Lora Lamm’s (b. 1928) swimwear poster for the chic Milanese department store La Rinascente is both captivatingly simple and atmospheric. With her illustrative style that combines subtle humor with poetic charm, Lamm seduced female customers to buy. Lamm’s work has been enjoying a comeback in recent years, speaking to the timelessness of her creations.

A half-length female figure turns her back to the viewer. Although we can’t see her face, we sense that her gaze is fixed on the sea before her. The water is indicated with a faint brushstroke. The woman’s head is tilted slightly and perched on a swan-like neck. Her hair is hidden under a swimming cap. Although the poster advertises fashions for the summer season, the swimsuit is only of secondary importance. Lora Lamm’s great art lies in the power of suggestion. With her highly reduced images in soft colors, she manages to summon the whole lifestyle of the postwar years in Italy. The sober objectivity of the Swiss graphic style was anathema to her. In charge of the complete visual identity of the La Rinascente department store, she crafted her very own mode of expression. Inspiration came in part from the contemporary American commercial illustrators she so admired. Lamm realized that she had to find a novel way to address the store’s predominantly female clientele. Her creative process was the secret to the success of her posters: Lamm invariably drafted her designs in tiny DIN A6 format, to capture only the atmosphere she wanted to create. And she sometimes whimsically combined her illustrations with photographic elements. Lamm’s protagonists are usually cheerful, cosmopolitan women who stand for a new image of the female sex. She once remarked that she was looking to elicit a smile, not laughter, with her posters, and the success of her efforts still beguiles us today. (Bettina Richter)