

“Arts in Mind”

“Mountain Play” Poster Artist: Leave the Kids Alone

By Lippy

You’re walking down the street absently gazing in shop windows when suddenly you’re transfixed by a poster that is so arresting it stops you dead in your tracks. The choice of adjacent colors causes them to “vibrate” and the text is difficult to decipher. If you’re intrigued, and you linger even longer at this colorful rebus, you have just engaged in the experience Victor Moscoso has hoped for.

One of the founding creators of the psychedelic 60s dance hall posters, Moscoso’s latest work can be seen all over Marin in his poster and handbill design for the upcoming Mountain Play production of “Hair”. I recently caught up with Moscoso and asked him about his thoughts on the artistic lifestyle and how best to nurture creativity in children.

Q: How does the way an artist sees the world differ from a non-artist?

A: This is a paraphrase of Carl Jung; “I really admire artists. They’re one of the few professions that works with the unconscious on a regular basis”. That relationship between conscious and unconscious is a constant in human beings. Now what you do as an artist is you develop the dialogue between consciousness and unconsciousness so you can work with it.

Q: So you’ve learned to trust what your unconscious may be telling you in relation to creating visuals for a given assignment?

A: Yes! I have a maxim and I’ve heard other artists say the same thing: ‘The first one is the right one’. Don’t think too much.

Q: How should children be encouraged to create?

A: You Don’t! Leave the kids alone. You give them the materials and let them choose. Then leave them alone. There’s not a child in kindergarten that will say, ‘I can’t draw’. Every kid in kindergarten is creative naturally. But you can lean really heavily on creativity to the point where you get rid of it.

Q: Given your experience as an instructor, how should art be taught?

A: I don’t teach art, I teach *craft*. I teach you how to make art. I don’t teach you about art because that is a personal thing. That is your personality coming through the medium that you choose.

Q: What artistic advice would you have given yourself as an elementary school student?

A: I knew very early on that I wanted to be an artist because I enjoyed drawing, but I wish I'd have had more exposure to non-Western art. It wasn't until I got to college that I realized that antique art wasn't all one thing. They didn't teach me about Muslim art or Chinese art.

Q: Your recent monograph, “Sex, Rock & Optical Illusions” serves as a good career overview, but a single volume can only highlight so much from a career that spans over 40 years. Will there be another volume?

A: The second volume is already planned and it will fill in the gaps from the first volume. Right now I'm also working on commissioned oil paintings. Initially I studied to be a painter but I was unable to pay my bills. I stumbled into the posters and was able to pay my bills and thought, 'To hell with painting'.

Q: Is it easier to work on a poster when you really admire the artist or event?

A: I prefer to work with something I like and admire, however jobs are funny that way. Sometimes that can be a hindrance. I got called to illustrate a Beatles songbook and they asked me, 'Which song would you like?' I think one of the greatest songs they've ever written was "A Day In The Life" but I picked "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da", a frivolous light piece of fluff. If you're going to try and make an illustration that's the equivalent of the impact that "A Day In The Life" had on you, you're in trouble!

Q: Looking back over your prolific career, is there a particular project that is disappointing because it never quite got past the idea state?

A: Yeah, the "Zap" animated movie [based upon the groundbreaking series of 'underground comix' of which Moscoso was a founding contributor]. That was 1970 -71 and we were "hot" but couldn't raise the money. It would have been remarkable.

More information about Victor Moscoso can be found at www.victormoscoso.com.

The Mountain Play, "Hair", will be performed June 3, 9, 10 and 17 on Mount Tam. For more information go to www.mountainplay.org/show.html or call 383-1100.

"Arts in Mind" is a series from Kiddo! that explores arts and arts education. Lippy is a local independent animator who came of age reading Moscoso comix.