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| **Games, Abram (1914-1996)** |
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| Abram Games belonged to the golden age of British graphic design and as a freelance commercial artist he produced posters for clients including Shell, London Transport, BEA, Guinness, the Royal Shakespeare Company, London Zoo, the Metropolitan Police, *The Times* and *The Financial Times*. His career spanned six decades and saw commercial art develop into the discipline of graphic design. His career is a collection of work done by a man of tireless invention and is a major contribution to British modernism. The force of his design came partly from the Bauhaus with its geometric directness, but Games also learned from a completely different strand of modern art, surrealism, when he fused different objects. Games secured his reputation through a series of stunning wartime propaganda posters for the War Office, of which, *Join the ATS* (1941) and *Your Talk May Kill Your Comrades* (1942) are the most famous. |
| Abram Games belonged to the golden age of British graphic design and as a freelance commercial artist he produced posters for clients including Shell, London Transport, BEA, Guinness, the Royal Shakespeare Company, London Zoo, the Metropolitan Police, *The Times* and *The Financial Times*.  File: AbramGames\_with\_poster.jpg  Figure 1. Abram Games with his controversial ATS poster  Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/aug/23/abram-games-poster-graphic-design-principles>  His career spanned six decades and saw commercial art develop into the discipline of graphic design. His career is a collection of work done by a man of tireless invention and is a major contribution to British modernism. The force of his design came partly from the Bauhaus with its geometric directness, but Games also learned from a completely different strand of modern art, surrealism, when he fused different objects. Games secured his reputation through a series of stunning wartime propaganda posters for the War Office, of which, *Join the ATS* (1941) and *Your Talk May Kill Your Comrades* (1942) are the most famous. His work for the War Office and post-war commissions for London Transport, the Festival of Britain, Guinness and the United Nations reveal his uncanny knack for blending a British wit and sensibility with the adventure of the avant-garde and surrealism.  Abram Games was born in Whitechapel in the East End of London in 1914, the first day of World War One. He was the son of Joseph Games, a Latvian photographer, and Sarah, a seamstress born on the border of Russia and Poland. He was educated locally, but when he left Hackney Downs School at the age of 16 in 1930, his headmaster refused to support his application for a scholarship to St Martins School of Art, London. He nevertheless gained entry to the school, but became disillusioned by the teaching and, worried about the expense of studying there, left after two terms and worked for his father as a photographer’s assistant. In 1932, Games was hired as a studio boy at Askew-Young, a commercial art studio, but was fired after a prank. He then embarked on a career as a freelance commercial artist and won poster commissions for London Transport, Shell and the Post Office. While working for Shell, Games befriended its design director Jack Beddington and gained his support to become an Official War Artist in 1942. During the war, Games designed more than one hundred posters in which he experimented with unusual juxtapositions of illustration and typography. His Jewish heritage strengthened his resolve to support the war effort against Nazism.  Sometimes Games’ work was deemed too provocative, notably *Join the ATS* (1941) [Fig. 2], a recruitment poster for the Auxiliary Territorial Service (the women's branch of the British Army). Also known as the *Blonde Bombshell*, its portrayal of an ATS girl was criticized by the House of Commons for being too glamorous. It had implications of potential sexual freedom within a more mobile female wartime population and thus was withdrawn from circulation. Games produced another famous wartime poster, *Your Talk May Kill Your Comrades* (1942) [Fig. 3], for the Careless Talk campaign. In it, a spiral form radiates from a soldier’s mouth and turns into a blood-red bayonet spearing three soldiers in a brutal metaphor for the danger of careless talk. In the drab visual culture of wartime Britain, Games’ work was bold, vigorous and often gently humorous, with a flair for devising inventive combinations of text and image.  Games’ *Air Mail* poster (1935)[Fig. 4] incorporates the main elements of his design philosophy; a perceptive combination of image and text that communicates a concept with *‘*maximum meaning' using 'minimum means’. The letters ‘A’ and ‘M’ are wittily incorporated within the structure of the envelope. The shadow suggests a bird’s wing, which echoes the winged logo on the Air Mail sticker. The design is also tilted to convey flight. Thus the concept is conveyed by a sophisticated fusion of image and type and is free from any unnecessary decoration.  Having made his name as a leading poster artist during the war, Games sought to revive his freelance career post-war and married German émigré Marianne Salfeld in 1945. He secured several important projects in 1948, notably the commemorative stamps for the Olympic Games, which earned him the nickname ‘Olympic Games’ and the competition to create the symbol of the Festival of Britain (1951) [Fig. 5], a public event on London’s South Bank and at other points across the country that symbolized Britain’s emergence from wartime and its progress in the technological revolution. This became one of the most popular images of post-war Britain and firmly established his reputation. In the poster, the palette of red, white and blue communicates the festival’s combination of patriotism and modernity. However, the image was initially not considered festive enough, and Games livened it up by stringing a washing line of tricolour pennants from east to west. The symbol was designed to work in several sizes, allowing it to be reproduced on postage stamps, posters and buildings.  Games was also a keen inventor and taught himself how to mould and cast metal. His inventions include an elegantly rounded Cona Coffee Machine, which is still in production today, a circular vacuum cleaner and a portable hand-held duplicating machine. In 1953 he designed an animated symbol for the BBC which became one of the first on-screen identities for a television channel. Nicknamed the 'Bat's wings' logo, it was achieved by filming an elaborate mechanical contraption with a spinning globe at the centre.  Abram Games’ reputation as a graphic designer was based on his ability to weave together layers of ideas with a great economy of means. He realized that if one combined several images in one iconic design, the result involved the spectator in a visual game to unravel the layers of meaning within. Games remained productive even in the age of television and colour supplements. When he died in 1996, illustrator David Gentleman wrote, ‘All Abram Games’ designs were recognisably his own. They had vigour, imagination, passion and individuality. And he was lucky and clever in contriving, over a long and creative working life, to keep on doing what he did best’.  File: AbramGames\_ATSPoster.jpg  Figure 2. Abram Games, Join the ATS (1941)  Source: <http://media.iwm.org.uk/iwm/mediaLib/176/media-176427/large.jpg>  File: AbramGames\_YourTalkMayKillYourComrades.jpg  Figure 3. Abram Games, Your talk may kill your comrades (1942)  Source: <https://farm8.staticflickr.com/7548/15864131379\_71547c31f3\_b.jpg>  File: AbramGames\_AirMail.jpg  Figure 4. Abram Games, Air Mail (1935)  Source: <http://www.artyfactory.com/art\_appreciation/graphic\_designers/abram\_games/air\_mail.jpg>  File: AbramGames\_FestivalofBritain.jpg  Figure 6. Abram Games, Festival of Britain (1951)  Source:  <https://static-secure.guim.co.uk/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/pictures/2014/8/21/1408621053727/a730ba69-308d-4d96-b27b-1bc55d983d33-1498x2040.jpeg> |
| Further reading:  (Games and Webb, Abram Games: Design)  (Moriarty, Rose and Games)  (Gombrich)  (Games, Abram Games: His Life and Work)  (Games, Poster Journeys: Abram Games and London Transport) |