

Russian Film Poster

Introduction

The Russian film posters are like other film posters that have been used since the earliest public exhibitions of film. They began as outside placards listing the program of (short) films to be shown inside the hall or movie theater.

It all features illustrations of a film scene or an array of overlaid images from several scenes. Other posters have used artistic interpretations of a scene or even the theme of the film, represented in a wide variety of artistic styles. These styles vary in eras, from the Russian avant-garde in the 1920s to the social realistic propaganda posters in Stalin Era, then to the photomontages appeared in the later decades until now.

Before the Revolution (Early Era)

In 1908, Aleksandr Drankov's *Sten'ka Razin* was released and recognized as the first Russian narrative film. Paul K. Assaturov, a cartoon and drawing author in satirical journals of the first Russian revolution, designed the poster of this film in the style of "ancient naive Russian imagery", a traditional Russian pictorial broadsheet known as lubok, which is a print style in existence since the late 17th century that is often seen as the precursor to the modern comic strip.

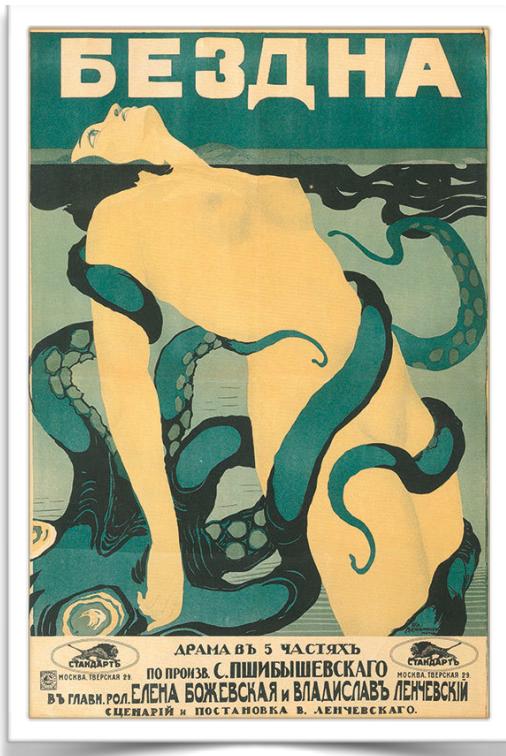
Ever since then, filmmaking in Russia has shown an exponential growth as primarily an urban phenomenon from 19 films being made in 1909 to 499 films being made in 1916.

Influenced by Art Nouveau, posters designed for films before the revolution inherited the unique artistic style



Aleksandr Drankov's *Sten'ka Razin*, 1908 (poster by Paul K. Assaturov)

with undulating asymmetrical lines in forms of delicate and sinuous natural objects, elegant and graceful. Artists such as Mikhail Kalmanson and Georgi Alexeev really stood out for the rendering of femininity in a decadent, risqué and objectifying way, which would be unthinkable in the year following the 1917 revolution. [1]



Wladyslaw Lenczewski's 'The Abyss', 1917 (poster by Mikhail Kalmanson)



Vyacheslav Viskovsky's 'Being Married by the Satan', 1917 (poster by Georgi Alexeev)

Golden Era

The 1917 Revolution changed life in Russia politically, socially and artistically. Art became regarded as an important force in shaping the future of the new State. It was a time of artistic experimentation, a kind of spontaneous combustion caused by the charged atmosphere and the radical changes in art and life. [2]

The Russian avant-garde film poster artists experimented with the same innovative cinematic techniques used in films they were advertising, such as extreme close-ups, unusual angles and dramatic proportions. They montaged disparate elements, such as adding photography to lithography, and juxtaposed the action from one scene with a



Dziga Vertov's Kino Glaz, 1924 (poster by Alexander Rodchenko)

able to transcend the individual stylistic confines of any of the particular established arts to create posters that represent a unique amalgamation of all the arts. [3]



Fridrikh Ermler's Fragment of an Empire, 1929 (poster by Anonymous)

character from another. They colored human faces with vivid colors, elongated and distorted body shapes, gave animal body to humans and turned film credits into an integral part of the design. There were no rules, except to follow one's imagination.

Many of the artists of the time applied their skills to the production of film advertisements and posters. The Stenberg brothers, among the most prolific of these artists, began their careers in Constructivism sculptures and film poster designs in the early 1920s and Alexander Rodchenko practiced photography and architecture as well as graphic design. This group of designers was



Dziga Vertov's Man with a Movie Camera, 1929 (poster by the Stenberg brothers)

Stalin Era

At the end of the 1920s, with the resignation of Lunacharsky, the end of the silent film and the advent of the First Five Year Plan, the 'golden era' of experimentation came to an end. [4]



Mikhail Romm's *Lenin in 1918*, 1939 (poster by Anatoly Belsky)

With Vladimir Lenin's quotation "That of all the arts the most important for us is the cinema", Stalin imposed a new style, Socialist Realism, as the only state-sanctioned for the arts. Cinema became a functional propaganda tool to the Bolsheviks' political advantage and the education for the masses. It was organized to ensure that it reflects the official view and spreads the Communist ideology. [5]

Using the language of socialist realism, film posters had to convey the ideological messages of the ruling party as censorship squeezed the film industry and production and variety rapidly reduced. There was also a focus on patriotic, nationalistic themes. [6]

Two major genres dominate the Stalin Era: historical biography and musical comedy. For the first genre, Lenin became the protagonist, appearing in films such as *Lenin in 1918*, *Lenin in October*, and *Three Songs About Lenin* along with other Bolshevik revolutionary heroes such as Chapaev. Those who stand for Soviet values become the center of the film posters. And "feeling of utopia" was generated in the form of musical comedy after the sound cinema arrived. In Grigorii Aleksandrov's *Circus*, the "escapist" style in Hollywood musical



The Vasil'ev Brothers' *Chapaev*, 1934 (poster by Anatoly Belsky)

was imitated, and it also provides the audiences with joyful laughter with dancing and singing.

