

BRITISH FILM POSTERS

An Illustrated History

SIM BRANAGHAN



arrived in London in 1968, where he was immediately taken on by Artist Partners. Vieweg moved quickly into film work, though a lot of his output seems to have been visualising only. He worked with Lindsay Anderson, producing designs for *If...* (1968) and its sequel, *Oh, Lucky Man!* (1973), and produced a finished illustration for *The Molly Maguires* (1970), with Richard Harris and Sean Connery (though he thinks Brian Sanders's painting may have been used instead). Illustrations of his that were definitely printed, all from designs by John Raymer, include *The Legend of Nigger Charlie* (1972), a black Western starring Fred Williamson; *Play It Again Sam* (1972), possibly the best-ever Woody Allen poster, with terrific monochrome portraits of Allen and Diane Keaton; and *The Eagle Has Landed*, which he thinks was probably his last piece of film work.¹⁴⁶

Michael Leonard, the last of the four AP illustrators to have worked regularly on film posters, has had perhaps the most distinguished career of all. Born in Bangalore, India, in 1933, Leonard studied at St Martin's School of Art between 1954 and 1957, then worked as an illustrator, joining Artist Partners at the end of the 1950s. He first exhibited as a painter in 1972, and has had one-man shows in London and New York, receiving a commission to paint a portrait of the Queen in 1986 for her sixtieth birthday. Examples of his work are in both the Victoria and Albert Museum and the National Portrait Gallery, and several monographs have been written about him by critics Lincoln Kirstein and Edward Lucie-Smith. However, he was not above taking on film poster work. His quads include: *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* (1970) with Barbra Streisand, and a powerful design for *The Day of the Jackal* (1973), featuring a portrait of De Gaulle reflected in assassin Edward Fox's pupil. Other AP artists who worked on film posters include Ann Meisel (*The Front Page*, 1974), Stuart Bodek (*The Incredible Sarah*, 1976), Brian Froud (*The Dark Crystal*, 1982) and Alan Lee (*The Company of Wolves*, 1984).¹⁴⁷

Another popular freelance illustrator of the 1970s, responsible for several well-known quads of the period, is Mike Vaughan. Born in Weston-super-Mare in 1940, his father was apparently an engineer manufacturing dental appliances, and his son never attended art school, being completely self-taught. Vaughan joined a London agency when he was about sixteen as a teaboy, and slowly

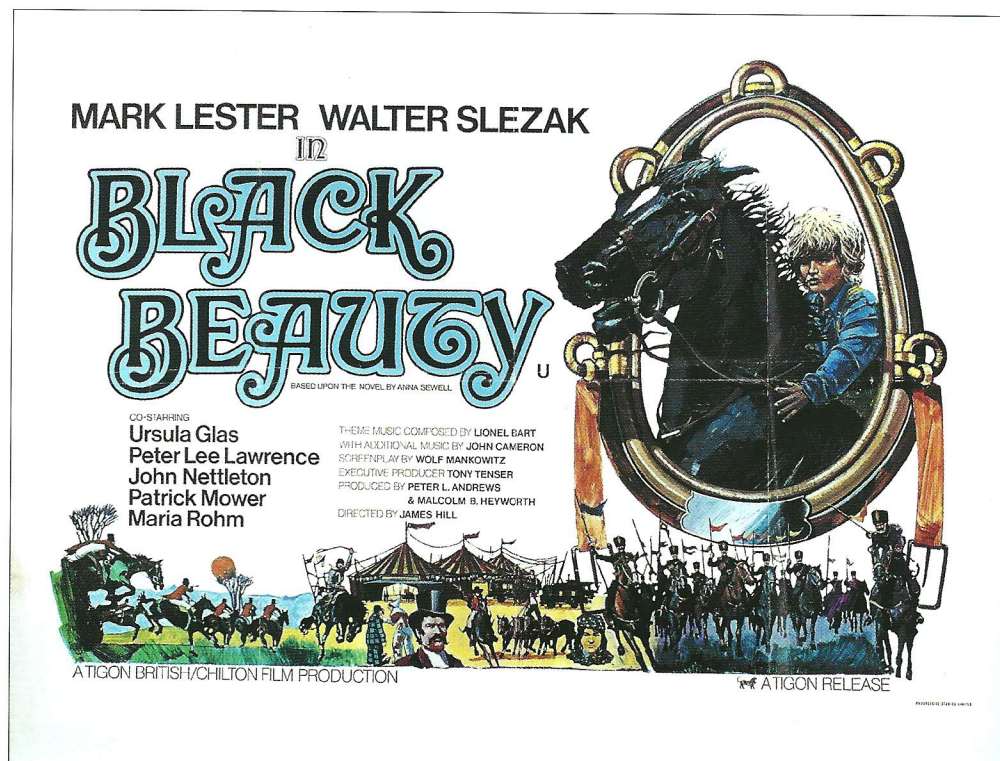
worked his way up through the ranks, learning his trade by constantly observing the other artists around him. In the 1960s, he worked on some prestigious accounts like British Airways, British Steel and American Express, and also did plenty of bookjacket illustration, including children's annual covers.¹⁴⁸

