PAPER SKYSCRAPER:
THE REPRESENTATION OF “TALL BUILDINGS” IN
AUSTRIAN AND GERMAN COMMERCIAL
ART, 1920–1940

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Between 1924 and 1929, Aby Warburg assembled a vast compendium of visual material, fusing philosophical investigation with an historical approach to images. Diverse materials were attached to wooden boards covered with black cloth—photographs, reproductions from books, newspapers clips, and scenes from daily life—arranged in such a way that they would illustrate multiple thematic areas, showing lines of continuity from antiquity. In Warburg’s Mnemosyne-Atlas, as he called it, one can even find examples from graphic designers. Yet Warburg’s massive work does not contain an image of the original form of the high-rise building, the Tower of Babel, an iconic topos from ancient times which evolved into the skyscrapers of the early twentieth century. This essay is intended as a small extension of Warburg’s project, as well as a tribute to it. The article is comprised of a short introduction followed by a catalogue. The twenty catalogue entries feature thirty-two posters, most of which come from the Austrian National Library in Vienna. The catalogue also includes posters from other collections, as well as illustrations from important graphic design journals of the 1920s and 1930s. The posters are vivid examples of the dialogue between different media and the pervasiveness of aesthetic ideas, for they demonstrate how applied artists appropriated and commented upon vital avant-garde architectural forms, namely the high-rise and the skyscraper.

The links between the American “skyscraper” and Austrian and German graphic design are obvious. The “tower-like monsters that owe their existence to the rampant quest for power of predatory entrepreneurs,” as Siegfried Kracauer put it, also rose from the desks of graphic designers who were swept away by the general skyscraper euphoria. Kracauer, trained as an architect with a doctorate in engineering, was well-equipped to engage with the modern world of building and economic power when he began work as the Frankfurter Zeitung’s leading film and literature editor in 1922. Indeed, Kracauer dedicated one of his first articles for the Frankfurter Zeitung to the clothes manufacturer Fritz Vogel’s high-rise in Frankfurt, a project not well-known today. Kracauer proved himself to be one of the most avid observers of metropolitan surface phenomena. He took note of graphic works in public space and reflected...
upon them in his articles. “The body strikes roots in concrete,” was Kra-
cauer’s response to a particularly well-executed advertisement that
claimed the attention of the passer-by.

Another important figure who was attuned to links between sky-
scrapers and advertisements was Richard Huelsenbeck, one of the central
figures in DADA, whose poem “The Song of the Posters” conjured up
their marriage:

When, tired from the night’s uneasy slumber,
We hurry through gray tunnels of the street,
And hear the city’s noises without number,
Great, startling pictures stay our rushing feet.

The cry of posters from the concrete walls
Proclaims a fairyland that we have lost,
Wild forests rise before us tempest-tossed,
And from Skyscrapers tumble waterfalls.²

Huelsenbeck’s vivid evocation of the power of posters alerts us to the role
of graphic design in the 1920s and its desire to promote a lifestyle, thus
both appropriating and shaping the visual trends of the time.

It is important to remind ourselves that, in the 1920s, the production
process in the advertising sector was not marked by the division of labor
to the degree it is today. In those days, a graphic artist was often solely
responsible for the end result, including the proportioning of picture and
text. Advertising was only just on the verge of becoming a scholarly
discipline—a process that eventually led the Viennese Hochschule für
Welthandel to call the subject “Werbewissenschaften”—and only very
large companies had their own advertising departments.

As an introduction to the following catalogue entries, I would like to
propose five theses to characterize the representation of high-rise build-
ings in functional graphics:

1. Parallel to the discussions about high-rise buildings which ensued
around 1920, skyscrapers appeared as motifs on posters, newspa-
per and magazine advertisements, magazine covers, book blurbs,
etc., all of which belong to the category of functional graphics. The
main medium for these “low-culture” products was the poster,
which found its way into public space and thus to made an im-
portant contribution to every-day aesthetics.

2. On posters, the skyscraper functioned as an icon that signified
prestige, modernity, and urbanity. In the European context, it con-
ferred upon the advertised products and services a touch of
“America.” The posters promised the purchasers the opportunity
to become one with a metropolis, even if they lived in a medium-
sized town with a maximum construction height of twenty-five meters rather than in Vienna or Berlin.

