

Museums Entertainment • Long Island

Maxfield Parrish exhibit opens at Nassau County Museum of Art

Updated November 18, 2015 3:18 PM By Steve Parks

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Paintings and prints from national museum of illustration
- Popular artist's work on display until Feb. 28

Pop quiz: Name the artist who, according to historians, once had reproductions of his paintings in one-quarter of American households.

Norman Rockwell? Bzzz. Andy Warhol? No way. Many if not most Americans wouldn't consider depictions of Campbell's soup cans art. But close in another way. Both worked in advertising.

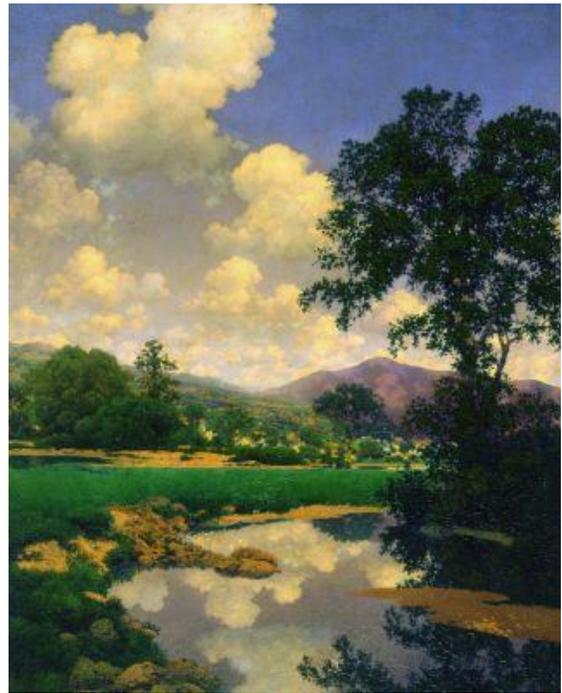
Give up? The answer is revealed in "Maxfield Parrish: Paintings and Prints from the National Museum of American Illustration," opening Saturday at the Nassau County Museum of Art.

"Parrish was so well known and appreciated," says Lawrence Cutler, co-curator with his wife, Judy, "that Woodrow Wilson moved the summer White House to Plainfield, New Hampshire, because the first lady was so taken by his art."

The Cutlers founded the American Illustration Museum in Newport, Rhode Island. "They selected this show specifically for us," says Nassau director Karl Willers, "with its landscapes reminding us of the lush surroundings here on Long Island."

GOLDEN AGE

Born in 1870, more than 10 years before Picasso and 23 years before Rockwell, Parrish had a career that covered the breadth of what is known as the Golden Age of Illustration. Yet for



"June Skies," a 1940 oil on panel, is part of the "Maxfield Parrish: Paintings and Prints from the National Museum of American Illustration" exhibit opening Nov. 21, 2015, at the Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn Harbor. Photo Credit: National Museum of American Illustration

much of his career, he was a fine art painter who knew how to market himself. “I’m a businessman with a brush,” he was once quoted as saying.

His first big break was a commission to illustrate “Mother Goose in Prose” (1897) by L. Frank Baum (“The Wizard of Oz”), followed by color plates for Eugene Field’s “Poems of Childhood” (1904) — both projects represented among the Nassau exhibit’s 190 images. Through the 1920s his imagery was ubiquitous on the covers of Colliers, Hearst and Life magazines. He was also a favorite of advertisers, including Edison-Mazda Lamps, forerunner to GE. Gradually he moved from illustration to painting, creating a series of androgynous nudes set in fantastical surroundings before declaring in 1931, “I’m done with girls on rocks.”

LUMINOUS ART

Turning his attention to landscapes, Parrish developed a technique — layering paint with varnish — that created a 3D-luminosity effect. He was earning \$100,000 a year at a time when you could buy a house for \$2,000.

The landscapes became his entree into millions of American homes and businesses through calendars, many for Edison-Mazda. His reproductions, in up to 17 colors, remained on display for a full year because calendars then featured one image above the tear-off months. Some of the original paintings hang next to the print calendars in the Nassau show.

His influence spanned generations. Rockwell once called Parrish “my idol.” Warhol collected Parrish art. “We bought his oil painting ‘The Glen’ from Warhol’s estate,” says Judy Cutler, director of the Newport museum. “Of the great illustrators from the Golden Age, he’s right up there with Rockwell and N.C. Wyeth.”

Coming soon: Newsday's Entertainment newsletter, for the latest on celebs, TV, more.

But his career outlasted the Golden Age and extended into the “Mad Men” advertising age with Brown & Bigelow.

Parrish painted almost up to his death at 95 in 1966.

WHAT “Maxfield Parrish: Paintings and Prints from the National Museum of American Illustration”

WHEN | WHERE Saturday, Nov. 21, through Feb. 28, Nassau County Museum of Art, 1 Museum Dr., Roslyn Harbor. Hours: 11 a.m.-4:45 p.m. Tuesdays-Sundays

ADMISSION \$4-\$10; 516-484-9337, nassaumuseum.org