

[Hagley Library/Fall Conference cfp/Commercial Pictures and the Arts and Technics of Visual Persuasion](#)

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Call for Proposals:

Commercial Pictures and the Arts and Technics of Visual Persuasion

A Conference at the Hagley Library, Wilmington DE, November 8, 2019

This conference will convene an international group of scholars concerned with the power of pictures in the world of commerce. As pictures became a central feature of the advertising message in the second half of the nineteenth century, they migrated from the pages of newspapers and magazines, and the posters on the sides of buildings, to such technologies as electrical spectaculars, film, and later, television. At the heart of this diffusion was an effort to make the pictorial sales message migrate not only across media but also into the minds of consumers.

We invite papers exploring the relationship between the material frameworks of picture-based selling and the immaterial, subjective fictions they were designed to activate. Papers should be historically grounded and offer fresh, previously unpublished research. We are primarily interested in research exploring the visual operations and social effects of picture-based advertising (broadly conceived) in and between the U.S. and Europe since the 19th century, as well as essays that place historical practice into relation with contemporary techniques. We hope to include the perspectives of art historians, business historians, illustrators and graphic designers, marketing and consumer researchers, behavioral psychologists, and scholars in American studies, literature, communication and media studies.

Because a key focus of our work is to foster close looking at commercial pictures, one specific objective will be to connect scholars with Hagley collection materials that exceed three million images, including photographs, prints, advertisements, film, and video. In so doing, we hope to identify new avenues for research that get beyond the usual questions regarding the traditional boundaries between high and low, art and commercial visual culture.

We are particularly interested in proposals addressing the following questions:

- How were people expected to interact with visual layouts and displays in specific material frameworks and social situations?
- Who were the commercial agents behind these processes, e.g. advertising agencies,

consumer research consultants, corporate marketing departments, magazine publishers, industrial and graphic designers, photographers and film makers, etc.

- What place did technology, art theory, scientific research, and models of corporate organization have in the development of particular pictorial techniques?
- When did priorities other than immediate sales—such as storytelling about a firm or product or community-building—complicate short-term economic concerns?

Please submit proposals of no more than 500 words and a one-page C.V. to Roger Horowitz at rorowitz@hagley.org by June 1, 2019. We welcome submissions from scholars working in any field. Presenters will receive lodging in the conference hotel and compensation for their travel costs.

This conference is part of a two-year initiative on commercial pictures and the art of visual persuasion organized by Jennifer Greenhill (Associate Professor of Art History, USC), Vanessa Schwartz (Professor of Art History and History and Director of the Visual Studies Research Institute, USC), and Alex Taylor (Assistant Professor and Academic Curator, University of Pittsburgh). Roger Horowitz, Director of Hagley's Center for the History of Business, Technology, and Society, will join the program committee of this conference. This initiative includes the Hagley conference in November 2019; a team-taught interdisciplinary graduate seminar at USC, Spring 2020; a second conference at the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens in San Marino, California, in September 2020; and a volume of essays.