3. The representations of high-rise buildings in applied graphics are mostly positive. In times of economic crisis, they served as symbols of modernity, technological progress, and prosperity. It was only on film posters such as Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* that skyscrapers carried the negative connotation of a “Tower of Babel” threatening humanity’s future.

4. Pictures of high-rise buildings were also very popular for illustrating the antagonism between old and new, between a future vision and the status quo.

5. The more rarely high-rise buildings were erected in certain areas, the more they were depicted in graphics—at least in Austria, where in comparison to Germany, few high-rises were actually erected. Many examples of high-rise illustrations are found in Austrian graphics.

It was thus not only architects, but also graphic designers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean who heeded Louis Sullivan’s dictum, “The building must be tall, it must posses the strength and power imparted by height, the glory and pride of elevation. It must be rugged and sublime in its every detail, rising up in the pure exultation of presenting from base to summit a unity free of discordant lines.”

Notes


2 Richard Huelsenbeck, “Das Lied der Plakate,” *Gebrauchsgraphik: International Advertising Art* 1 (1927): 4. The original German version is as follows:

   Wenn wir noch müde von dem kurzen Schlaf der Nacht
   In den Tunnels grauer Straß en eilen
   Und der Lärm beginnt, der eine Stadt entfacht,
   Zwingt der großen Bilder bunte Wildheit zum Verweilen
   Der Plakate Schrei aus den Zementverließen
   Kündet uns ein Märchenland, das uns entschwand,
   Wasserfälle rollen aus der Wolkenkratzerwand,
   Nebelwälder wallen auf vor unsren Füß en.

The Austrian reception of high-rise buildings starts with an 1892 magazine article by Fritz von Emperger, the leading Austrian specialist in reinforced concrete buildings, entitled “Chicago’s Tall Buildings.” The following year (1893), after having completed his studies in Dresden, Adolf Loos (1870–1933) traveled to the United States to visit the Chicago World’s Fair. The week he spent there as a twenty-three-year-old student proved crucial for his future development as an architect, and he remained in the country until 1896.

In 1909–11, Loos erected his main opus, the six-story building on Michaelerplatz—formerly the tailoring firm Goldmann & Salatsch—directly opposite the Hofburg (Figure 1). Although Loos hid the reinforced concrete skeleton beneath an unadorned plaster façade, many protested against a building on such an important historic site. The poster depicted here testifies to the controversy, quoting a Vienna newspaper’s view that it was “a horror of a building.”

Note

Figure 1
Cat. 2

2a Julius Klinger: Tabu
Façade painting, Vienna, about 1919
From Anita Kühlne, Julius Klinger, Plakatkünstler und Zeichner (Berlin, 1997)

2b Julius Klinger: Tabu
Poster, Vienna 1919
126 x 95 cm
Kunstbibliothek Berlin

The First World War left a vast void in the Michaelerplatz. Following American examples, firewalls were built and covered with gigantic ads. One company that believed in good advertising was Tabu, a producer of cigarette paper. After the war, they commissioned a renowned Viennese graphic designer for their advertising campaign, Julius Klinger (1876–1942). A student of the Secessionist Kolo Moser and co-founder of the “Deutschen Sachplakat,” Klinger had been a designer for the women’s magazine Wiener Mode since 1895 and, later, an illustrator for the Meggendorfer Blätter. He moved to Munich in 1896, and then to Berlin in 1897. In Berlin, Klinger remained active in the field of applied graphics until 1915. Together with the printing firm Hollerbaum und Schmidt, he developed a new kind of functional poster production which brought him international recognition. After the First World War he opened a studio for applied graphics, where he also gave courses. Like Adolf Loos, Klinger rejected the idea of ornament for its own sake. He regarded the Loos-Haus house on Michaelerplatz as modern Vienna’s best. In 1919, the two met for the first time. Tabu also commissioned him to design an ad spanning the entire side of the Loos-Haus where it adjoined the Liechtenstein Palais, which was demolished in 1913. Acting as a sort of imaginary architect, Klinger solved the problem in an unconventional way. He designed a steel skeleton like that of an American skyscraper and attached the letters T-A-B-U to it, in irregular order (Figure 2a).

