



# Posters for Peace: Youth, Design and Cultural Memory

<sup>1</sup> Ms Arpita Singh, <sup>2</sup> Dr. Sumita Kathuria<sup>2</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>PhD Scholar, Applied Art Department, College of Art, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Art, University of Delhi

Email – <sup>1</sup>luminaries.arpita@gmail.com

**Abstract: Background-** Posters are among the most enduring forms of mass communication, yet scholarship has primarily emphasized propaganda and protest. Their potential as tools of peace communication remains underexplored.

**Purpose-** This study examines how contemporary peace posters function as cultural and communicative interventions. It proposes a comparative typology such as youth, professional, and institutional and explores how posters operate with a dual temporality: as urgent interventions in moments of crisis and as enduring cultural artifacts preserved in memory institutions.

**Method-** Using an interdisciplinary framework that integrates semiotics, peace communication, and visual culture, the paper analyzes three initiatives: the Lions Club International Peace Poster Contest (2024–25), the Designers for Peace: United with Ukraine campaign (2024), and the Posters4Peace exhibition at the Peace Museum Vienna (2025).

**Findings-** Results show that youth reinterpret universal symbols to articulate resilience, professionals employ minimalist aesthetics to mobilize solidarity, and institutions curate activist works into cultural memory, sustaining peace narratives beyond immediate crises.

**Contribution-** The study shifts poster scholarship from propaganda to peace communication, offering a novel typology and demonstrating how posters remain democratic, accessible, and relevant media in today's polarized digital world

**Key Words:** Peace Communication, Visual Culture, Semiotics, Applied Art, Peace Posters, Youth Voices, Design Solidarity, Cultural Memory.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Posters have long been one of the most enduring and accessible forms of mass communication. From propaganda to social campaigns, they have served as tools of persuasion, education, and mobilization across diverse contexts. Their effectiveness lies in visual immediacy, simplicity, and the ability to engage broad audiences. Described as a “quick firing weapon aimed at a moving target” [11], posters transmit messages with urgency and emotional force. Yet while their role in advertising, health promotion, and propaganda is well documented, far less attention has been given to their use in articulating and performing peace.

Historically, poster scholarship emphasized rhetorical and propagandistic functions. In the twentieth century, posters were central to wartime mobilization and anti-war protest. Benson[2], for instance, showed how Berkeley's 1970 anti-war posters acted as civic interventions that invited reflection and participation. Such work expanded poster studies beyond propaganda toward participatory media, yet most research remains focused on resistance, overlooking posters designed to promote peace.

Recent scholarship offers new avenues for analysis. Aiello[1] and Parry highlight posters as semiotic systems globally recognizable yet locally reinterpreted while Djonov and Zhao[7] stress multimodality, the interplay of text, imagery, and design. These approaches are especially relevant for peace posters, which often remix universal motifs such as doves or olive branches with culturally specific testimonies of resilience. Peace communication research adds further insight, showing that images can enact peace by cultivating empathy and reframing conflict narratives [9][12]. In this sense, posters operate not only as aesthetic artifacts but as interventions that encourage alternative futures. Visual culture perspectives extend this by tracing how images circulate across contexts. Bleiker[3] and Mirzoeff[10] note that posters acquire new meanings as they travel, while Dovey[8] and Campbell[4] demonstrate how museums preserve activist art as cultural memory. Despite these advances, contemporary peace posters remain underexplored. This study



addresses that gap by analyzing three initiatives: the Lions Club International Peace Poster Contest (2024–25), *Designers for Peace: United with Ukraine* (2024), and the *Posters4Peace* exhibition at the Peace Museum Vienna (2025). It contributes by shifting poster scholarship toward peace communication, introducing a typology of youth, professional, and institutional posters, and highlighting their dual temporality as both ephemeral yet archival interventions.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

### Early Foundations: Posters as Persuasion

Rege[11] provided one of the earliest systematic accounts of poster design, outlining qualities such as attention, clarity, brevity, emotional appeal, and lasting impression. His framework emphasized persuasion and communication efficiency, establishing principles still relevant to poster analysis today.

### Rhetorical Shifts: Posters as Civic Action

Later scholarship expanded posters' scope beyond persuasion. Benson[2], for example, demonstrated how Vietnam-era protest posters in Berkeley functioned as civic invitations, encouraging dialogue and participation. This rhetorical turn highlighted posters' capacity to intervene in public life, though most studies focused on protest rather than peace.

