

PREFACE

This book offers a chronological selection of some of the best posters from the history of cycling, covering the period from the boom years of the late nineteenth century, when track racing was the largest sport in the world, through to the 1970s, when poster artistry was on the decline. Among the artists featured here are some of the masters of poster design – Cassandre, Will H. Bradley, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Fortunato Depero – and the artists of the Polish Poster School of the 1970s, as well as some lesser-known artists. In the broadest sense (and to qualify for inclusion), a poster is an image containing a message, mechanically reproduced on a sheet of paper. An extension of that would be, as is true with most of these: the poster is designed to be applied to a surface, and for public display.

For many reasons, posters such as these are becoming increasingly rare and expensive. First, posters are by nature temporary: many of the earlier examples lasted only a week or so and were often open to the elements. They were also replaced or pasted over regularly and were hard to remove without damage. The rarity of the earlier posters is also due in part to the printing process: the faces of the lithographic stones that were used to create the prints were ground down for reuse, so no further reprints were possible. In some cases only a handful of examples are known to exist, often coming directly from copies held by the printer for archival purposes.

Posters have always been collectable, as mementos, souvenirs and affordable artworks, and are often now produced by fans for collectors, printed in small numbers and without commercial pressures. They connect us with the past, as a reflection of the time in which they were produced and a window into the minds of the marketers and the general public. The days of the poster being used as the primary method of marketing is behind us. The artistry declined as the advertising industry developed and became more sophisticated, with the rise of radio and, in the 1950s and '60s, television pushing the poster further into a supporting role. The public, by now more accustomed to the television image than a painting, were commonly delivered photographic posters instead, which were both faster to produce and a better aligned part of a multifaceted advertising campaign.

The pages in this book are a standard size and so can be taken out and framed, perhaps as the start of a collection. For those who wish to further their interest, at the back of the book I have included a reading list of some of the many great books written on the subject of posters.

THEATRE D'HIW
PALAIS DES ARTS LIBÉRAUX



CYCLES HUMBER



Lith G. BATAILLE, 18, R. de Chabrol, PARIS

Tous à 2^h
les
MACHINES PNEUS DUNLOP
à 2^h
Dimanches

VÉLODROME D'HIVER

PALAIS DES ARTS LIBÉRAUX. MACHINES PNEUS DUNLOP

The Vélodrome d'Hiver (Winter Velodrome), known locally as the Vél d'Hiv, was an indoor velodrome in Paris. In 1895, when this poster was designed, it was situated inside the Palais des Arts Libéraux, which was built for the Paris World's Fair in 1889. The velodrome lived at various sites around Paris but found a permanent home in 1909 close to the Eiffel Tower, thanks to Henri Desgrange, the first organizer of the Tour de France. Misti (Ferdinand Mifliez), the designer of this poster, was a printer employed at Chaix, a printing press in Paris owned by Jules Cheret, the master of the modern poster and perhaps the most famous poster designer of the Belle Époque period (1871–1914).

The 'safety bicycle' (the blueprint for most modern bicycles) seen here, with its practicality and relative low cost, was a turning point in the uptake of cycling, having taken over from the Penny Farthing. Paris was home to some of the big names of French cycling at the time, but this advertisement features the British Humber Cycles and their expansion into the booming French market. Another significant technological improvement seen here was the pneumatic tyre. Women were often the focus of posters at the time, an approach Misti learned from Cheret. In contrast to the typical representation of women, however, here she wears a pair of bloomers, a distinctive garment named after the American social reformer Amelia Bloomer. With their ease of movement, bloomers were a pivotal invention in 'rational dress', altering the public perception of female athleticism forever and becoming standard wear for women bikers of the time. In this sense the poster brings together many of the elements of the bicycle craze of the 1890s: the inventions that precipitated it and, importantly, the social changes it brought about.

LITHOGRAPH. 160 × 120 cm. G. Bataille, 18 rue de Chabrol, Paris.

MISTI. 1895.

