Japonisme and Bonnard’s Invention of the Modern Poster

David E. Gliem
Eckerd College

Abstract

Soon after Japan was opened to the West in the 1850s, large numbers of Japanese works of art were exported to Europe and America. Western artists, excited by the novelty of Japanese art, eagerly adopted and adapted Japanese aesthetics to their own creative efforts. The fascination these artists held for Japan and its culture was but one small part of a much broader appreciation of Japan, a phenomenon dubbed Japonisme in 1872 by the art critic Philippe Burty. Japonisme reached the peak of its influence around 1890, the same time that Pierre Bonnard, a young French artist and member of the symbolist group, the Nabis, was formulating a new approach to poster design. A keen admirer and student of Japanese art, Bonnard applied what he learned of Japanese aesthetics to the style of his first lithographed poster, France-Champagne. Innovative in its use of a flat, reductive composition and synthesis between text and image—design elements borrowed from the Japanese—this work ushered in a new era of poster design.

Author Biography

David E. Gliem, Eckerd College
Ph.D., Pennsylvania State University. Associate Professor of Art History. David teaches a range of courses in Art History, and specializes in 19th and 20th century western art.
The foundation of the Meiji restoration was the 1866 Satsuma-Chōshū Alliance between Saigō Takamori and Kido Takayoshi, leaders of the reformist elements in the Satsuma Domain and Chōshū Domain.