



Iron Curtain call

HOT THING

New kids on the bloc

Totalitarianism aside, there may be some positive aspects to the Eastern bloc's years of political and social isolation, some revolutionary benefits for them as well as us. In terms of graphic design, for instance, the Iron Curtain actually helped countries like Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland develop a unique creative syntax, a style refreshingly free from the homogenized sensibilities of their NATO counterparts.

A dearth of computers and other technological tools forced Eastern European artists to make more imaginative use of their classical heritage. Their insularity led them to develop a sense of color and form distinct from the best of the West — hues Pantone has never even dreamed of, shapes that seem at times to come from another planet.

Eastern-bloc popular and commercial art is hot. Its posters, signage, advertising, design, and graphic ephemera have a foreignness that renders even contemporary objects anachronistic. For example, many East German and Romanian postage stamps have a stark, Brave New World quality, a social realism that hasn't been explored in America since the '30s. Polish movie posters (even those promoting Western films) are more dramatic than our own and often exploit more graphic symbolism. And now that the Curtain has parted, we can begin to appreciate not just the people it let out but the cultures it kept in.

For a catalogue of Eastern-bloc collectibles, including posters, contact Russian Dressing, Box 1313, New York, New York 10013, or call (212) 334-0006.