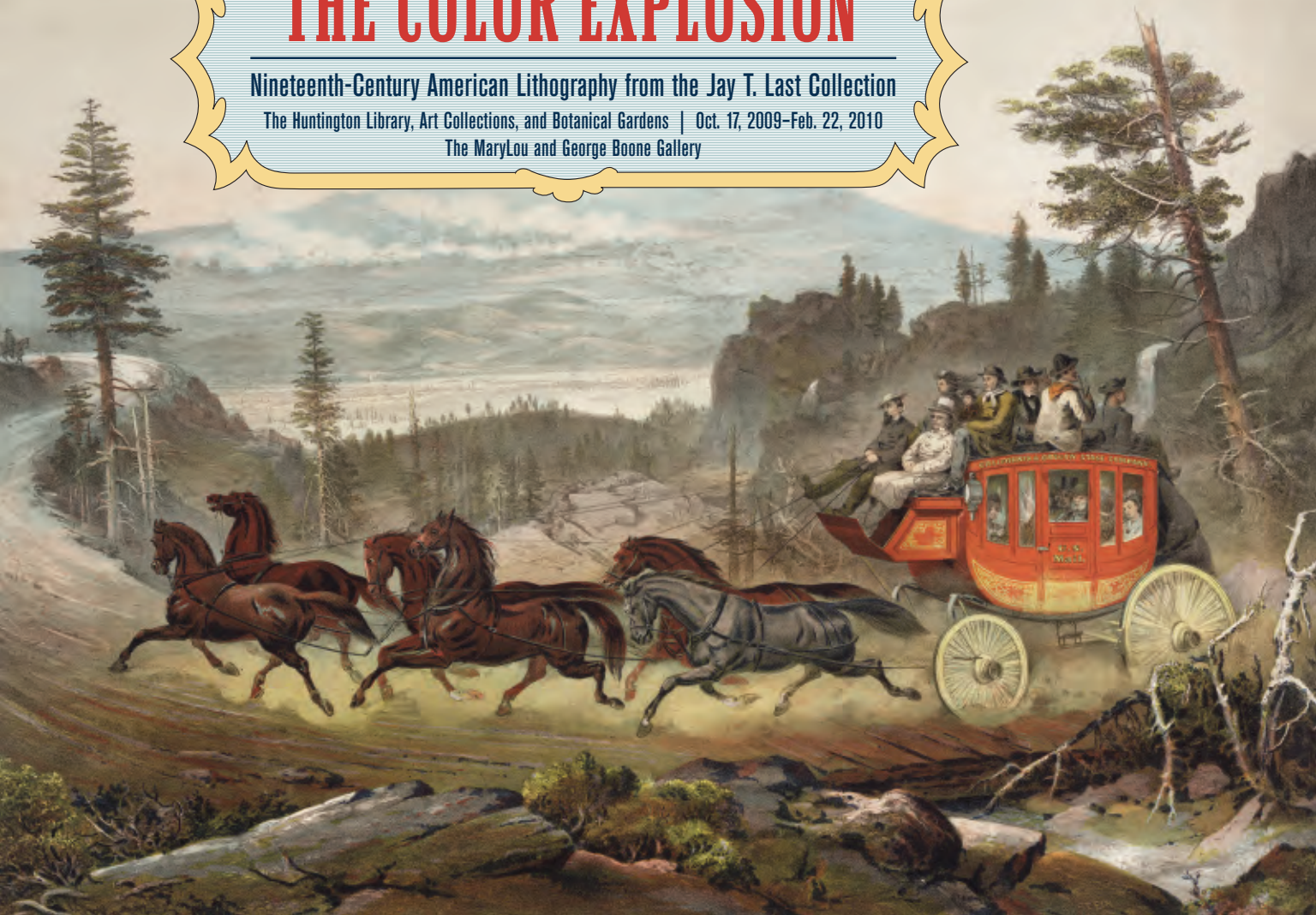


THE COLOR EXPLOSION

Nineteenth-Century American Lithography from the Jay T. Last Collection

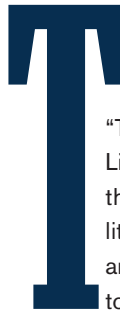
The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens | Oct. 17, 2009–Feb. 22, 2010

The MaryLou and George Boone Gallery



Color lithography **REVOLUTIONIZED THE PRINTING INDUSTRY** in 19th-century America, bringing art, literature, and music to the masses. Some would argue that **IT TRANSFORMED THE NATION**; certainly **IT TRANSFORMED CONSUMER CULTURE.**

On the cover: California & Oregon Stage Company advertising poster, lithographed by Britton & Rey (San Francisco), ca. 1870.



“The Color Explosion: Nineteenth-Century American Lithography from the Jay T. Last Collection” features more than 250 objects documenting the ubiquity of color lithography—from advertising posters, product labels, and wall calendars to art prints; from children’s books, toys, and games to sheet music and trade cards.

Lithography was invented in the 1790s by Alois Senefelder, a young German playwright who sought a cheaper and faster way to publish his plays. Unlike copper engraving or wood-block printing, the newer printmaking process did not require any cutting into metal or wood. Instead, the artist would draw an image onto a flat block of limestone with a greasy crayon. Working with the principle that water and oil don’t mix, the lithographer would then apply water to the stone, followed by a layer of oily ink that would adhere only to the greasy surface. The inked portion of the design produced an image when the block was pressed against the paper.

