

# A MEANS OF ESCAPE

## EUROPEAN POSTERS FROM 1889 TO 1930

Like advertisements today, posters from the turn of the twentieth century often promised far more than the pictured products. They offered ways to leave the hardship of everyday life behind and enter a world of fun, fantasy, and hedonism. This exhibition examines escapism in large-scale advertisements by focusing on three forms of diversion: fast transportation, dazzling entertainment, and reckless drinking.

While they demonstrate the pleasure that escape could bring, these posters remain silent about the anxieties that made getting away seem so appealing. Between 1889 and 1930, France experienced a great deal of political turmoil, the wrenching Dreyfus Affair and a World War. Additionally, the public was trying to adjust to an onslaught of new technologies. Like today's Internet, these inventions altered

social relationships by changing the way people communicated, thought, worked, and entertained themselves. Posters were often employed to put a positive spin on new devices, especially during Paris' Universal Exposition of 1889.

The new color lithography process that made it possible to create large posters inspired many artists to experiment with the medium. Their eagerness—along with an 1881 French law that relaxed advertising regulations—brought an explosion of posters to the streets and to new audiences. Posters were celebrated as a way to democratize art and make it accessible to people who might never go to a museum. The working-class public could not afford to purchase the sorts of pleasures these posters advertised, but by pausing to look at their vibrant imagery, viewers experienced a means of escape, if only for a moment.