### Semiotics and Multimodality

Recent work shifted toward meaning-making. Aiello and Parry[1] describe visual communication as a universal yet culturally adaptive language, while Djonov and Zhao[7] emphasize multimodality such as how text, imagery, and color combine to create layered meaning. Such perspectives are vital for understanding how peace posters remix universal symbols (such as doves and olive branches) within local contexts.

### Peace Communication and Visual Performativity

Scholars in peace and conflict studies argue that images can enact peace. Shinar[12] frames communication as conflict transformation, while Koliska[9] describes images as “agents of peace” capable of cultivating empathy. Chouliaraki[5] further highlights a “discourse of hope,” where images generate visions of possible futures. These insights position posters as performative media rather than static symbols.

### Visual Culture and Cultural Memory

Visual culture research stresses circulation and preservation. Bleiker[3] and Mirzoeff[10] show that images gain new meanings as they travel across contexts. Dovey[8] highlights museums as mediators between activism and diplomacy, and Campbell[4] emphasizes the ethical duty to preserve activist art as cultural memory. This perspective reframes posters not just as temporary communication but as archival artifacts.

### Research Gap

The trajectory of scholarship moves from design principles to civic rhetoric to semiotic and performative approaches. Yet contemporary peace posters, particularly those spanning youth initiatives, professional solidarity campaigns, and institutional archives remain underexplored. Few studies integrate these practices into a comparative framework that accounts for both their performative role and their temporality. Addressing this gap, the present study introduces a typology (youth, professional, institutional) and demonstrates how peace posters function simultaneously as immediate interventions and lasting cultural memory.

## 3. METHODOLOGY:

### Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach to examine peace posters as both communicative and cultural artifacts. The aim was not only to describe visual elements but also to interpret how posters perform peace across different contexts.

### Case Selection

Three initiatives were purposively chosen to represent distinct scales of practice:

1. Youth- Lions Club International Peace Poster Contest (2024–25).
2. Professional- Designers for Peace: United with Ukraine campaign (2024).
3. Institutional- Posters4Peace exhibition, Peace Museum Vienna (2025).

Selection criteria included contemporaneity, accessibility of materials, and relevance to ongoing conflicts.

### Data Sources

Materials were drawn from organizational archives, exhibition catalogues, press coverage, and publicly available digital repositories. Triangulating across these sources enhanced validity and situated visual analysis within institutional and cultural contexts.

### Analytic Framework:

A coding schema (see Table 1) was developed around three dimensions:



- Semiotics: symbol types, motifs, and multimodality.
- Peace Communication: empathy, solidarity, and reframing of conflict narratives.
- Visual Culture: circulation, preservation, and cultural memory.

This framework enabled a comparative, multi-scalar analysis across youth, professional, and institutional levels.

### Limitations

As the study relied primarily on secondary sources and curatorial documentation, findings reflect interpretive readings rather than direct audience responses. Future work should complement visual analysis with reception studies to capture how publics engage with peace posters.

**Table 1. Analytic Dimensions of Peace Poster Analysis:**

Dimension	Indicators	Example Application
<b>Semiotics</b>	Symbol types, visual motifs, multimodality (text, image, color)	Youth reinterpretation of doves and olive branches
<b>Peace Communication</b>	Empathy, solidarity, reframing conflict narratives	Ukraine campaign mobilizing publics through minimalist design
<b>Visual Culture</b>	Circulation, institutional preservation, cultural memory	Museum exhibition archiving activist posters

This approach moves beyond description to provide a comparative, multi-scalar framework for interpreting peace posters as both immediate interventions and enduring artifacts.

## 4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Posters are visual artifacts that combine aesthetic design with communicative purpose. To analyze how contemporary peace posters function in conflict and post-conflict contexts, this study employs an interdisciplinary framework integrating semiotics, peace communication, and visual culture. Together, these perspectives illuminate posters as semiotic performances embedded in transnational visual ecologies.

### Semiotics of Peace Symbols

Semiotics provides tools for understanding how images and symbols generate meaning. Building on Saussure and Peirce, semiotic analysis highlights how signs operate across cultural contexts. Aiello [1] and Parry describe visual communication as both a “universal language” and a contextually adaptive system. Djonov and Zhao[7] emphasize multimodality, showing how meaning emerges through the interplay of symbols, typography, and color. In the Lions Club International Peace Poster Contest (2024–25), for example, children rework universal motifs such as doves or olive branches to articulate personal experiences of conflict and resilience. Semiotics thus explains how posters communicate simultaneously across global and local registers.

