



(Cover art not final.)

For Immediate Release

RICHARD AMSEL: THE ART OF ENTERTAINMENT
to explore the life and work of celebrated illustrator Richard Amsel

In tandem with a feature documentary currently in post-production, the forthcoming book will reveal extensive details about one of the most popular entertainment artists of the 20th century, who tragically succumbed to AIDS complications in 1985

(LOS ANGELES – DECEMBER 1, 2023) *RICHARD AMSEL: THE ART OF ENTERTAINMENT* is a forthcoming retrospective book on the life and work of one of the most popular illustrators of entertainment art in the 20th century. Known for his portraiture work of such luminaries as Barbra Streisand, Lily Tomlin, and Bette Midler, as well as numerous *TV Guide* covers, and iconic movie posters for *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Sting*, *The Dark Crystal*, and *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*, Richard Amsel

succumbed to AIDS complications in late 1985, at the young age of 37.

The book announcement coincides with World AIDS Day on December 1st, and shortly precedes what would have been the artist's 76th birthday on December 4th.

Despite a professional career spanning only 16 years, Mr. Amsel became one of the most prolific and popular American illustrators of the 1970s and 1980s. He remains a titanic figure in the world of entertainment art, one whose work has inspired generations of illustrators and continues to be enjoyed by millions of art and film lovers around the world.

Mr. Amsel's other prominent movie posters include *Hello Dolly!*, *Chinatown*, *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, *The Late Show*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *The Big Sleep*, *The Shootist*, *Death on the Nile*, and *Flash Gordon*. His poster for the 1982 blockbuster rerelease of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was named "The Greatest Hand-Drawn Movie Poster of all time" by *Total Film* in 2011, and remains one of the most recognizable images ever associated with Indiana Jones.

Mr. Amsel was recently inducted into The Society of Illustrators Hall of Fame, in a special honorary event held in New York City last Sept. 9th.

The book is being developed by writer and filmmaker Adam McDaniel, in tandem with a feature documentary about Amsel now in post production, titled *AMSEL: ILLUSTRATOR OF THE LOST ART*. Both projects, made through an exclusive agreement with Howard Feinberg of the Richard Amsel estate, will include extensive selections from the many hundreds of images McDaniel has collected of Amsel's work over the years – including a large number of personal and unused pieces that have never before been published.

Legendary movie poster artist Drew Struzan and his wife, author Dylan Struzan, will be contributing a special written foreword to the book, as will Mr. Feinberg, and artists David Edward Byrd and Jolino Beserra, both of whom were good friends with Mr. Amsel.

Other testimonials and commentary provided for the book and film include such notable figures as Hollywood producer and executive Sid Ganis, writers Michael Musto and Bruce Vilanch, art directors Jerry Alten, Spiros Angelikas, Merv Bloch, and Mike Salisbury, Jim Henson Foundation president Cheryl Henson, animators Stephen Anderson and Gary Goldman, artists Blake Armstrong, Alice "Bunny" Carter, Howard Chaykin, Greg Hildebrandt, Kyle Lambert, Marvin Mattelson, Ann Meisel, David Negrón, Paul Shipper, Mark Raats, and William Stout, filmmaker Erik Sharkey, actress and singer Charlo Crossley, music producer and songwriter Bob Esty, and *Flash Gordon* star Sam J. Jones, among many, many others.

McDaniel has interviewed over 60 people around the country thus far, but hopes word of mouth, and goodwill towards Amsel's creative legacy, might help attract the participation of other famous figures. (Harrison Ford, George Lucas, Bette Midler, Jack Nicholson, and Barbra Streisand all respectfully declined McDaniel's invitations, while others, including Steven Spielberg, Barry Manilow, Richard Chamberlain, and Lily Tomlin, have yet to respond.)

McDaniel noted that as those who knew Amsel personally are now well into their twilight years, getting new testimonials has become a race against time. Four subjects who filmed interviews have since died, as did numerous others who McDaniel had approached – including actress Sally Kellerman, and artists Mark English, David Palladini, and Charlie White.

The documentary's editing is "still taking form," McDaniel says, adding the possibility that the final

product may become a multi-part series instead of just a feature-length film. As for the book, McDaniel has ambitions to make the final product as thorough and comprehensive as possible, both regarding the art as well as the artist.

