

Post  
Exhibition

HOUSE

# Vera List & The Posters Of Lincoln Center

---

October 8, 2020–January 3, 2021

In 1955, John D. Rockefeller III proposed a new type of cultural haven in the heart of New York City that would bring together all of the fine and performing arts. President Dwight D. Eisenhower broke ground on May 14, 1959, and by the early 1960s construction had begun on the creation of the vibrant complex that currently houses 11 resident organizations and 30 performance spaces.

**“She laid the foundation for Lincoln Center’s lasting involvement in contemporary art and its dissemination to a broader public.”**

—Charles A. Riley II, Art Historian

As prominent patrons of the arts, Vera and Albert List were asked by Rockefeller to help fund this new organization. While they gave \$1 million toward incorporating contemporary art within the general construction of the institution, Vera List had particular notions about how this new center for the arts would advertise itself to the public. She did not want the organization to simply copy the standard text-and-image advertising style used by so many cultural institutions at the time. Inspired by artist-designed posters she had seen in Paris, she earmarked \$200,000 as seed money for what would become the List Art Poster Program (later known as the Vera List Art Project).

Rather than hiring an advertising agency, she went directly to some of the most prominent and emerging artists in the world, asking them to create posters to promote each new facility or event at Lincoln Center. Instead of literally depicting a performance or venue, the posters had to engage the viewer with powerful graphics that both translated well to the poster medium and appropriately represented the goals of the institution. The result is a star-studded archive, a Who's Who of the New York art scene in the 1960s and 70s—a small, relatively closed world to which the general public would not usually have had access.

Vera List's project bridged the gap between the imposing grandeur of the elite institution and the average person on the street, simultaneously elevating advertising in Manhattan to levels not seen since the turn of the century.

For the next few years, Vera ran this ambitious endeavor out of a spare room at her husband's office, commissioning artists, overseeing printing, and handling sales. She wanted the project to be self-sustaining, so while thousands of copies of a design were printed for street-facing advertising, an additional number were printed (sometimes without advertising copy) and signed by the artists for sale to collectors at low cost. The success of this program inspired Vera to form a printing company, HKL Ltd., in 1968 with art dealers Portia Marcus and Barbara Krakow that focused

on bringing similar artist-designed posters to other organizations within the nonprofit sector.

Vera ran the project until around 1974, when she delegated its leadership to colleague Delmar Hendricks. Today, the program has shifted away from street-facing advertising and focuses on limited-edition prints, with proceeds benefiting Lincoln Center's innovative cultural programming. The last advertising poster was released in 1976. Vera's brainchild lives on through Lincoln Center Editions and remains one of the longest continuously running print programs in the United States.

This mini exhibition concentrates on the earliest posters in the campaign, featuring artists who have since become household names. Each of these images is the advertising poster version of the design.

This exhibition is made possible through a generous loan from Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Unless otherwise noted, all posters are from its archives.

