have become part of a visual language and a popular culture.

Indeed, over the years, a specific movie poster graphic design style developed, large in scale and bold in impact, different from other styles of poster art, but always using the strong colors and the innovative typographical treatment characteristic of any good poster design: posters need to grab a viewer’s attention from a distance.

Birth of a Nation (1915)

The famous (and infamous) movie

Advertised in the stunning stone lithographic poster (created for the 1921 release of the movie in New York) as “the supreme picture of all time” this particular variant of the “Clansman on the Horse” theme poster sold at auction in 2009 for \$13,145. It was described as in fair condition after some restoration, and, as any collector knows, condition plays a key role in the desirability and value of all vintage posters; should another impression of this extremely rare poster surface on the open art market today, one in better condition could probably reach the \$25,000-30,000 price range.

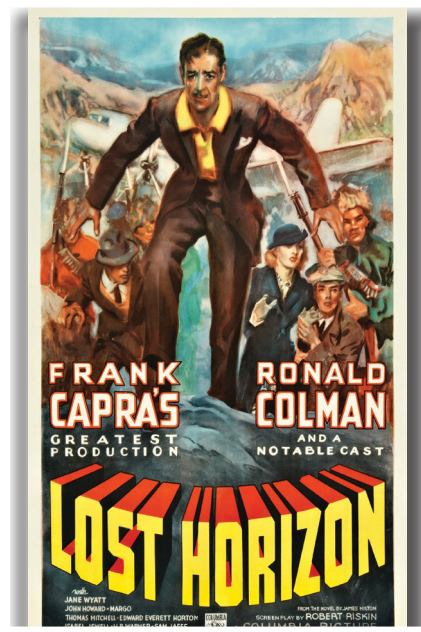
about the Civil War, this classic silent epic was directed by D.W. Griffith and starred Lillian Gish. Based on the novel “The Clansman” by Thomas Dixon, Jr., the film was over three hours long in its original release and was presented in two parts, with an intermission. It was the first 12-reel film produced in America. “The film was a commercial success

(it shattered box office records), but was highly controversial owing to its portrayal of African-American men and the portrayal of the Ku Klux Klan.

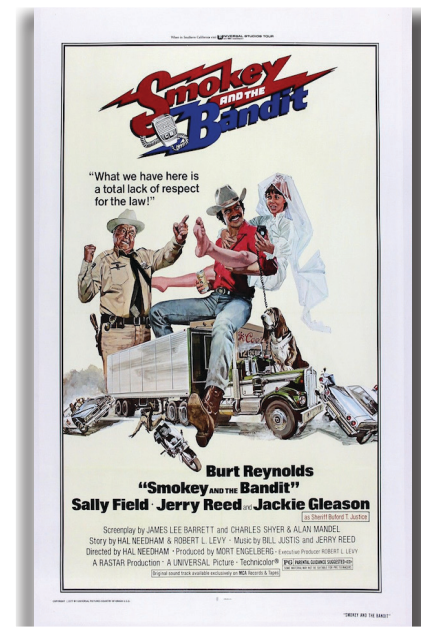
“Despite the film’s controversial content, Griffith’s innovative film techniques (he pioneered the use of panoramic long shots, iris effects, still-shots, night photography, panning camera shots, color tinting, origi-



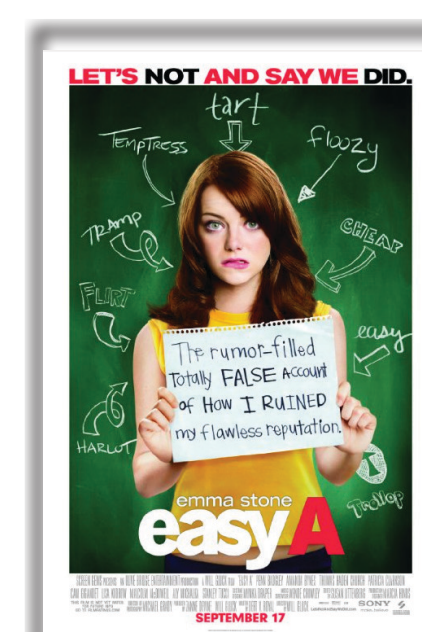
“Lost Horizon:” It was auctioned only three times between 1994 and 2002, with a hammer price between \$10,928 and \$ 21,450. Today it could fetch between \$30,000-40,000.



“Lost Horizon:” Two restored copies sold at auction: one in 2009 for \$ 5,975 and another, in 2014, for \$ 8,365. A copy in good condition could fetch now in the \$ 10-15,000 range.



A one-sheet in good condition from “Smokey and Bandit” can be found for \$100-200. Any posters sign by the movie’s stars are always more valuable.



The one-sheet “Easy A” (2010) is easily available for \$ 20 to \$30, which is customary for a recently released film. A poster signed by Emma Stone would, of course, be more desirable.