### Peace Communication as Performative Practice

Peace communication shifts attention from representation to performance. Shinar[12] argues that communication can transform conflict narratives, while Koliska[9] suggests that images act as “agents of peace,” cultivating empathy and reconciliation. Cottle[6] further notes that images mobilize publics emotionally as much as rationally, particularly during crises. The Designers for Peace: United with Ukraine campaign (2024) demonstrates this performativity: fragmented national symbols and minimalist color schemes not only symbolize solidarity but enact it, inviting global publics to identify with Ukraine’s struggle.

### Visual Culture and Transnational Circulation

Visual culture perspectives extend this analysis by tracing how images travel across media and contexts. Bleiker [3] shows that images gain political force through mobility, while Mirzoeff[10] stresses how reinterpretation shapes meaning across exhibitions and digital platforms. Institutions also play a crucial role: Dovey[8] describes museums as mediators between art and diplomacy, and Campbell [4] emphasizes the ethical responsibility of preserving activist artifacts. The Peace Museum Vienna’s Posters4Peace exhibition (2025) illustrates how institutions transform temporary visual activism into enduring cultural memory.

### Integrating the Framework

Together, these perspectives clarify the multi-scalar role of peace posters:

- Micro (youth) - individual voices using global symbols in local testimony.
- Meso (professional) - design communities mobilizing solidarity in crises.
- Macro (institutional) - museums preserving posters as cultural and diplomatic resources.



This integrated approach highlights the study's novelty: moving beyond historical propaganda or protest, it examines how contemporary peace posters perform and sustain imaginaries of peace across grassroots, professional, and institutional domains.

## 5. CASE STUDY:

### Case Study 1- Lions Club International Peace Poster Contest

The Lions Club International Peace Poster Contest has, for over three decades, encouraged children worldwide to visualize their visions of peace. The 2024–25 theme, “Peace Without Limits,” drew submissions from both stable and conflict-affected societies.

Semiotic analysis reveals recurring global motifs such as doves, suns, clasped hands yet these acquire specific meanings in local contexts. For example, a Palestinian child's dove functions not only as a universal symbol of peace but also as testimony of resilience amid occupation. This reflects Djonov and Zhao's[7] notion of multimodality, where color, style, and placement create layered meanings.

Through the lens of peace communication, the contest positions children as agents rather than recipients of peace discourse. As Koliska[9] suggests, such images perform peace by fostering empathy and nonviolent imaginaries. Circulating through classrooms, exhibitions, and digital platforms, youth-created posters extend their reach, transforming drawings into transnational interventions.

### Case Study 2- Designers for Peace: United with Ukraine

The Designers for Peace: United with Ukraine initiative, launched in 2024, mobilized over 350 designers from more than 30 countries. Organized through professional networks, the campaign used minimalist semiotics such as fragmented flags, stark palettes of blue and yellow, bold typography to symbolize resilience and unity.

These designs exemplify Cottle's[6] claim that visual media mobilize publics emotionally as well as rationally. They did not merely represent solidarity; they enacted it, circulating globally via exhibitions, Instagram, and activist platforms. The campaign thus extended Benson's[2] notion of posters as civic invitations into transnational, digital contexts.

Semiotically stripped to essentials, these posters transcended language, reinforcing Aiello and Parry's [1] idea of a “universal but adaptive” visual language. By leveraging simplicity and repetition, the campaign transformed professional design into an act of global nonviolent resistance.

### Case Study 3- Posters4Peace, Peace Museum Vienna

In 2025, the Peace Museum Vienna inaugurated Posters4Peace, curating international submissions from artists, designers, and activists. Unlike grassroots or professional initiatives, the exhibition institutionalized peace imagery, reframing temporary activism into cultural memory.

Semiotic motifs such as seeds, trees, and broken chains conveyed renewal and liberation. Their diversity illustrated Aiello and Parry's [1] point that signs are both globally recognizable and locally adaptable. From a peace communication perspective, the exhibition enacted reconciliation by transforming individual works into collective narratives of dialogue [12].

Institutions, as Dovey [8] argues, mediate between art and diplomacy. The Vienna museum exemplifies this role by preserving ephemeral activism for education, diplomacy, and intergenerational transmission. In Campbell's [4] terms, this ethical curation ensures activist voices endure beyond immediate crises.