**Curation**

Angelina Lippert

**Exhibition Design**

Ola Baldych

**Installation**

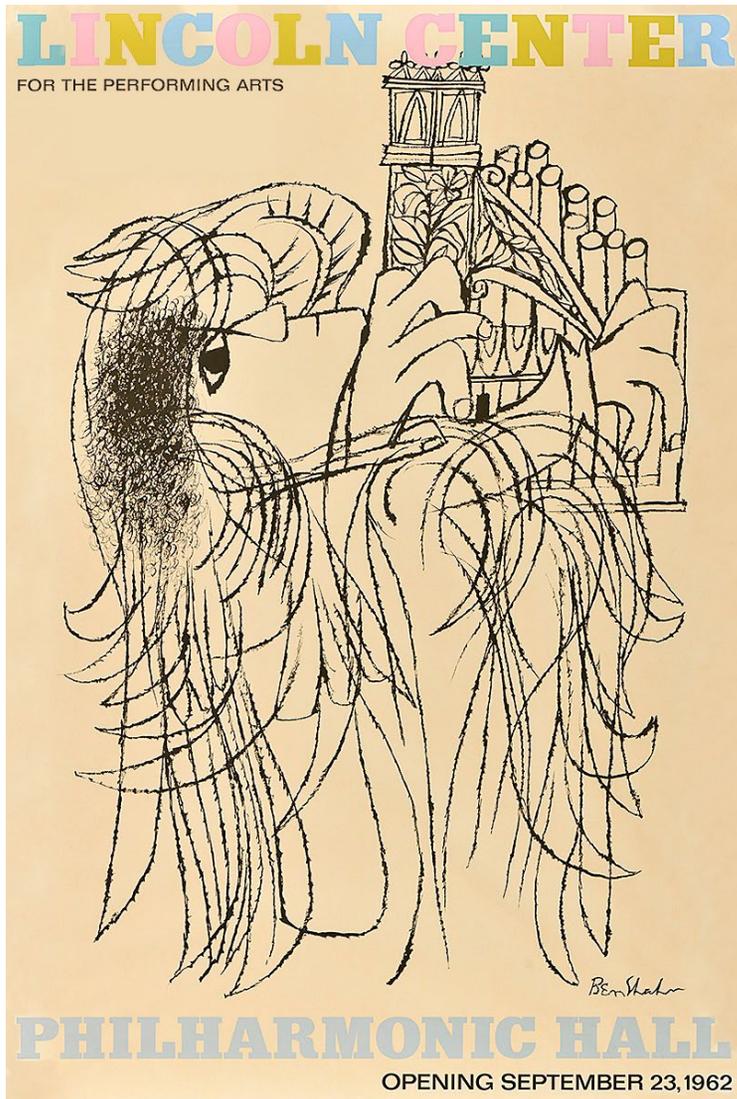
John F. Lynch

Robert Leonardi

**Graphic**

**Installation**

Keith Immediato



### **Lincoln Center/Philharmonic Hall, 1962**

Ben Shahn (1898–1969)

*Poster House Permanent Collection*

- Released on August 20, 1962, this poster announces the opening of the first completed building within the new Lincoln Center complex: the Philharmonic Hall (known today as David Geffen Hall).
- As an outspoken political artist who was once brought before the House Un-American Activities Committee for being a Communist sympathizer, Shahn was a daring choice to introduce a new institution.
- The design features an image of an angel playing a Medieval portative organ—a figure that often appeared in Shahn’s work and which fit nicely with the purpose of the Philharmonic Hall.
- Vera List began privately collecting the work of Ben Shahn in the 1950s, particularly his paintings featuring Jewish themes. This poster also marked the year that Vera became chair of the Jewish Museum’s board of governors, ushering in an era when that institution began collecting the works of many of the same artists who created these posters.



## New York Film Festival, 2003

Larry Rivers (1923–2002)