Cycles GLADIATOR



18, BOULEVARD
MONTMARTRE

Imp. G. MASSIAS-17. Passage Daudin - PARIS

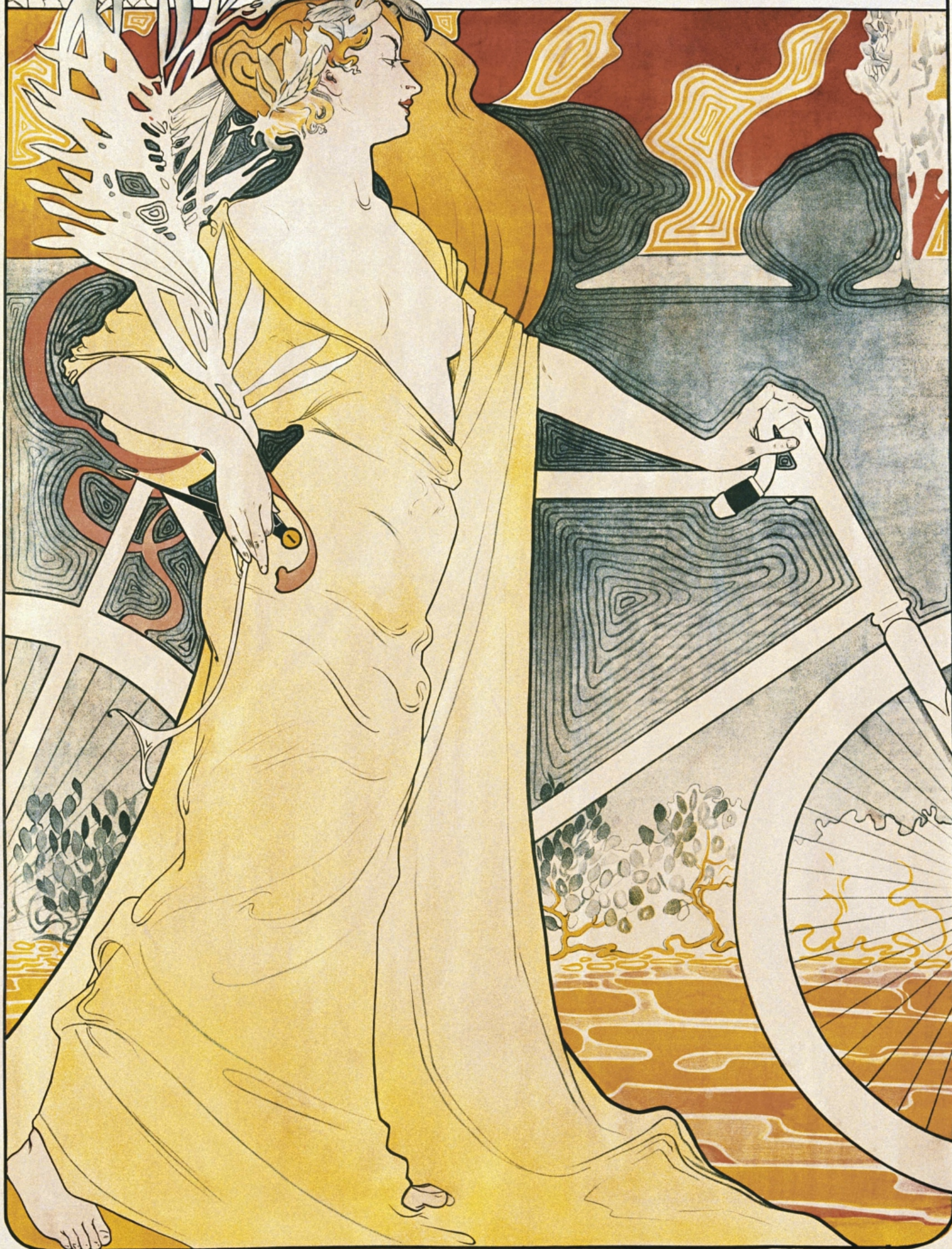
CYCLES GLADIATOR
18, BOULEVARD MONTMARTRE

Cycles Gladiator was a successful company created in 1891 by Jean Aucoc and Alexandre Darracq. They had a large factory in Pré-Saint-Gervais, in northeast Paris. Gladiator had a prolific poster output, commissioning many of the best artists of the day. In 1896, four years after the company's creation, Adolphe Clément of Cycles Clément and Harvey du Cros, director of Dunlop tyres, merged Clément and Gladiator with the French branch of Humber Cycles. Though Clément and Gladiator also continued to create bicycles under their own brands, both would go on to be better known for their cars and posters than for their bicycles. This pared-back design, which speaks of beauty and the freedom a bicycle allows, was created by an unknown artist, signed 'L.W. & C.B.'

