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Signs of Change

The Lost World of Enamel Advertising Signs

by Andrew Morley – Artist, Author and Co-Founder of The Street Jewellery Society

Andrew Morley's interest in the art of advertising began when, as an undergraduate at Newcastle University in the 1960s, he studied under Richard Hamilton. The influence of the father of Pop Art opened Morley's eyes to the possibilities for art of commercial imagery.

At the same period much of old Newcastle and Gateshead was being demolished; Morley began collecting the discarded advertising that had decorated the demolished corner shops. Much of his artwork was and continues to be based on imagery and graphics of this early advertising. In the mid 1970s he and Chris Baglee, a fellow collector, launched a series of five books on old enamel advertising under the general title Street Jewellery.

Morley and Baglee founded the Street Jewellery Society, to promote appreciation of this forgotten medium, and to encourage collection by individuals and museums. Many of the early examples they collected are now displayed at Beamish Museum.

Enamel advertising signs were first manufactured in Birmingham in the 1880s, quickly becoming the principal advertising medium of the Victorian/Edwardian era. By 1900 every shopping street in Britain was bedecked with street jewellery. Eventually

millions of enamel signs were manufactured for display on

shop fronts all over the

world, yet by the 1970s

virtually all of them

had been scrapped,

their usefulness

having been

overwhelmed by

more modern forms

of advertising such

as multiple sheet

paper hoardings

and by television

advertising. There is

a danger that without

some intervention they

will become a mere footnote

to visual culture, their original

significance forgotten. Morley's

lecture will explore the history of the creation, manufacture, decline and neglected importance of street jewellery to Victorian/Edwardian social history.

Andrew Morley's lecture *Signs of Change* has been produced as a DVD, and a limited number of copies have been reproduced by Old Sydney Signs with the Authors permission.