In a way, the tall building of Klinger’s firewall advertisement was completed on a poster (Figure 2b), also from 1919, which shows a skyscraper rising from medieval Vienna. As the architecture critic Ada Louis Huxtable put it, its style is functional rather than an eclectic, anticipating by decades the revolutionary poverty of International Style high-rises.
such as the Seagram Building by Mies van der Rohe. The contrast in urban design could not be more marked. In a period of postwar economic crisis, the elegant simplicity of the future-oriented skyscraper and airplane is a sharp counterpoint to the great variety of detail found in the narrow town and the images of nature, represented by the trees and birds.

Julius Klinger, who later fell victim to the Nazis, greatly admired American culture. His designs were highly praised by art critics. With a bit of understatement, Klinger wrote of his role as a commercial artist, “Advertising calls for experienced experts and craftsmen, the ‘artists’ with their ideals have no say in this matter.”¹ He thus contradicted the view of art held by groups like the Wiener Werkstätte or the German Werkbund, who sought to erase the barriers between free and applied art.

However, Hans Ankwicz-Kleehoven, then curator of the Vienna Museum of Art and Industry, claimed that Klinger thereby linked the opposing principles of art and commerce: “Julius Klinger could be called the Peter Behrens of poster art. Preferring to cater to the demands of industry, he possesses an imagination with a strong technical leaning, mixed with a healthy portion of Americanism that avoids all sentimentalism and pettiness and instead aims for simplicity and greatness, and always with a sound sense of effect.”²

Notes

Figure 2a
In 1923, Klinger expressed his great love for America with a book meant for the American market and therefore written in painstaking English. It claimed Chicago as its fictitious place of publication, but it was unmistakably printed in Vienna. *Poster Art in Vienna*, as it was titled, was an assortment of examples of Klinger’s modern, sober, and cool posters, as well as works by his students. The introductory text describes Klinger in the following way:

> America is the land of his heart’s desire. But for him America is but a theoretical conception for he has never had the good luck to see it for himself and experience its life. It may be that just for this reason his longings are the more intense. America as he conceives it means spacious style, World Power and an eye for the future. . . . his Americanized ideas in weary, stale Europe are finding more and more supporters.¹

Numerous designs in *Poster Art in Vienna* depict skyscrapers. An example is the poster designed by one of Klinger’s students, Violette Engelberg (dates unknown), for an exhibition of architectural models (Figure 3). Set in a dynamic diagonal, it shows a small detached house opposite a high-rise building which is far too large, and thus extends beyond the narrow confines of the poster.

**Note**

¹ Julius Klinger, *Poster Art in Vienna* (Vienna, 1923).
Figure 3
Another important student of Klinger’s, Wilhelm Willrab (1897–1973), who went to Berlin in the late 1920s, provides two more examples. The first is a poster for the Viennese carpet store Repper. It is in the best Klinger tradition: economy, simplicity, a white background (Figure 4a). It shows a high-rise resting on a solid base, covered with a carpet to depict the letter “R.” Only the saddleback roof makes some concessions to Viennese views. The second poster represents office furniture made by the American company Cyklop that resembles skyscrapers (Figure 4b). Perhaps Mies van der Rohe knew this illustration when, in 1923, he noted cryptically in the manuscript of an article, “cabinets that look like models of skyscrapers.”

