

## Best in Show

*Recommendations by Robert Shuster*



**'Die, Nazi Scum!'**

Andrew Edlin Gallery

134 Tenth Avenue

212-206-9723, edlingallery.com

Through January 14

# Posterized!

**T**he visual demonization of Hitler and his gang was a lively business during the Second World War, but no one did the job more colorfully or with greater urgency than TASS, the Soviet Union's news and propaganda agency.

In a five-year span, beginning with the German invasion of Russia in 1941, a volunteer group of artists, writers, and poets produced more than 1,200 morale-boosting posters—sampled here in this fascinating exhibit—that showed the Nazis as cornered beasts, cowardly buffoons, and brutal thugs. Cartoonish caricatures borrowed the fluid lines of 19th-century political satire, but also prefigured the nasty exaggerations of 1970s underground comics. Portrayed as a greenish long-nosed troll, Hitler succumbs to a bucketful of orange molten metal from a steel workers' vat; he scampers in his underwear along Napoleon's famous route of retreat; and he lies prostrate on a map of Europe with his ass on fire.

Because printing presses were mostly melted down for armaments, TASS actually used an assembly line of stenciling to print the posters—a massive, time-consuming effort that perhaps only the Soviets could have mustered. The technical limitations, a relatively narrow palette, and a need to present forceful messages led the artists, largely uncensored, to make their designs simple and bold. The metaphors were never subtle. A slack-jawed gorilla, bearing the German cross and holding a machine gun, stalks across the bodies of Russian citizens. Elsewhere, surrounded by the enemy's red flags, a desperate, three-legged German wolf bleeds into a snowy expanse. After the Allied victory, Stalin's bland socialist realism once again dominated the visual arts, but it was the regime's rare wartime support for creative satire that had helped trounce the Nazi scourge.



**Hitler feels the heat:  
Soviet propaganda poster, 1942**