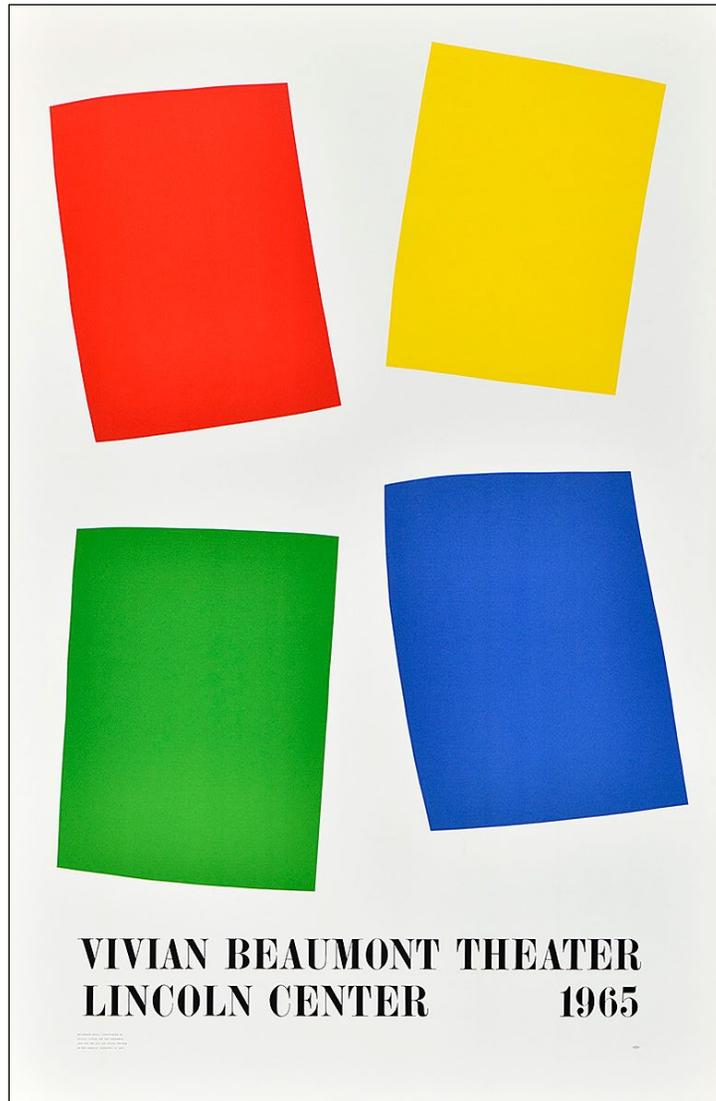
- Helmed by film critic Richard Roud and Cinema16 president Amos Vogel, the New York Film Festival was founded to celebrate the best in world cinema, from mainstream productions to arthouse films. At this time, the United States did not have a major international film festival similar to the kind long-established in Europe.
- This first year, Lincoln Center presented 20 new feature-length films and additional shorts, while the Museum of Modern Art screened ten exceptional older films from their collection that had never had a New York premiere. This collaborative effort did not continue.
- The festival opened with the surrealist Mexican film *The Exterminating Angel*, still considered one of the greatest films of all time, and also featured the work of Jean-Luc Godard and Roman Polanski.
- Over the week leading up to the festival, Larry Rivers actively painted a billboard outside the venue on 65th Street and Broadway. The composition—the largest he had ever made—was based on the design he created for the official poster.
- As the “Godfather of Pop Art,” Rivers was a favorite artist of the Lists, and would go on to paint a compelling portrait of Vera that is now in the collection of the Jewish Museum.



### New York State Theater, 1964

Robert Indiana (1928–2018)

- Created by architects Philip Johnson and John Burgee as a satellite venue for the 1964–65 World’s Fair, the New York State Theater originally belonged to the State (thus its name). After the fair, ownership was transferred to New York City, which currently leases the theater to Lincoln Center.
- Known today as the David H. Koch Theater, the venue is home to the New York City Ballet and the American Ballet Theater. Until 2011, it also housed the New York City Opera.
- Best known today for his LOVE sculpture in the heart of Manhattan, Robert Indiana was gaining international attention at the time of this commission thanks to a recent purchase of his work by the Museum of Modern Art.
- The central motif separating the words on this poster is an aerial view of the fountain and radiating pavement design at Lincoln Center. The color palette was derived from the original auditorium decor at the venue, which ironically stands on the site of Indiana’s first studio in New York City.