Note

Figure 4a
Figure 4b
Real skyscraper models could be built with the aid of the Ingenius construction kit (Figure 5), produced in Vienna in 1924 from designs by Wilhelm Kreis (1873–1955), who had built the Marx high-rise in Cologne, and Karl August Jüngst, one of his co-workers. This kit, “The New City,” was based on the tongue-and-groove assembly system. Its container cover was designed by Wilhelm Willrab, depicting a high-rise model that could actually be built with the largest kit, which contained 3,000 parts. The instructions promised skyscrapers of up to three meters and even recommended emulating some of Wilhelm Kreis’s real projects, such as the Marx skyscraper in Cologne. The instructions for the Ingenius construction kit proclaim,

“The splendid sight there before me seemed like something from the new world, from one of the most modern parts of the New York skyscraper district. One nearly hears New York’s hectic life incorporated here and sees palpably what until now could only be conveyed by pictures. It is like the realization of a dream and makes you almost think you live in that country of unlimited possibilities. NEW CITY may, in fact, be called the toy for the modern child.”
It was Willrab, now living in Berlin, who created a cover for the January 1933 edition of the magazine *Reklame* (Figure 6a) that looked like an updated version of the TABU poster designed by his teacher, Julius Klinger (see Cat. 2). It also depicted the juxtaposition of old and new, with the old town in the foreground and the new, modern, technical city rising in the background. In the center, an unadorned skyscraper is circled by airplanes. The speed with which the Nazis did away with modernity can be observed in the March 1933 edition of Reklame (Figure 6b). They replaced the modern architecture-inspired Futura font with antiquated Gothic letters.
Figure 6a
Another of Klinger’s pupils, Hermann Kosel (1896–1983), found a similar solution in 1924, when he designed a poster to promote the book *Wien—einst und jetzt* (Vienna, Then and Now) (Figure 7b). He also utilized the dichotomy “old” versus “new.” In the center of Vienna, a number of skyscrapers loom over the 140-meter-high Gothic spire of St. Stephen’s Cathedral and houses that look as if they were built from a model construction kit. A variation of this poster was created in 1927 for the exhibition “Vienna and the Viennese” in cooperation with Erwin Gibson.
(1891–1972), who was also Kosel’s studio partner (Figure 7a). As the exhibit’s sub-title “Old and New Vienna” suggests, Biedermeier Vienna with its still-intact city wall is confronted with a modern Vienna of smoking chimneys and high-rises.
In December 1928, Julius Klinger was invited by General Motors and thus finally got his chance to travel to America. However, the Promised Land disillusioned him. America’s rationalized advertising industry, where power shifted away from free-lance commercial artists to PR managers and promotion departments did not fit with Klinger’s ideal of how an autonomous graphic designer should work. After returning to Vienna, he gave a talk about his experience, entitled “Pseudo-Americanism,” a warning against the introduction of the American system in Europe. At the same time, Klinger took part in the international poster competition connected with the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair. This time, for the city of skyscrapers, he did without the skyscraper motif. Instead, he used an American flag—which he had previously referred to as the best poster ever—filling the profile of a Hermes head that reminds one of Oskar Schlemmer (Figure 8). Klinger did not receive a prize.

Note

1 Anita Kühnel, Julius Klinger. Plakatkünstler und Zeichner (Berlin, 1997), 17.
Another Austrian participated in the poster competition for the 1933 World’s Fair, Joseph Binder (1898–1972). The leading Austrian poster artist of the interwar period, Binder studied lithography from 1912 to 1916, and then worked for a short time for Julius Klinger. From 1922–26, he worked for Bertold Löffler and studied at the Vienna Kunstgewerbeschule. Binder wanted to retain the skyscraper motif, but only in a stylized version and on a secondary iconographic level (Figure 9a). In 1928, he created a constructivist composition for the Social Democratic Party, an abstract image of a skyscraper in red, blue, and black (Figure 9b). Binder, a master of stylization, rejected the inclusion of photo montage in poster art: “Stylized representation possesses formal and suggestive qualities that can never be achieved by a camera.”¹ True to this credo, Binder’s designs transformed products into gigantic high-rise buildings which fill the foreground, grow into the sky, and rise above everything else. One of many such examples is Binder’s poster for the detergent Persil, which uses this design technique to symbolize Persil’s superior quality (Figure 9c). The professional journals praised Binder’s posters:

... all his work is keenly thought out, both artistically and graphically speaking, it is reduced to the most concentrated form, and incomparable in its effect. He is a born poster artist. He always succeeds in reducing every task to such a short formula that the foremost law of all poster art, optical simplicity and quick comprehensibility, is achieved.²