But even with this great innovation in printing technique, lithography’s full impact wasn’t felt until color became part of the process in the mid-19th century. Other improvements made it possible for printers to apply multiple colors, and increasingly colorful images began appearing in periodicals, advertisements,



"American Autumn," lithographed by Thomas Sinclair (Philadelphia), 1867.

and the packaging of commercial goods. By the 1870s, salesmen were pitching products using multicolored lithographic trade cards and catalogs, and Americans were beautifying their homes with purchases of color prints and wall calendars.

Color lithography saturated the marketplace of consumer goods, represented in the exhibition by labels from food cans,

cigar boxes, and fruit crates. On display is a small fraction of the Last collection, which comprises some 135,000 objects in all—one of the largest collections of color lithography in the United States.

PACKAGED APPEAL

The invention of lithography is directly linked to the early history of branding and advertising, as manufacturers and merchants began to appreciate the powerful contribution of packaging to the appeal of merchandise. Brand-name products in boxes, can, cartons, and wrappers replaced generic goods in barrels, jars, bins, and sacks. Color-lithographed labels provided crucial identification and promotion in an ever-widening sea of consumer choices.

Lithography not only changed the way consumers purchased products, but also the way merchants displayed their goods.

Paris Laundry Soap advertising poster, lithographed by Shober & Carqueville (Chicago), ca. 1885.



For example, large cigar box labels were pasted inside the lids for maximum impact when the boxes were displayed open on shelves. Smaller labels were used on exterior lids and sides, which provided easy identification when boxes were closed. Cigar box labels remained a staple of lithographic production until American consumers traded cigars for cigarettes in the early 1900s.

Affordable color printing also transformed book illustration, which had previously been constrained by the limitations of hand coloring. Natural history books abounded, and gift books with color lithographed frontispieces and presentation pages became popular. Books on technical subjects, including scientific treatises, medical reports, government land surveys, and works on architecture, frequently made special use of color to convey complex information.

Lithographers also applied their skills to the depiction of current events. As advances in printing accelerated the pace of production and lowered costs, lithographed prints helped launch the field of pictorial journalism. In one of the earlier examples of this trend, New York lithographer Henry Robinson produced *Battle of Buena Vista* shortly after that 1846 episode in the Mexican-American War.



Lambertville Rubber Co. advertising poster, lithographed by Ketterlinus Printing House (Philadelphia), ca. 1895.

The well-known board game pioneer Milton Bradley was also an accomplished lithographer. In the early 1860s, he created and printed a simple lithographed game called "The Checkered Game of Life." Its modern version was published a century later. Bradley continued to produce labels, posters, and book illustrations but also became one of America's biggest manufacturers of board games by the 1870s and helped to launch that American industry.

In just 40 years—starting with its American introduction in the 1820s—lithography grew from an imported craft to a national industry. Printing firms from coast to coast boomed with activity for the rest of the 19th century as America flexed its industrial power to supply a new consumer society. And although stone lithography gradually faded from commercial use after



1900, as photographic techniques replaced skilled hand work and metal printing plates supplanted stone, the techniques of lithography live on. Lithography employing metal or rubber plates is used for almost all high-volume commercial printing, and stone lithography persists as a preferred technique in fine-art-print studios across the country.

Parlor Queen cigar box label, lithographed by the New York Label Publishing Co. (New York), ca. 1878.



Advertising poster for Hall's Hair Renewer, unidentified lithographer, ca. 1885.



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JAY T. LAST

"We live today in a sea of color images—printed and electronic—and we find it hard to imagine a time when reproductions in color were a prized commodity," writes lithography collector Jay T. Last in his award-winning book *The Color Explosion: Nineteenth-Century American Lithography* (Hillcrest Press, 2005). Last's exhaustive volume, documenting the history of hundreds of American lithographic businesses, is testimony to his passion for and knowledge of lithography's impact on American consumer culture. His collection, which includes 2,500 books with lithographic illustrations, is a gift in progress to The Huntington. The enormous scope of the material—complemented by The Huntington's holdings in European and American printmaking, book illustration, and design; photography (particularly of California and the West); and cartography—makes the Library an important center for scholarship in the field of graphic arts.

Last received a doctorate in physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and was one of the founders of Fairchild Semiconductor Corporation. Along with lithography, he has studied and collected African art, is active in preserving American archaeological sites, and has an interest in California watercolor art.

Right: Product label for Rancho Chico Muscatel Raisins, lithographed by A. L. Bancroft & Co. (San Francisco), 1880.



FAMILY GALLERY ACTIVITY

THE FUN IS IN THE DETAILS

While art can be about the big picture, sometimes the fun is in the details. Using the images and clues below, try to find all six original artworks in the exhibition sections noted by the white headers below. You just might discover a few surprises along the way!



NEW PERSPECTIVES

This detail is from a bird's-eye view of a former Dutch trading post. Hint: It's the apple of America's eye.



DESIGNED TO SELL

Milton Bradley, one of the great makers of games and puzzles in the world, printed an advertising poster for these "free wheelers." Hint: You probably had one as a kid.



PORTABLE PROMOTIONS

Do you want to trade your San Jose Sharks for my Anaheim Ducks? This is a trade card from under the sea that has nothing to do with professional hockey! Find him and discover what he's crooning about.



DESIGNED TO SELL

Dexter Mason Ferry produced and distributed vegetable and flower seeds for more than 40 years. Can you guess what simple little invention sealed his success by allowing easy shipment and display of his merchandise?



DESIGNED TO SELL

The California and Oregon Stage Company promoted its delivery service with scenic images of established routes. After you find this image, can you name the majestic mountain in the background?



LEARNING TO PLAY

Typically, football (rugby) is a contact sport played outdoors. Locate this image and solve the riddle, "How do you play this 'sport' in your living room?"