“When I first imagined filming a documentary about the artist, I naturally planned to focus on his remarkable body of work,” McDaniel said, having been a fan of Amsel’s since he was a child. “Such are the things we all know. Amsel’s movie poster artwork is particularly legendary, iconic – and often exceeded the quality of the very films they showcased, revered in the realm of entertainment art. But the more research I made into Amsel himself, the more I shifted my focus into what I learned was a remarkable, personal life story. The art, I found, was just the beginning.”

Amsel, who was gay, was relatively introverted and shy about his private life, though close friends provide many accounts of the artist’s wicked sense of humor. McDaniel hopes to strike a balance between some of the more whimsical stories of Amsel’s life, and the tragedy of his early death.

The book and film will explore Amsel’s personal life, including his early childhood in the Philadelphia suburbs, his formative years studying at the Philadelphia College of Art (now The University of the Arts), his career in New York from the time of Stonewall through the rise of AIDS in the face of the Reagan era, and his eventual move to Los Angeles. It will also provide details into the artist’s declining health and final days, and the chaos that ensued regarding the control and ownership of his work following his death.

McDaniel recalls how illustrator David Edward Byrd, who was a close friend of Amsel’s, often described him as a creative “savant”. Byrd and McDaniel wonder if Amsel may have been on the developmental spectrum. “This is conjecture on my part,” McDaniel says, adding, “If he was, he was high functioning. But so much more knowledge and research has been made into that in recent years. We’ll never know, but it’s possible.”

McDaniel also shares some of Amsel’s achievements beyond the realm of movie poster art. He was an aspiring photographer and, as an avid Disney fan, hoped to break into the animation industry.

“He had a lot of unrealized dreams,” McDaniel says. “You can’t help but wonder what he’d be doing if he was still with us, and all the wonderful work that should have been.”

McDaniel has already received interest from several publishers. “I have to focus on the documentary first,” he said, “though the bulk of the work on the book is being done along the way. Work on one directly feeds into the other, with over 100 hours of interview footage and testimonials, as well as archival research. And then, of course, there’s the artwork!”

The journey in making the documentary and book has been a long one, beset with several challenges. Early attempts to collaborate with members of Amsel’s close surviving family ultimately ended with a falling out. “It came to the point where the project would not happen. A collaboration was impossible,” McDaniel says. “I tried working with them for over a year. I handed them all my work, all my research, all my contacts. This was not reciprocated in any way, and I was met with, initially, delay, delay, delay, demands and then resistance. I don’t think, you know, some of the testimonials I heard at that time were completely forthcoming, and so it was necessary for me to just move on, take my work, and do the project.”

Fortunately, one of Amsel’s cousins reached out to McDaniel in early 2022, and filmed a telling interview that summer about the problematic dynamics among the artist’s immediate family. It’s a testimonial McDaniel is especially grateful for. “To not have someone in the family involved would have been a gaping

hole in the project," he says. "The interview we did was pretty short, but it was direct, and it was honest. And that's exactly what I needed."

Another challenge, McDaniel explains, was trying to reconcile some of the conflicting narratives he had been told by certain people about their relationships with Amsel over the years, and unraveling the truth about the proper legal ownership of the late artist's estate following his untimely death in 1985. McDaniel's investigation entailed exhaustive research through probate and court records, and retaining an IP attorney to make formal legal inquiries into different copyright and trademark filings.

Ultimately, McDaniel finally found some definitive answers. He identified the rightful legal heir to the Richard Amsel estate, now identified as Howard Feinberg. Mr. Feinberg is the surviving nephew of the late artist Gary Bralow, a close friend to whom Richard Amsel left his estate and appointed his executor. (As for his own family, Amsel disowned them in his will – a fact that, McDaniel believes, at least partly explains their reluctance in fully cooperating on the project.)

It's an unusual case where a filmmaker's involvement has directly contributed to the narrative of the subject matter itself. "In the 33 years since Gary Bralow's death, no one had ever reached out to the Bralow family about the proper ownership and legal control of Richard Amsel's work," McDaniel says. "In my opinion, it's a shame and a disgrace, and it's time for the truth to be told."