LITHOGRAPH. 134 × 96.6 cm. Imprimerie G. Massias, 17 passage Daudin, Paris.

L.W & C.B. 1890s.

element



CLÉMENT

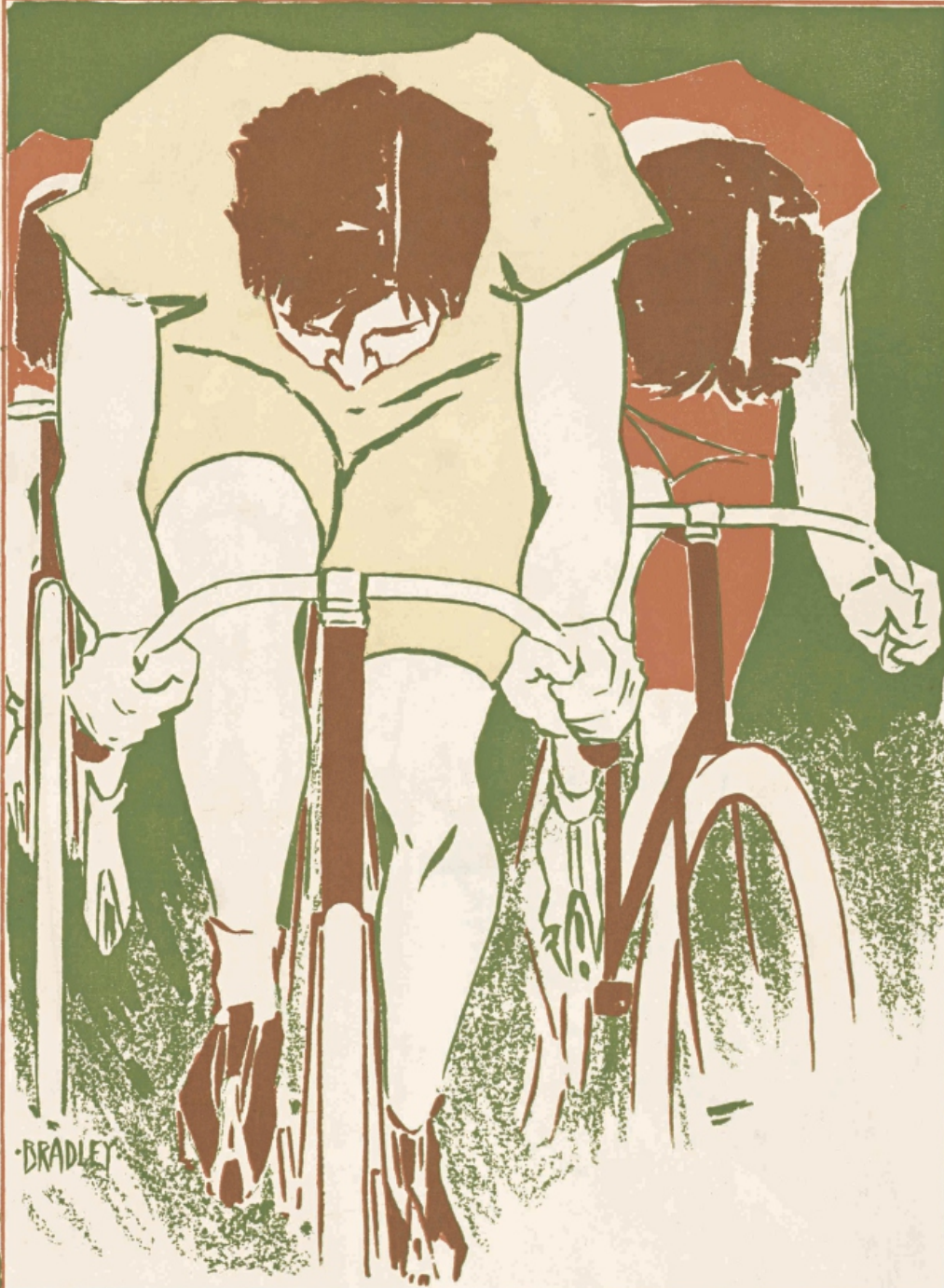
This Art Nouveau poster was designed by the French painter Arthur Foäche for Cycles Clément. The company was founded by Adolphe Clément in Lyon in 1877, and a year later they opened a much larger factory in Paris. Clément adopted the Gallic rooster as their emblem, which appears on the head badge of their bicycles.

