

Animated Advertising: 200 Years of Premiums, Promos, and Pop-ups, from the Collection of Ellen G. K. Rubin

**The Grolier Club Exhibition (December 1, 2022 – February 11, 2023)
and exhibition catalogue**

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ABSTRACT

Review of the Grolier Club Exhibition and exhibition catalogue: Animated Advertising: 200 Years of Premiums, Promos, and Pop-ups, from the Collection of Ellen G. K. Rubin (December 1, 2022 - February 11, 2023).

KEYWORDS

Animated advertising; Pop-up; Ellen G. K. Rubin.

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Ellen G. K. Rubin, aka [The Pop-Up Lady](#), knows a thing or two about advertising and salesmanship. A tireless promoter of all kinds of works of movable paper, she has been collecting interactive books and ephemera for decades and remains an active participant in the Ephemera and Movable Book Societies. She even has her own pop-up business card (engineered by Andrew Baron), which is on view among other impressive examples. While Ms. Rubin has curated several exhibitions from her vast collection, including a previous installation at the Grolier Club, the topic of attention-seeking ephemera might be seen as central to her collecting of pop-up books as a whole. What indeed is more ephemeral than a book (or printed sheet) that requires repeated handling and direct interaction, and was intended to be thrown away? (Fig. 1).



Figure 1

A selection of the advertising ephemera from the Pop-Up Lady's collection amply fills the second floor Members' Gallery, and continues to grow. An impressive over two hundred items are cozily pinned into the fabric backdrop of wall and standing cases around the room, with a shallow set of wall cases in the adjoining hallway. The comfortable chairs in the middle allow an intimate observation of the collection as a whole, though each piece deserves individual scrutiny. Most are relatively small in scale, but frequently detailed. While very visual and surprising in their movements, most items also rely substantially on their textual content, and include a range of the forty-one different languages and many different countries represented in the collection overall.

Ms. Rubin's accompanying catalog, penned almost entirely during pandemic lockdown, makes an excellent companion to the show. They work very well in tandem, particularly as the labels include QR codes showing many of the works of ephemera in motion. These videos of the exhibits coming to life in the collector's own hands are even more readily accessible from the [Grolier Club exhibition website](#). A wide range of these truly animated advertisements also appear in an extended video here: https://youtu.be/U8W_Cr7OEgE.

The exhibition and catalog are structured in parallel, with an introductory panel and essay respectively, and labels or catalog entries throughout. Ms. Rubin organizes her ephemera collection into categories including: Pharmaceuticals, Food (particularly breakfast cereal), Industrial Design, Automobiles, Business, Sin Products (especially tobacco and alcohol), Beauty Products, Holidays, Travel, Arts, Entertainment and Politics. Understandably for creative works of advertising, most evoke leisure activities or the sale of luxury goods. Given the expense of production and labor to construct these advertisements, their playfulness often belie a serious marketing strategy. Many of the early trade card series with moving parts are indeed connected to the entire shopping experience, though only a few examples per set are on display. One of the most international groupings includes a plethora of circa 1900 Parisian Bon Marché trade cards – this one a tiny proscenium showing a theatrical production of Cinderella (Cendrillon)—; an inflatable Wannamaker Department Store (Philadelphia) card from 1910; and a 1930s Japanese card demonstrating updates to the still-extant Ueno branch of the longest-running chain store (Matsuzakaya Department Store, founded in Nagoya in 1611). Medical advertisements are on display in the outer corridor, including the earliest device in the show, an 1824 cardboard dial from an American textbook produced by Doctor John Ayrton Paris for medical practitioners to help them compare active ingredients across different medications to help prescribe them properly. Over a third of a case devoted to breakfast cereals makes a particularly fascinating case study, one that occasionally also used its merits for a healthy lifestyle as a selling point. Product placement was already well advanced in the early 1900s, with an oversized drawing for a 1938 Terry and the Pirates comic and radio tie-in ad for Quaker Oats. This promises a cardboard “Bang-Bang” gun as an enticement to buy their new line of “Sparkies”. The sign claims they were “wholesome grains of rice shot from guns!” Shooting practice aside, Kellogg’s cornflakes had been previously developed as a wholesome breakfast option. The show includes seven different, full-color Kellogg’s items from 1912 to 1997, including a folding booklet with the first appearance in 1933 of the now well-known Snap Crackle Pop gnomes. Several iterations of the *Funny Jungleland* flap book with three-way split flaps feature a range of anthropomorphic animals. A 1909 edition of one of these playful books is also held by the Newberry Library, demonstrating the far reach of this marketing scheme. Competing cocoa brands and a Maxwell House presidential history card series round out the breakfast beverages for that arguably most important meal of the day (Fig. 2).



Figure 2

Where would homemakers be able to see (and be convinced by) these advertisements? While many are now included in magazines, or are mailed to promote special events, the largest examples required their audience to come to them. Two of the most memorable items in the show defy enclosure entirely, a pair of fairytale dioramas on an enormous scale and drenched in glitter. These were supermarket displays dreamt up by Pillsbury in the 1950s. Its “SNO Sheen Cake Flour” lends itself to an alternate telling of Cinderella, who runs from her prince and a laden sideboard of cakes, secure in the knowledge that her baking skills will win his hand. The label reads:



Figure 3

“Lovely Cinderella, Princess for a night, Lost her tiny slipper in her midnight flight. She knew the prince would follow with a wedding ring, for she had baked a layer cake fit to please a king!”

In the second diorama on view, Hansel and Gretel, appropriately, advertise “Pillsbury Gingerbread Mix” in their glee at dispatching the wicked old witch.

