

Wealth on the Waterfront

Bosses earn huge bucks as union dwindles

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BEST OF NEW YORK



POSTER BOYS Lars Larsson (l.) and Robert Chisholm

MATTHEW ROBERTS

pan, Cuba, Belgium and the United States. They tout everything from political causes to food, travel, circuses, clothing, sporting and musical events, household appliances, automobiles and, of course, movies.

"And they're still very affordable," says Chisholm, 55, who grew up in Virginia and went to work for a New York auction house in 1971, which proved to be an ideal training ground for his current business.

"If you want to spend \$100 or \$150, you can do that," he says. "Or you can spend \$15,000. There's something interesting in every price range."

He points to a huge poster of a pair of men's shoes painted by the renowned French artist A.M. Cassandre in 1932. The poster, miraculously, looks as if it was printed yesterday. It's priced at \$9,000.

The rest of the posters in the bright gallery are in equally good condition. That's because an

TOP-RATED

Chisholm Larsson Gallery

Australian artist named Michael Brewster toils in an

upstairs studio to return the posters to their original condition, if requested by the buyer. He covers fold lines, repairs rips and tears, touches up faded colors.

Chisholm and Larsson are relentless in their pursuit of new pieces. They regularly travel to France and Italy, two great repositories of poster art, and they visit auctions, flea markets, estate sales, the Internet.

"An amazing amount walks through the door these days," says Chisholm. "We've been avid buyers for 30 years, and we've been in the same location so long that people bring things to us."

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, for instance, there has been a steady stream of Russian propaganda posters, including a sub-genre that Chisholm refers to fondly as "women and tanks."

The appeal is the same one that drew him to that World War I poster so many years ago: "It's the art and the history mixed up together." ♦

Windows to the past

For these vintage poster dealers, every picture tells a story BY BILL MORRIS

For Robert Chisholm, it was love at first sight. As soon as he saw a certain World War I vintage poster — a shouting soldier urging his fellow Frenchmen to buy war bonds — Chisholm was a goner.

"It was very emotional artwork," he says, rifling through a sampling of French World

War I posters. "I'm a sucker for art that tells a story, and these do. They're not just decorative. They're actual pieces of history."

And there is a staggering selection of vintage posters — some 27,000 pieces — at Chisholm Larsson Gallery in Chelsea, the emporium Chisholm opened in 1974 and now runs with Lars Larsson.

From his original fascination with French World War I posters, Chisholm has expanded all over the map. In neatly organized binders, photographs of the gallery's vast collection are arranged by topic and geography. The posters date from as far back as the late 19th century, and they come from France, Italy, Poland, Russia, India, Ja-

CHISHOLM LARSSON GALLERY

145 Eighth Ave. (between 17th & 18th Sts.); (212) 741-1703; www.posterny.com