Film posters continued with the previous constructivist style from the Russian Avant-Garde but the content has been shifted to heroes and role models. In general, they are enlightenment for the masses with full propaganda functions, creating the collective utopia fantasy.

The Thaw

It was only in the late 1950s and 1960s that there was a return to creative freedom in cinema and art. After Stalin's death in March 1953, Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin in "The Secret Speech" at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party.



Mikhail Kalatozov's The Cranes Are Flying, 1957 (poster by Boris Zelensky)



Yuli Raizman's The Communist, 1958 (poster by Boris Zelensky)

Stylistically and ideologically, two historical events were at the center of most politically significant films of the era: The October Revolution and the Great Patriotic War. [7] Yet the most successful films of the time follow the melodrama structure. Melodrama provided an opportunity for Thaw-era filmmakers to reclaim individual identity caught in the whirlwind of historical forces. [8]

During the Khrushchev Thaw, artists could once again experiment relatively freely with composition, metaphorical content and symbolism. [6]

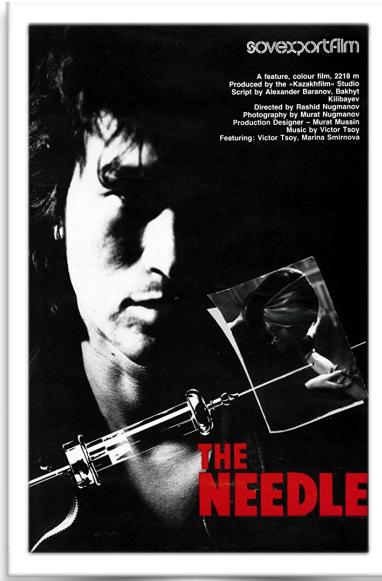
The Stagnation

The Era of Stagnation (also called the Brezhnevian Stagnation) was a period of negative economic, political, and social effects in the Soviet Union which began hopefully but devolved into disillusionment.

Soviet cinema of the Brezhnev era strove to assist the construction of new socialist and Soviet identities while establishing a space for collective amusement. Though popular Western narratives of Soviet life tended to emphasize state hegemony, political centralization, and repression, the films mentioned in this article shed light on lesser known aspects of Soviet life. They explore how citizens of the Brezhnev era attempted to reconcile the complex relationship of a highly centralized political and cultural system with their ordinary ways of life. In this way, Soviet cinema under Brezhnev provided a refreshing depiction of the normality of life during the 1970s, albeit within the framework of a communist state seeking to consolidate its power. [9]



Rolan Bykov's The Scarecrow, 1984 (poster by unknown artist)



Rashid Nugmanov's *The Neddle*, 1988 (poster by unknown artist)

Posters chart the rapid changes afoot in Russian society and the ways in which artists responded to artistic and technological advancements. Films such as *The Scarecrow* and *The Needle* had posters that played with photography, experimenting with the new possibilities offered by developments in photo montage. The posters remain fresh and relevant. Bold, colorful designs, distorted geometric forms and eye-catching typography unite to create compelling works of art in their own right.

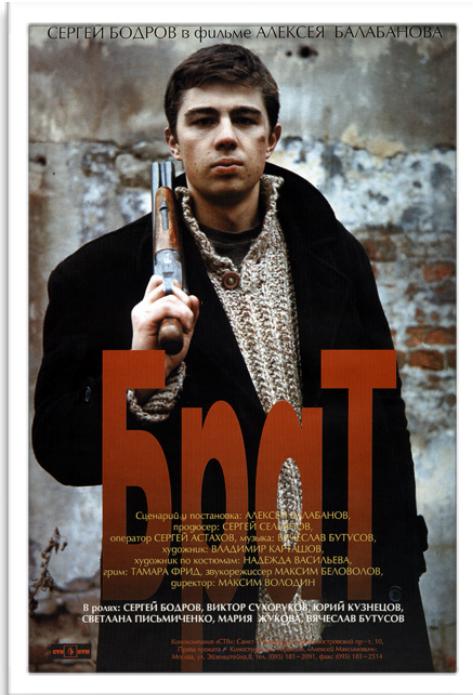
[6]

Post-Soviet

At the beginning of the 1990s, economic decline and the government's inability even to feed the population exacerbated an existing political crisis that resulted finally in the breakup of the Soviet Union. [10] The dissolution of the Soviet Union occurred on December 26, 1991, and it was reflected in the films and film posters.

By the early 1990s, cinema has become a barometer of the country's problem, offering a steady and shocking diet of societal dysfunction: violence, rape, drugs, prostitution and all manner of other crimes. Later in the mid-1990s, films began a search for a new, post-empire Russian identity and a new definition of Russian space. Towards the beginning of what Russians call the "zero years" (the 2000s), films began to screen the actual social turmoil of the 1990s in a very realistic manner. [10]

The traditional Russian style of posters has been diminished similarly to film productions. In the search for a new identity, Russian film posters started to mimic western blockbuster models to attract the mass audiences. And the form of photographs of main characters with credits lost the previous Soviet-era's unique characteristics.



Aleksey Balabanov's Brother, 1997
(poster by unknown artist)

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Further Reading

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