

Saturday, September 26, 11:00am - 1:00pm

MICA / Brown Center, Room 320

1301 Mt Royal Ave / Baltimore

SHAG and AIGA/Baltimore present

Ballyhoo! Posters as Portraiture

Wendy Wick Reaves, Curator of Prints and Drawings,
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution



What could be less subtle than the pictorial poster, blaring out its message with large scale, loud colors, and bold graphics? Yet as print historian A. Hyatt Mayor pointed out, posters competing in a busy visual environment are “pictures meant to be seen by people who did not mean to see them.” Viewers may absorb the persuasive message on an inattentive or even subconscious level. We are used to decoding the poster as advertising or propaganda. But what if we consider the poster as a form of popular portraiture? How does the presence of a recognizable figure operate on our consciousness?

By interweaving the themes of poster art, celebrity promotion, and advertising, Wendy Wick Reaves suggests how a famous face can enhance the message of the poster, and how posters have defined and disseminated images of prominent Americans. Furthermore, posters provide an instructive glimpse of an era’s prevailing ideals, prejudices, and presumptions. Widely disseminated forms of popular portraiture remain a profound influence in our culture.