This poster features the 'whiplash' lines and striking colour choices characteristic of Art Nouveau, clearly influenced by the Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints that were popular among designers in Paris at the time. Typical of early Clément output, this is a simple, confident and beautiful poster, bearing none of the later celebration of the company's success in races. The earlier examples, such as this, were produced in an environment with less commercial pressure or competition – after all, Clément were in the late 1880s the largest cycling brand in France.

LITHOGRAPH. 136.5 x 93 cm. Bourgerie & Cie, Paris.

ARTHUR FOÄCHE. 1900.

THE SPRINGFIELD
BICYCLE CLUB
TOURNAMENT



SEPTEMBER FIRST
SECOND & THIRD

THE SPRINGFIELD BICYCLE CLUB TOURNAMENT
 SEPTEMBER FIRST, SECOND & THIRD

At the time this poster was printed, cycling clubs rather than governing bodies or companies organized races. This tournament, run by the Springfield Bicycle Club, drew thousands of spectators, with riders from both sides of the Atlantic travelling to compete over the three days of racing. The event was held at Hampden Park (in Springfield, Massachusetts), which had an outdoor cement track a third of a mile long that was used primarily for horse racing but which would host the tournaments from 1882 onwards, with racing in the day and parties at night.

Posters and cycling were both booming at this time; the price of bicycles came down, and collectors were already buying the latest advertising posters from Europe, which were available at leading bookshops. Will H. Bradley, one of the masters of American poster art, designed a number of bicycle posters, both for individual manufacturers as well for the Springfield tournament. This poster was created in the Art Nouveau style but also shows the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement in the use of the flower border. Bradley was a trained printer who had opened his own printing house, the Wayside Press, in Springfield in 1895. During his long, illustrious career, he worked on magazines, designed dozens of book covers and was art director of several films.

LITHOGRAPH. 56 × 36 cm.
WILL H. BRADLEY. 1896.

La Chaîne Simpson



L.B. SPOKE
DIRECTEUR POUR LA FRANCE
25, Boulevard Haussmann.



LA CHAÎNE SIMPSON

L[OUIS] B[OUGLÉ] SPOKE

Louis Bouglé, known as ‘Spoke’, commissioned Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, the Paris-based painter, draughtsman and illustrator, to create this poster for Simpson, a British brand of lever chains for which he was the agent in France. Here, multiple world record holder and four-time Bol d’Or cycle race winner Constant ‘The Baker’ Huret is the lone cyclist, riding behind a pacing team (perhaps Paris’s famous ‘Gladiators’). Professional teams like the one seen here drew large crowds, pacing Paris’s finest on their multi-rider bicycles. By 1900, steam- or gas-powered motorcycles would allow riders to achieve even greater speeds, before being superseded by the motorized Derny that is still seen in velodromes today.

Innovations in lithographic printing at the time allowed Toulouse-Lautrec to employ a wide range of techniques; his spattered ink or *crachis* technique, for example, is used here to add texture. The enormous stucco elephant that inhabited the garden café at the rear of the famous Moulin Rouge is seen here in miniature, bearing the artist’s initials – a nod to his less healthy pursuits. Though this is far from his best work, Toulouse-Lautrec’s influence on poster art and painting is undeniable. An earlier proposal for this poster featured the champion Welsh cyclist Jimmy Michael – also part of the Simpson Chain Team – riding in London (probably at Catford or Herne Hill), but it was rejected by Simpson because of the technical rendering of the chain, an exceptionally cumbersome-looking device. The rejected draft was nevertheless printed in limited numbers – some suggest a run of only two hundred – presumably to recoup the travel costs the artist incurred during his trip to London to create the poster.

LITHOGRAPH. 87 × 124 cm. Imprimerie Chaix, 20 rue Bergère, Paris.
HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC. 1896.