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¹ Binder’s quote is from his article “The Art of Poster-Making” in *Gebrauchsgraphik* 7 (1930): 57.
Notes


Figure 9a
Figure 9b
10a Joseph Binder: Fortune
Magazine cover, New York 1937
36 x 28 cm
MAK, Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna

10b Joseph Binder: New York World’s Fair
Poster, New York 1938
From Gebrauchsgraphik 2 (1939): 16
30 x 23 cm
Austrian National Library, Department of Broadsheets, Posters and Ex Libris, Vienna

In the 1930s, Binder—the most important of all Viennese poster artists—left Europe for America, where he was greatly celebrated. Among his great triumphs in the United States was his victory in the poster competition for the 1939 World’s Fair in Flushing Meadows (Figure 10b). The nighttime silhouette of the New York skyline was naturally part of this illustration, but only as a background, like that of a Broadway musical. The center is taken up by the exhibition theme: Trylon and Perisphere, surrounded by lights, airplanes, rail lines, and an ocean cruiser. In his book Delirious New York, Rem Koolhaas regards these forms—globe and needle—as symbols of the end of “Manhattanism.”

Shortly before the creation of this award-winning poster, Binder designed a cover for the December 1937 edition of Fortune magazine that showed a skyscraper shaped like a crystal Christmas tree (Figure 10a). The composition, a bright star against a dark night sky, has an almost sacral and recalls Bruno Taut’s vision of the Stadtkrone (city crown).

Note

Cat. 11

Victor Weixler, Fritz Judtmann: Wiener Internationale Messe
Poster draft, Vienna 1923
125 x 95 cm
Austrian National Library, Department of Broadsheets, Posters
and Ex Libris, Vienna

In 1923, the Viennese architects Viktor Weixler (b.1883) and Fritz Judtmann (1899–1968) designed an Expressionist poster for the Vienna International Fair (Figure 11). Like Binder’s magazine cover for Fortune (see Cat. 10), it was probably inspired by Bruno Taut’s thoughts about the Stadtkrone (city crown). As the Labor party’s architect, Judtmann surely sympathized with Taut’s views on social reform. The central building on the poster consists of the three letters W-I-M; it takes up the entire area of Vienna’s First District, the historical center of the city within the confines of the former city wall. Beyond the gigantic building, Vienna’s concentric structure is visible. The middle part of the edifice consists of an enormous prism glass wall that resembles that of the staircase in Bruno Taut’s own home in Dahlewitz (Brandenburg). Inscribed upon the façade of the advertising pavillion for the glass industry which Taut had designed for the German Werkbund exhibit in Cologne in 1914 was a quote from Paul Scheerbart: “Glass has been brought to us by modern times, brick culture only makes us feel sorry.”¹

Note

Figure 11
Cat. 12

Attributed to Ernst A. Plischke: Zeho
Poster draft, Vienna 1926
Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

The Zeho advertisement was designed shortly after Weixler’s and Judtmann’s Wiener Internationale Messe (see Cat. 11) by another Viennese architect, Ernst A. Plischke (1903–1992). While its purpose is not entirely clear, we do know that this company produced bricks, and the poster includes bricks in profile. In the skyscraper, they serve as balcony balustrades jutting over the edge of the façade. One can easily recognize elements taken from a competition entry designed by Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer for the Chicago Tribune: the top three floors of the building are also furnished with oriel windows and drawn from the same perspective. An architect as open to vanguard trends as Ernst A. Plischke—who had been under the tutelage of Oskar Strnad (1879–1935) and Peter Behrens (1868–1940) in Vienna—was naturally familiar with these competition entries from the professional journals. Only the piece of angle steel attached to the roof sets his design apart from that of Gropius and Meyer.
In contrast to the Austrian examples above, and the lack of actually realized skyscrapers in that country, Germany provides us with a more realistic selection of high-rise posters. The *deutsche Städtewerbung* (German town promotion) often used images of skyscrapers, but not, surprisingly, for Berlin. The German metropolis preferred to advertise its qualities by showing off its well-known sights from the era of Kaiser Wilhelm. Instead, medium-sized towns were the ones seeking to elevate themselves to the level of cosmopolitan cities with the help of posters of high-rises. Towns such as Stuttgart, Düsseldorf, Hamburg, and Dresden thus tried to compete with the capital of the Weimar Republic.