While too large to be included in the exhibition, the catalog includes images of the Kraft paper packages the dioramas came in, complete with diagrams showing how to assemble them on top of a tall stack of flour or gingerbread mix sacks. Although only two are on display, the complete set of four in Ms. Rubin’s collection is happily illustrated in the catalog as well. The imposing scale of the the proposed, pyramidal display

tower in the supermarkets would have made these items temporarily in demand, but, like most of these fleeting productions, they were meant to be discarded after use.

The catalog boasts a briskly-penned introductory essay extending upon the in-gallery text, and a fully-illustrated checklist with alternate views and comparative images that further enliven the description. Beautifully reproduced and described, the book lends these fugitive publications a sense of permanence and provides an appropriate amount of context (Figs. 3-4).

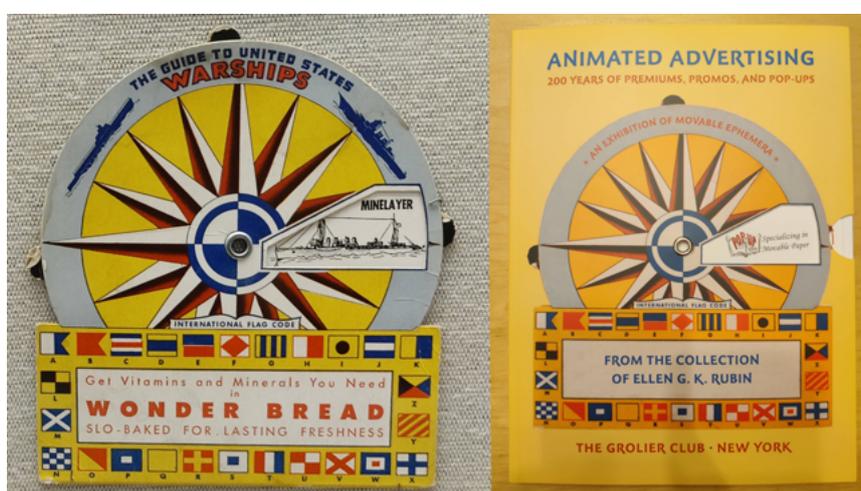


Figure 4

The bright-yellow cover of the *Animated Advertising* volume is perhaps the most appropriate and entertaining aspect of all, as it adapts a compass-shaped volvelle chart issued by Wonder Bread as a Guide to United States Warships into a rotating title sequence. Ms. Rubin's 'Pop-Up Lady' logo fills one of the blanks, with others dedicated to details about the show. A less obvious addition at the back serves as an interactive colophon (as well as a smaller-scale version of the invitation to the Grolier Club exhibition opening). A folding square cut into triangular flaps, each bears a detail of a different item on view, most notably the Eagle-Pencil hawking Statue of Liberty. The others advertise Dubonnet, Frosties (Kellogg's adult Frosted Flakes) and a Parisian cookie factory. It opens to reveal information about the type (Palatino) and the designer (Jerry Kelly).

Sin City? Possibly the most entertaining case were the ones dedicated to luxury products including adults-only tobacco and alcohol. A pop-up Joe Camel in a pyramid in the desert marks the cigarettes' 75th anniversary (in 1988), while a Martini and Rossi-produced dial matches sparkling wines with appetizers (Sweet still white wine goes with rich chocolates and bleu cheese for dessert). On the moralizing side, a Drink/Drive Calculator issued by the State of Wisconsin. "Wisconsin wants you to live: Remember the best idea still is When you drink don't; drive". While many items in these cases suggest they are there to nip a cautionary tale in the bud, this moral imperative is tempered with different forms of humor along the way. For instance, a nineteenth-century joke card showing a young boy scaling a tree, not to rescue a kitten, but to retrieve a pack of cigarettes, has hardly aged well, and raises questions about the target audiences back in that day.

While Ms. Rubin owns movable books dating back to the sixteenth century, the oldest item in this exhibition is the 1824 medical volvelle, and the most recent a 2020 booklet celebrating the Louis Jadot winery in Burgundy, France produced by Philippe Huger or UG. The catalog index helpfully includes a section on movable components, with some eighty pop-ups taking a significant lead over more than thirty volvelles and twenty-some pull-tab elements. The fewest examples each appear only once, but in significant variety: anamorphs, carousel, flip book, flexagon, magic wallet, moiré, myriopticon, and peep show and turn-up books. Not all interactive ephemera has aged equally well from a functional standpoint either. The ones that are supplied with internal batteries, like a 2018 Toyota Camry *InStyle* magazine ad, are perhaps the most ephemeral. (It featured a gatefold opening with pressure-sensitive 'door handles' and inside a dashboard that lights up and gives the viewer an EKG reading to measure their excitement at seeing the car.)

Others, with simpler means of creating sound, can still turn up the volume, like the [polar bear](#) with metal castanets and a drum advertising Standard Gasoline in 1932!

Ms. Rubin's 2014 Grolier Club exhibition, on the prolific Czech illustrator and paper engineer Vojtech Kubasta, was also installed on the second floor; both shows garnered significant attention nonetheless (**Fig. 5**).

One recent improvement in the space's visibility has been the addition of a standing vitrine in the front lobby with a few intriguing items to lure visitors upstairs. In this case, a compact disc album cover with a dial and an accordion-shaped tunnel book featuring a VW camper do the trick. And there is even a poster outside.

Visiting this ephemeral installation (only twelve weeks) of such a varied ephemera trove also highlights the collection's satisfying redemption of these intentionally temporary and easily discarded publications. Given that Ms. Rubin's personal collection contains upwards of 11,000 items, one wonders how much more she'll be able to do when she finally gets her chance at an equally ephemeral, but larger scale show in the main gallery.



Figure 5