The comparative features of youth, professional, and institutional posters are summarized in **Table 2**.

**Table 2. Comparative Typology of Peace Posters**

Dimension	Youth (Lions Club)	Professional (Ukraine Campaign)	Institutional (Vienna Museum)
Producers	Children and youth participants	Professional designers and design collectives	Curators and cultural institutions
Symbolic Approach	Universal symbols reinterpreted in local contexts	Minimalist use of national motifs (flags, colors, typography)	Metaphors of renewal (seeds, trees, broken chains)





Function	Empowering youth voices; testimonies of hope	Enacting solidarity; mobilizing transnational publics	Preserving activism as cultural memory and diplomacy
Circulation	Classrooms, local exhibitions, digital archives	Social media, online galleries, international showcases	Museum archives, curated exhibitions, educational programs
Temporal Dimension	Immediate expressions of resilience	Urgent interventions during crisis	Long-term preservation and intergenerational transmission

## 6. DISCUSSION:

**Background-** The three case studies such as the Lions Club International Peace Poster Contest (2024–25), the Designers for Peace: United with Ukraine campaign (2024), and the Posters4Peace exhibition at the Peace Museum Vienna (2025) demonstrate how peace posters continue to function as vital communicative and cultural tools.

**Continuity-** Core design principles identified by Rege[11] such as attention, clarity, brevity, emotional appeal, and lasting impression remain relevant. Youth drawings use vivid imagery to express resilience, professional designs employ minimalist clarity to mobilize publics and institutions preserve these works to extend their impact.

**Novelty-** What distinguishes contemporary peace posters is their performative and temporal dimension. Youth drawings enact resilience, professional campaigns generate real-time solidarity, and museums transform temporary activism into enduring cultural memory. This dual temporality was urgent yet lasting, sets peace posters apart from earlier traditions.

**Challenges-** However, tensions persist. Youth contests may restrict creativity, professional campaigns risk oversimplification, and institutional curation can selectively filter voices. Studying the systems that shape production and circulation is therefore as important as analyzing the posters themselves.

**Implications-** The findings shift poster scholarship from a narrow focus on propaganda and protest toward peace communication. Practically, they highlight posters as democratic, accessible tools for education, civic mobilization, and cultural diplomacy, proving their continued relevance in the digital age.

The theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions are synthesized in **Table 3**

**Table 3. Key Contributions of the Study**

Domain	Contribution
Theoretical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shifts poster scholarship from propaganda/protest toward peace communication.</li> <li>• Introduces the concept of <i>dual temporality</i>—posters as both urgent interventions and enduring cultural artifacts.</li> <li>• Demonstrates how posters enact peace performatively rather than merely symbolize it.</li> </ul>
Methodological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposes a <i>comparative typology</i> (youth, professional, institutional) for analyzing peace posters.</li> <li>• Develops a three-dimensional analytic framework (semiotics, peace communication, visual culture).</li> <li>• Offers a transferable model for future studies of visual peace media.</li> </ul>
Practical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlights posters' democratic accessibility: low-cost, emotionally resonant, widely distributable.</li> <li>• Shows how educators, designers, and museums can use posters for civic engagement, solidarity campaigns, and cultural diplomacy.</li> <li>• Affirms posters' continued relevance in today's polarized digital environment.</li> </ul>

## 7. CONCLUSION:

**Background-** Posters have long been recognized for their accessibility and communicative power, yet their role in articulating peace has rarely been studied in depth. **Purpose-** This study addressed that gap by investigating how peace posters operate across different contexts such as youth initiatives, professional campaigns, and institutional exhibitions and by advancing a framework that accounts for their symbolic, performative, and temporal dimensions.



Findings-Analysis of three recent cases showed that:

- Youth posters reinterpreted shared symbols to express resilience and hope.
- Professional campaigns mobilized publics through minimalist, emotionally charged design.
- Institutional exhibitions curated activist works into lasting cultural memory.

Together, these examples illustrate how posters do not merely represent peace but actively perform it, while also sustaining its narratives over time.

Contribution-The study moves poster scholarship beyond propaganda and protest by foregrounding peace communication. It introduces a typology of youth, professional, and institutional practices, highlights the dual temporality of posters as both immediate interventions and enduring artifacts, and affirms their continuing relevance as democratic tools of solidarity and cultural diplomacy in an era of polarization.

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