In the context of town promotion, one medium in particular deserves mention.

The *Chicago Tribune* competition marked a moment in time when German daily papers also wanted to assume a new, modern image. They also began to commission architects to design high-rise buildings. The two best-known examples date from 1927–28: the brick high-rise for the *Hannoverscher Anzeiger* designed by Emil Lorenz (dates unknown) and Fritz Höger (1877–1949) and the tower for the Stuttgart *Tagblatt*, the largest liberal-democratic daily in Württemberg, by Otto Ößwald (1880–1960). In the very year of its completion, the *Tagblatt* tower took pride of place in a poster by August Gumbart (1884–before 1955) for the Stuttgarter Lichtschau in 1928, alongside the Schocken department store by Erich Mendelsohn (1887–1953) and the railway station tower by Paul Bonatz (1877–1956). The poster’s dramatic lighting reflects the rise of floodlight during this period; the poster congenially translates the dramatic effect of artificial light into a striking design.
In 1929, a poster competition took place to promote Stuttgart as the up-and-coming metropolis of the German southwest. Naturally, it used the new Tagblatt tower as an eyecatcher (see Cat. 13). The competition was open to German and Austrian artists and advertised by the publisher of the Stuttgarter Neues Tagblatt: “Stuttgart, as the most noteworthy town of modern economic development and eternal natural beauty, should become ever better known both at home and abroad.” The poster was supposed to link the modern town with the surrounding countryside and to include the motto “Stuttgart, the blossoming city.” From the seven hundred entries, the best 100 designs were exhibited on the fourteenth floor of the Tagblatt tower at the beginning of 1930. Many entries represented the rising town with a realistic or stylized illustration of the Tagblatt tower and Paul Bonatz’s monumental railway station tower. The jury awarded two second prizes, one for a design by Helmut Schwarz (1891–1961) “for the combination of Stuttgart’s position in the landscape and its towering world-city architecture” (Figure 14a), which remotely resembles the high-rise concept for Stuttgart created by Richard Döcker (1894–1968) and Hugo Keuerleber (1883–1973) in 1921, and the other for a design by Fritz Peter (dates unknown) who “indicated the architectural features of the town in white contours on a black background” (Figure 14b).
In the last year of the Weimar Republic, the traffic society of Stuttgart printed a poster by Fritz Uhlich (1893–1993) which was supposed to present the town to travellers as a city of new buildings and thus to consolidate its reputation as southern Germany’s most modern metropolis (Figure 14c). Historical Stuttgart is set against the shadows of the past, with the new trend-setting sights looming above: the Schocken department store, the Tagblatt tower, and the railway station tower.

Notes

2 Ibid., 19.
3 Ibid., 20.
Figure 14a
Figure 14b
Figure 14c
Like Stuttgart (see Cat. 14a–c), the Rhenish city of Düsseldorf also embraced the new architectural trends. Posters such as this 1926 draft by Ernst Aufseeser (1880–1940) turned to the new buildings as good publicity for the city, an excellent expression of its cultural and political openness (Figure 15a). Another striking example of this approach is Hanns Herkendell’s advertisement “Düsseldorf, the loveliest modern city on the Rhine,” printed in 1926 (Figure 15b). On the banks of the Rhine, oversized grotesque buildings rise to the sky, their tops forming huge chimneys, with modern buildings in the background: the Stumm high-rise by Paul Bonatz, with its Expressionist brick façade, completed in 1925; the Rheinhalle for the Gesolei exhibition in 1926 by Wilhelm Kreis (1873–1955); and the Wilhelm-Marx-house from 1924, also by Kreis. No more than one church spire is attributed to old Düsseldorf. In contrast to Aufseeser, Herkendell (dates unknown) sketched out his design in full.
Figure 15a
Figure 15b
Cat. 16

Willy Dzubas: Germany
Poster, Hamburg about 1925
73 × 50 cm.
Kunstbibliothek Berlin

