

# 20 Years of Design at Dartmouth College

The Posters of Michael Amberger by James Burger

**A** vacation first brought Michael Amberger and his family to the Upper Valley. Living in Florida at the time, he had decided to visit a friend in Lyme, New Hampshire. Soon thereafter, he left the world of advertising design and photography to become the art director at Vermont Castings. Three years later, in 1983, Amberger accepted a position as a graphic designer at Dartmouth College. On February 13, 2004, he was honored at an event celebrating “The Michael Amberger Poster Collection”, a permanent collection at the Rauner Library of nearly 550 posters that he has created for Dartmouth College throughout the past twenty years.

Amberger, who grew up in the Bronx, credits his fifth-grade teacher with encouraging him to take the New York City educational system’s tests for art. He passed them all and elected to attend Manhattan’s High School of Art and Design, a school tailored for students interested in commercial art. During his undergraduate and graduate studies at New York Community College and The School of Visual Arts, he majored in advertising design. Many fast-paced, creative years followed, as he worked in a wide range of capacities at various ad agencies. Clients included Clairol, Chanel, Olin Skis, and Salada, and he designed logos for major motion pictures such as *The Sandpebbles*, *Take the Money and Run*, and *The St. Valentine’s Day Massacre*. He also had his own film production company, making television commercials and short films.

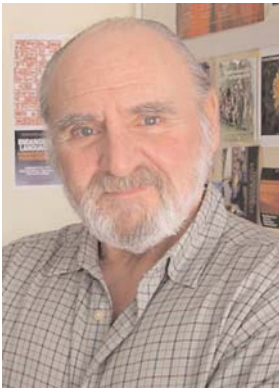


Photo: James Burger

Hearing of an opening for Director of Photography and Design at the New York Botanical Gardens, Amberger departed hectic Madison Avenue to “take photos of plants, trees, and people. I loved that job!” One of his favorite projects during that time was a television commercial that he produced. The spot, featuring time-lapse photography of a flower opening, is still shown to this day. Additionally, his subway poster for the Botanical Gardens is in the permanent collection at the Museum of Modern Art.

Discussing print work, Amberger stresses the importance of white space. “First, I determine the space that I have to work with,” he says. “Then, I go for a clear, clean, and precise look, avoiding added visual clutter.” Although he now does most of his work on a computer, he typically draws his ideas for brochures, logos, book covers, and videotapes on paper first. For lecture posters, he’ll do research on the speakers to get insights for the overall design. It’s important that they like the finished piece, Amberger feels, and he is proud that a framed poster for “Is Communism Dead?” is prominently displayed in the office of Bulgarian Ambassador Velichko Velichkov, who was the visiting lecturer. Amberger has had many student assistants, and he thoroughly enjoys teaching them about the business of graphic design. “I’m in love with Dartmouth students,” he says enthusiastically. “They’re so talented and fortunate to have such an educational opportunity. I learn from them and am inspired by them, and it makes me feel that I’m doing something important.”

Effective this June, Amberger became an independent producer, renting space in North Fairbanks. He continues to work on a number of exciting design projects, for external clients as well as for the College, and he is clearly moved when he speaks of the Rauner collection. “I’m very proud that my son’s children will be able to come here and see my work. I’m very honored. I never envisioned that this could happen.”

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Winter 2004

A catered reception for “The Michael Amberger Poster Collection” was held on Friday, February 13, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., in the Treasure Room at Baker-Berry Library. The event marked the official opening of the collection, showcasing two decades of powerfully inspiring artistic talent.

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Some of the works included in  
“The Michael Amberger Poster Collection”