Vaughan had a distinctive style, quite loose and often employing big splashy backgrounds similar to Arnaldo Putzu's work, but with a much heavier use of outline – his original pencil marks underneath the paint are occasionally still visible. His poster work seems to have begun at the end of the 1960s, mostly for EMI, and includes several late Hammer Horrors: *The Vampire Lovers*, *Lust for a Vampire*, *Scars of Dracula/Horror of Frankenstein* (1971) and *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb*. He also painted *The Deserter* (1970) for Paramount and a few others. One of his last posters seems to have been the *Thief of Bagdad* clone *Arabian Adventure* (1979) – it was a sign of the times that the best tagline review EMI could provide was *Variety's* 'Star Wars with flying carpets!'. Vaughan abandoned commercial work at the end of the 1980s to move into highly finished fine art subjects, sold through prestigious London galleries, including Nancy Attwood's Essential Art in Harefield. He specialised in dramatic scenes of racing yachts, but also painted other sporting events like golf and motor racing, plus wildlife portraits. These included some powerful studies of big cats, several of which became very popular as prints. Attwood recalls him as 'a thoroughly nice guy, very easy to work with and with a terrific sense of humour', but extremely outspoken: 'he always said exactly what he thought about things – definitely shot straight from the hip'. Sadly, Mike Vaughan died suddenly in July 2003 from a blood clot on the brain, a cruelly premature end to a versatile talent that was clearly still evolving.

Another freelance whose career followed a strikingly similar path is no-nonsense illustrator Mike Francis. Born in Mitcham, Surrey, in May 1938, son of a proofreader, Francis was already showing some promise as an artist by the time he left school at fifteen. An art teacher suggested a scholarship at Sutton, but with his father reluctant to contribute to the fees, Francis instead became a porter at Covent Garden for a few months. However, when a friend landed a job as a studio junior, Francis felt encouraged to try to do the



Arabian Adventure (1979). Printed by Lonsdale & Bartholomew. Illustration by Mike Vaughan, from a design by Eddie Paul. Another interesting example of what might be described as Vaughan's deliberately naive style, on this rather half-baked British fantasy. (AC)



Black Beauty (1971). Printed by Progressive Publicity. Design and illustration by Mike Francis. Francis's first film poster, for Tony Tenser's lively children's adaptation. (AC)

same, and was taken on by Rome Studios in Soho, one of the four big London commercial art outfits (the others were Hawke, Gilchris and Fleet Advertising). The studio was run by 'Miss Rome' (actually Romanovsky), 'a Russian naturalised-American lady with famously individual dress-sense, who used to wear this incredible ginger wig and a Robin Hood hat complete with a feather – a real character!'¹⁴⁹ It employed about thirty artists, perhaps a quarter of whom were women, including specialists in figure work, still life, car illustration, lettering and so on. The major long-term contracts were car manufacturers like Morris and Ford, plus washing powders brands like Persil and Daz.