McDaniel remains greatly appreciative of Howard Feinberg's support and enthusiasm toward the project. "It's nice to have someone's blessing for a change," McDaniel says. "Howard is someone who doesn't have an agenda, other than wanting Richard Amsel's name to be known, and his work to be remembered. It's what his uncle, Gary Bralow, would have wanted." (Bralow himself passed away from AIDS in 1990, just over four years after Amsel.)

Perhaps predictably, the biggest challenge remains a financial one. While the documentary has generated some financial support through crowdfunding over the years, McDaniel explains that he's personally financed most of the endeavor himself. Despite his modest means, he remains undeterred – though he frustratingly admits that it's hindered his progress. "2023 was a challenging year," McDaniel says. "The actors' and writers' strikes effectively shut down the entertainment industry, and as a result, our project only received a fraction of the usual fundraising. Many of the benefactors we've relied on now found themselves cash strapped. It's certainly understandable. The effects hit home for me, too, as I found myself out of work, and struggling to find new opportunities. Hopefully things will improve in the year to come."

McDaniel is considering doing a crowdfunding campaign for the book. (For legal and tax reasons, he emphasized such a fundraising endeavor would need to be separate from the documentary.) But he wants to explore all his options. "So many people want their piece of the pie," he says, "and all too often, these projects get tripped up in too much red tape. Best I can do is simply move forward, and surround myself with good people. The narrative is really starting to come together, and today's printing technology makes it much more economically feasible to do an independent, small-scale run, and have control, if that's what it ultimately takes."

The final challenge concerns the art itself. Over the course of 15 years, McDaniel has acquired over a thousand images of Amsel's art, including a small number of originals. Images range from childhood drawings to school and personal projects, to a seemingly endless array of preliminary sketches and unused concepts, most of which have never seen the light of day. "It would be impossible to publish them all," McDaniel says. "The film and book will present just be the tip of the iceberg. But it's a glorious iceberg, and shows just how prolific and meticulous Richard Amsel was. For every movie poster and *TV Guide* cover

we've seen published – and there are thirty-some-odd of each – there's an untold number of unused pieces. Some are just thumbnail sketches, while others are full-fledged, polished, beautiful pieces of art."

As successful as Richard Amsel was, not every one of his movie posters were used. Poster designs for such prominent films as *Terms of Endearment*, *Greystoke*, *Yentl*, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, *Norma Rae*, *The Rose*, *All Night Long*, *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*, and *Funny Lady* all featured artwork by someone else...or photo montages concocted by nameless marketing committees.

"Amsel's work on *Coal Miner's Daughter* and *Norma Rae* represent some of the most sensitive, delicate portraits he ever did," McDaniel says. "And he chose to draw them that way, to follow his own creative instincts, in defiance of what the studios wanted. You have to admire the guy. Everyone says how shy and soft-spoken he was, but artistically, he knew he was good. And boy, he sure had cajones."

There's also the matter of presenting the art in its best possible form. The ravages of time take their toll; colors and details fade, paper rips and yellows. McDaniel, a graphic artist himself with a background at such companies as Warner Bros. and Disney, has applied his skills in digitally restoring and cleaning up many of Amsel's most iconic works. The process has taken him years, and he hopes this will allow people to experience Amsel's iconic images in an all new light. (The documentary takes the additional step of *animating* them, as evidenced by an early teaser trailer released in October of last year.)

"Regarding movie poster art and my love for it, my position is I don't really care if it's classical art, if it's fine art, or commercial art," McDaniel says. "Even if many people consider it to be kitsch or tacky, if we take joy from it, if we see beauty in it, if we can admire the skill and craftsmanship that goes into that kind of illustration, does that make it less worthy? Should we love it any less? I'd argue no."

"Richard loved movies. He loved animation. And one of the things I want to do with this project is, wherever he is, I hope he knows that the movies loved him back."

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For More Information:

AMSEL: ILLUSTRATOR OF THE LOST ART official website:

www.richardamselmovie.com

www.richardamselofficial.com

The film's teaser trailer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUDSBw0ACFU>

Details on the book:

<https://www.richardamselmovie.com/the-book>

The film's fundraising page:

<https://www.richardamselmovie.com/donate-contribute>

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