In 1925, the Reichszentrale für deutsche Verkehrswerbung decided to commission an advertisement that would use modern architecture. This was unusual, for the office tended to use medieval architecture for its advertising campaigns. The decision can, however, be explained with the campaign’s particular audience, namely United States. Indeed, the poster itself included the address of the German Tourist Information Office on Fifth Avenue. Aiming to symbolize Germany’s modernity by including a high-rise building, the designer, poster-artist Willy Dzubas (1877–1947), chose Hamburg’s Chile House to attract American tourists (Figure 16). Built between 1922 and 1924, the ten-story building by Fritz Höger (1877–1949) represented a striking example of brick expressionism with its south-end resembling a ship bow. In contrast to Höger’s building itself, which was only of a modest height, Dzubas increased its vertical impression by choosing a slightly lower perspective. Despite this turn to modern German architecture, Dzubas ultimately did not wish to exclude Hamburg’s past altogether, and thus added two churches, St. Jakobi and St. Michaelis, to his design. In so doing, he dramatically juxtaposed images of Germany’s tradition with its modernity, uniting them.
Figure 16
In the 1920s, Dresden hosted a series of educational exhibitions on work and everyday life. In 1928, the theme was “The Technical City.” The convincing design by Willy Petzold (1885–1978) won the poster competition (Figure 17). Its motif was current urban development: a double-T steel beam with a coat of red anti-corrosive paint protruding diagonally into the picture, reflecting a promising view of a future city with all the signs of technical progress, including skyscrapers.
Figure 17
Cat. 18

Paul Kirnig: Gerwerbeschau München
Poster draft, Vienna 1927
From Gebrauchsgraphik 11 (1927):24
30 × 23 cm
Austrian National Library, Department of Broadsheets, Posters and Ex Libris, Vienna

It is interesting to compare Willy Petzold’s design for Dresden (Cat. 17) with the solution for a Munich advertisement (Figure 18) delivered by the Viennese painter and graphic artist Paul Kirnig (1891–1955). Like Petzold, Kirnig, who would in 1935 succeed his teacher Bertold Löffler (1874–1960) as professor at the Viennese School of Applied Arts, designed a fictitious skyscraper for the Munich Industrial Exhibition of 1927. Kirnig’s paper skyscraper resembles the American town visions that Hugh Ferriss (1889–1962) layed out in his famous and epoch-making Metropolis of Tomorrow.¹

Note

¹ Hugh Ferriss, Metropolis of Tomorrow (New York, 1929)
While towns such as Stuttgart, Düsseldorf, or Hamburg were able to advertise their own, existing skyscrapers, Vienna had to be content to compete with these visions of modernity only on a symbolic level. In this sense, the Odol poster, designed around 1930 (Figure 19a), represents high-rise buildings through light columns, replacing the materiality of steel-and-glass or brick with an immaterial vision. Covered with a transparent picture of a skyscraper, the poster advertised the mouthwash at tram stops.

Faced with the challenge to create alternative signifiers of “modernity” for companies that could not claim a high-rise building, tower, or skyscraper as their headquarters, designers maximized the visual possibilities of poster design. In 1924, for example, the Hungarian designer Mihály Biró (1886–1948) manipulated typography to suggest a real building (Figure 19b). Biró takes the name of a brand of shoes, colors its letters bright red and enlarges them to the size of skyscrapers. By replacing the image of the skyscraper with the brand name, the poster symbolizes the superior quality of the advertised product.
Figure 19b
Finally, I found like to return to the Loos-Haus, in the heart of Vienna. In 1931–32, the architects Theiss and Jaksch erected their first high-rise next to this building, in exactly the same place where Julius Klinger put up his TABU advertisement in 1919, using a fictitious steel framework. The project was initiated by the conservative government, after several projects sponsored by the social-democratic had failed. The so-called Herrengasse high-rise is a steel structure building about fifty-two meters high, with sixteen floors and 225 apartments. The stepped upper floors are visible only from a distance. The building is crowned with a rooftop café made of glass (Figure 20). Thus, after countless utopian visions by graphic designers, Vienna finally managed to get its own high-rise building, even if it was only a “wannabe” skyscraper.