Ojai is used for two locations, in the immediate vicinity of one another; a scene in the coffee shop at Carrow’s, West Ojai Avenue, and the ensuing car chase around the old Shell/Adamson Station (now Cluff Vista Park).

The poster design released by the studio focuses on the stars (Burt Reynolds, Jackie Gleason and Sally Field) and uses an array of overlaid images from several scenes designed to trigger the conception that this is an action-packed comedy.

Easy A - (2010)

The entirety of this film is shot in Ojai, without using a single film set.

The school used for the movie is Nordhoff High School, renamed “Ojai North High School.”

As for the bookstore that Olive visits that has books on the outside of the store? It’s our world-famous Bart’s Books. Other locations include Shelf Road, the Ojai Playhouse, Libbey Park, Ojai Presbyterian

Church, Carrow’s, Ojai Coffee Roasting, as well as several private residences.

If you watch the movie carefully, you will likely see among the extras many familiar faces, especially in the hallway scenes.

This poster design uses bold, single-character central focus (Emma Stone), and legible hand-lettering (chalked on board) the name of the movie. The red color of the letter “A” has a double meaning; it refers to an easy class to get good grades in as well as the sexual connotation for an “easy” woman, as in Hawthorne’s classic novel “The Scarlet Letter.”

The enduring myth of Ojai as Shangri-La — “a mystic valley away from it all” — lives on, through films, in our imagination and as a daily reality for those of us fortunate enough to live in this enchanted valley. ☺

nal music score, and more) make it one of the most influential films in the commercial film industry, and it is often ranked as one of “the greatest American films of all time,” as per its Wikipedia page.

No poster is “unique,” since they are printed as multiples, but some old posters are “rarer” than others and highly sought after. There are only a few known copies of Toulouse-Lautrec’s three-sheet “Le Moulin Rouge” (1891), which sold at Sotheby’s in New York in 2010 for \$374,500, and there are only about a dozen original posters known to exist of this version of “The Birth of a Nation.”

The movie was filmed in a dozen places in Southern California. The Ojai location is noted as one of them on IMDb. In one visually powerful sequence, a cavalcade of KKK riders is going through different locations, one of which is documented as Ojai in the just-published book “D.W. Griffith’s 100th Anniversary – The Birth of a Nation: A History of the most controversial movie ever made,” by Seymour Stern and Ira H. Gallen.

The horse gallop sequence was stitched together and “edited in such a way as to create a sum-image of a vast but continuous single terrain.”

Interesting production details are added: “The Ojai location represented a ‘small saving’ in money, because it was less expensive for groups of actors (Klansmen) and the camera crew to drive to Calabasas and the Agoura Trading Post, where ranch horses were still for rent, than to pay the cost of trucking them from Ojai to the South.”

Richard Brody summed it up best in his *New Yorker* article last year: “The worst thing about “Birth of a Nation” is how good it is. The merits of its grand and enduring aesthetic make it impossible to ignore and, despite its disgusting content, also make it hard not to love.”

Lost Horizon (1937)

It is a widespread belief that the Ojai Valley was used for filming the outside scenes of Shangri-La in Frank Capra’s classic “Lost Horizon.” But was it? Is it fact, fiction or film lore? Shangri-La is a fictional mountain valley described by James Hilton in his 1933 novel “Lost Horizon,” from which the movie was derived.

James Montgomery Flagg (1877-1960) was the artist of both one-sheets shown above. He had a long and truly illustrious career as an illustrator. J.M. Flagg is

famous for his 1917 poster “I Want You for U.S. Army” with Uncle Sam pointing at the viewer. Both of his posters use illustration art to interpret scenes from the film. In both cases, compositions are complex and multi-layered to create a depth of field: one uses bolder, action-oriented typographical effects; the other is softer, more suggestive of emotions.

These magnificent posters are extremely rare and desirable by collectors.

It is documented that Frank Capra and his crew started filming “Lost Horizon” in March 1936 and came to the valley shortly after. It is reputed that the establishing shot of Shangri-La was filmed as a sweeping view of the Ojai Valley from Dennison Grade. The original “final cut” of the film premiered in New York in 1937, but a questionnaire filled out by the viewers concluded that it was too long. The film was subjected to numerous edits, cut from 132 minutes to 95 minutes. Movie experts agree that somewhere in that process, the Ojai scene was edited out. Indeed, there seems to be no trace of the Ojai vistas in the film versions available to contemporary cinephiles.

Smokey and the Bandit - (1977)

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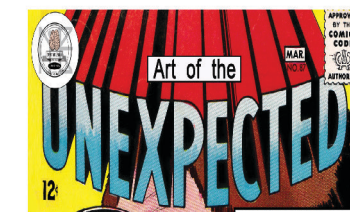


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