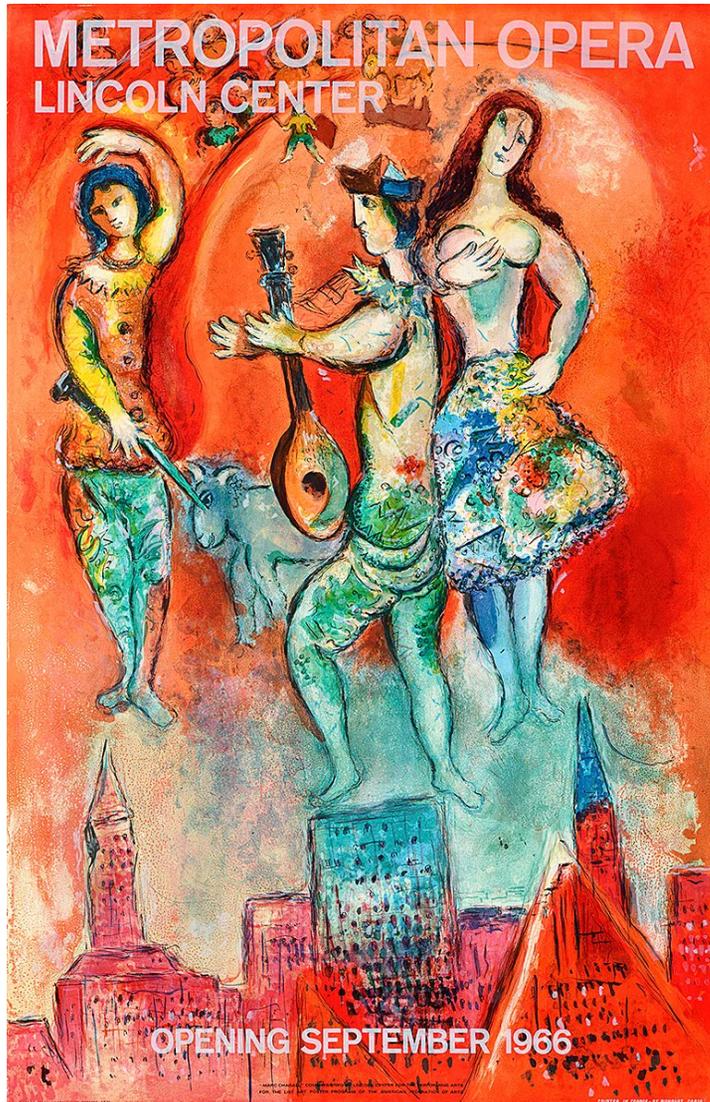
**“I always felt that if people’s sensibilities were awakened, they would seek to make the whole city a more amenable place in which to live.”**

—Vera List

**Vivian Beaumont Theater, 1965**

Ellsworth Kelly (1923–2015)

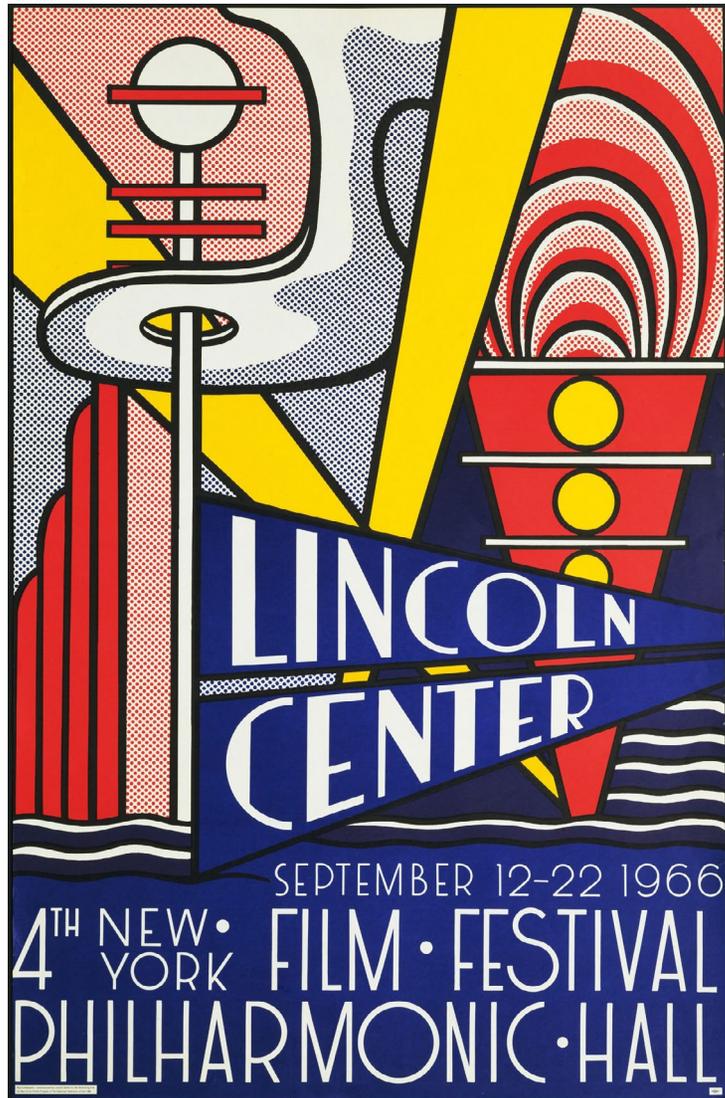
- Designed by Eero Saarinen, the Vivian Beaumont Theater is the only non-Broadway theatrical venue in New York City whose productions are eligible for Tony Awards.
- The building opened on October 21, 1965 with the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center’s revival of Georg Büchner’s 1835 play *Danton’s Death*, featuring James Earl Jones. This performance propelled Jones into his breakout role on *As The World Turns*, where he became the first Black actor to feature regularly on a daytime soap opera.
- As a minimalist Color Field painter, Ellsworth Kelly was an unusual choice for an advertising campaign, especially during a period when abstraction was viewed as inappropriate for mass communication and public art.
- It is also interesting to note that Vera List picked Kelly for this project less than a year after his personal breakup with the designer of the previous poster in this series, Robert Indiana.