Francis started out as a messenger boy on £2.50 a week, and, after a while, was given small illustration jobs. Just as he was beginning to find his feet, however, he was called up for National Service in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps at Blackdown, spending part of his time there in the glasshouse: 'Well I was quite a drinker in those days ...'. Eventually, in 1958, he was discharged and went straight back to Rome Studios, to a welcome raise of £4 a week. Francis stayed with Rome for the next twelve years, soon getting his own desk and beginning to do car advertising and still-life work for products like Rowntree's Kit-Kat. However, following the death of Miss Rome, the studio set-up began to deteriorate. Finally, in 1970, Francis left to join Illustrators of London on Great Marlborough Street, a group run by Ivan Rose, an artist with some earlier experience in film work, 'who taught me a hell of a lot'. At the same point, Francis was introduced to Tony Tenser, who began to supply him with regular film work for Tigon, beginning with the quad for *Black Beauty* in April 1971. He also recalls producing posters for Hammer and other independent companies, often painting two-colour double crowns for the *Underground*. He rarely signed his work – 'we were told not to' – though his signature is on *King Elephant* (1971), a wildlife documentary that was quite a success. He and Rose left Illustrators of London in 1973 to help set up a commercial studio/illustration unit for a photographic company called Hatton, while still turning out various film work for Warners ('very finicky') and MGM, via their art buyer Elizabeth Hesketh. This period lasted for about eighteen months, until in 1974 Francis won the National Gallery's 150th Anniversary Award, and with the



Mike Francis in 1973, a couple of years into his film career. (Courtesy of Mike Francis)

prize money under his belt decided to go freelance and work from home.

He estimates that he averaged a couple of film posters a year, less than 15 per cent of his overall output, though he also did a lot of video covers in the 1980s, principally for CIC.¹⁵⁰ Some of Francis's later quads came via *Downton's* – Colin Holloway, John Raymer, Vic Fair and Brian Bysouth all gave him work at one time or another. Many of his better-known titles date from late in his film career, including *The Terminator* (1984 – a famously iconic design), *American Dreamers* (1984), *The Karate Kid* (1984), *Not Quite Jerusalem* (1985) and *The Holocaust Covenant* (1985). There were a few later quads and video covers, but, by about 1990, film illustration work had dried up completely. Since the mid-1960s, Francis has also been painting highly finished photorealist work in the American style for exhibition around various high-profile London galleries, and recently this side of his career has taken off properly, with his work being bought by celebrities including Jerry Hall, Bob Monkhouse and Robbie Williams.

Ivan Rose, Francis's acknowledged mentor, was born in Wembley in September 1935, the son of a hairdresser. He attended Ealing Art



The Terminator (1984). Printed by W. E. Berry. Design and illustration by Mike Francis. One of the artist's last poster assignments and easily his best remembered, with an iconic portrait of Schwarzenegger's robotic assassin. (AC)



Goldengirl (1979). No printer credited. Design and illustration by Ivan Rose. A really excellent series of portraits on this now long-forgotten sporting melodrama. (AC)

School, leaving at fifteen to work briefly for a model-makers in Hammersmith, then later a photographic studio. He gained an apprenticeship with Rank Screen Services in 1951, doing photorealist illustration for subjects like restaurant interiors, and, at one point, even got involved with one of Rank's occasional flings with cartoon animation. However, he was sacked at the age of twenty-two for being 'a disturbing influence on the other working staff', an irreverent anti-authoritarianism that meant he gained and lost various other studio jobs over the next four years. He eventually went freelance in 1962 to specialise in magazine illustration.¹⁵¹ Rose's film work began in the 1970s following the formation of Illustrators of London, though his output was only intermittent, perhaps only ten quads in total. Titles he recalls date from the end of the decade: *The Wanderers* (1979), *The Onion Field* (1979) and *Goldengirl* (1979). Since the 1980s, he has worked mainly in storyboarding and animatics, with the odd commercial poster.

One mysterious freelance who has resisted all attempts to track him down is John Payne. His unique jagged monogram appears on dozens of quads from the 1960s, principally for the independent distributors Gala and Compton. Gala was set up in 1958 by Kenneth Rive (1918–2002) to distribute mostly erotic foreign-language films to the arthouses, and Payne was the company's 'house artist'. His distinctive, almost Italian-style illustrations featured on titles as diverse as *Adolescents* (1960), *Vice and Virtue* (1962), *Four Kinds of Love* (1965) and *Night Games* (1966), as well as fantasy epics like *Goliath and the Vampires* (1964). Rive also ventured into production in the mid-1960s, with offbeat horror items like Lindsay Schonteff's *Devil Doll* (1964), a reworking of the 'haunted ventriloquist's dummy' theme, for which Payne contributed a strikingly nightmarish surrealist design. The artist also seems to have worked for even smaller distributors, for example Archway Films' *Death Comes from Outer Space* (1961).



Goliath and the Vampires (1964). No printer credited, but probably Broomhead Litho. Illustration by John Payne, adapting US campaign artwork by Reynold Brown. A madcap Italian peplum/horror, Payne still obviously liked this enough to sign it. (AC)