## Metropolitan Opera, 1966

Marc Chagall (1887–1985)

- Built to replace the “Old Met” on 39th Street, The Metropolitan Opera House opened on September 16, 1966 as the largest opera venue in the world.
- Chagall had a strong relationship with the Met, having created elaborate sets for a new production of *The Magic Flute* that remained in rotation until the 1981–82 season. He also painted the two multistory murals which fill the opera house’s main windows—*The Sources of Music* and *The Triumph of Music*—which were officially unveiled a few days after his posters appeared around New York.
- The poster for the opening of the venue is based on a motif in the upper left area of *The Triumph of Music* and is commonly referred to as Carmen (after the opera by Georges Bizet). In it, the figure holding the mandolin is a portrait of Rudolf Bing, the then-director of The Metropolitan Opera.
- Unlike the other posters in this series, this image was printed by Atelier Mourlot in Paris. Chagall had a longstanding friendship with an employee there, and Vera enjoyed the idea of her project being part of the great tradition of French poster art.



**“That first poster was the initial step along a path that would connect hundreds of artists.”**

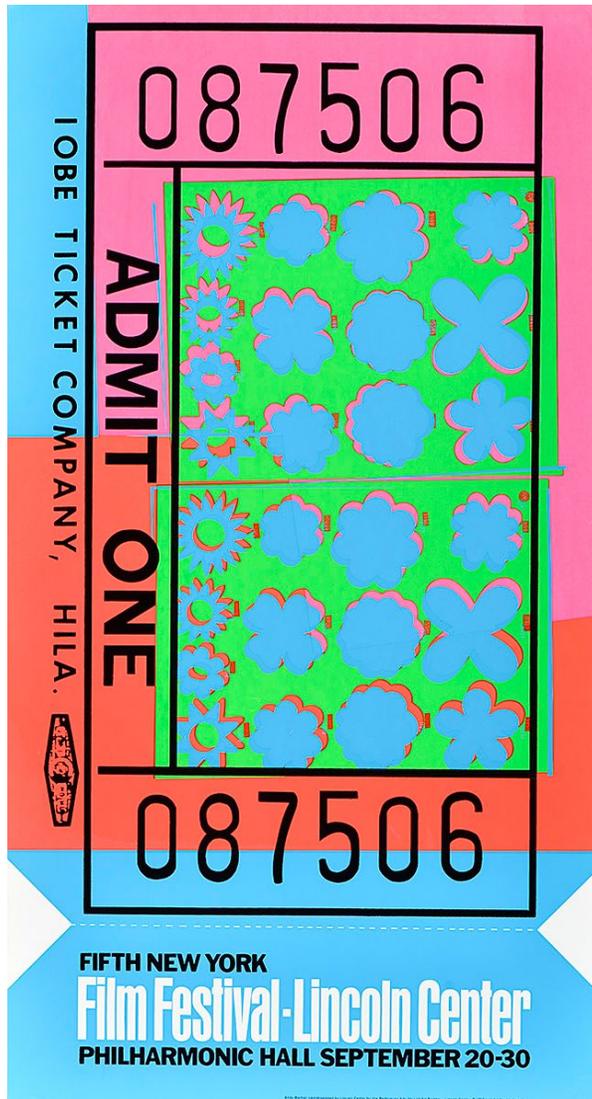
—Charles A. Riley II, Art Historian

**New York Film Festival, 1967**

Roy Lichtenstein (1923–97)

*Private Collection, Vermont*

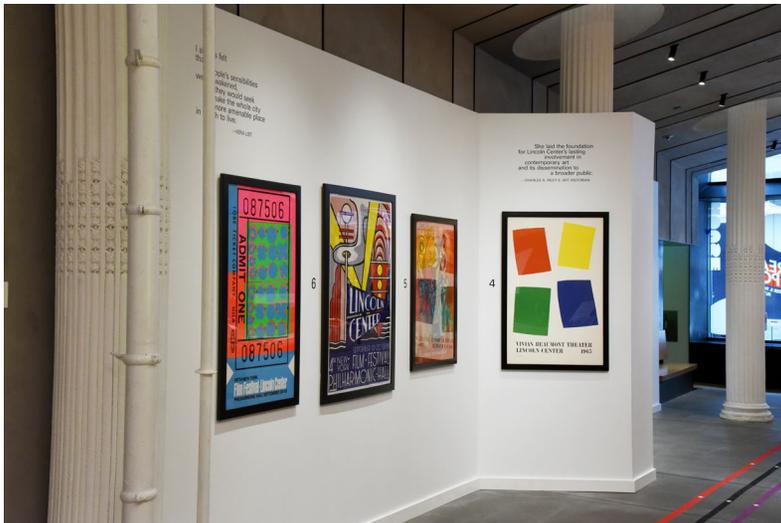
- Following Larry Rivers’s inaugural poster for the New York Film Festival, Saul Bass and Bruce Conner created the designs for the posters in the subsequent two years. Roy Lichtenstein’s poster for the fourth iteration of the event, however, is especially notable for the way in which he effectively uses Pop Art to suggest the excitement of the festival.
- That same year, Lichtenstein began his Modern Paintings series that incorporated Art Deco architectural motifs, elements that are also evident in this poster.
- The 1966 cinematic lineup included films by Angès Varda, Bernardo Bertolucci, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and two works by Jean-Luc Godard, reinforcing the festival’s early focus on European films.



### New York Film Festival, 1967

Andy Warhol (1928–87)

- Andy Warhol's fluorescent design for the fifth New York Film Festival remains the most acclaimed poster in the Lincoln Center series.
- A classic example of Pop Art, the composition plays on two of Warhol's dominant themes: the ticket stub is both a reference to the celebrity of stars appearing in these films as well as the commodity of purchasing a ticket to see a movie. The repeating floral motif on the ticket is also a nod to his now-iconic *Flowers* (1964) series.
- This year also marked the beginning of American writer and filmmaker Susan Sontag's decade-long appointment to the festival's prestigious selection committee, as well as Jean-Luc Godard's unprecedented achievement of having three films screened. A committee favorite, his work had also been represented in each of the previous Film Festivals.
- While posters are created for every iteration of the New York Film Festival, The Vera List Art Project only produced the first 14 designs.



**POSTER**

**HOUSE**