

ILLUSTRIOUS ILLUSTRATOR

Exhibit at National Museum of American Illustration celebrates Howard Pyle

By Sean Flynn
Staff writer

NEWPORT — As a young mother living in Philadelphia, Judy Goffman Cutler began collecting the original paintings behind the illustrations that appeared in magazines like Saturday Evening Post, paintings that publishers considered almost worthless and gave away to employees and acquaintances.

She ran classified ads seeking this art because she recognized the historic importance of the Golden Age of Illustration from the late 1800s to the mid-20th century. She also appreciated the aesthetic quality and beauty of these depictions of American mainstream culture.

Cutler founded the American Illustrators Gallery in New York City and in the 1980s, curated and circulated an exhibit of Norman Rockwell, the most famous of the illustrators. The pioneering exhibit, hosted by museums across the country, provided the public with a broad exposure to Rockwell's original artworks.

Cutler went on to co-found the National Museum of American Illustration, at 492 Bellevue Ave., with her husband, Laurence Cutler, which introduces viewers to a wide range of illustrators.

Judy Cutler is now curating the first major exhibit to honor the "Father of American Illustration," Howard Pyle, who lived from 1854 to 1911.

"Howard Pyle, His Students & the Golden Age of American Illustration" opens on May 26, to mark the start of the museum's summer season. The museum is open Thursdays through Sundays, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., with a guided tour every Friday at 3 p.m.

The new exhibit also celebrates the generation of illustrators Pyle taught and who went on to become famous in their own right. His legacy continued after his death.

Rockwell, who lived from 1894 to 1978, studied at the Art Students League of New York, where Pyle also had taught and where Pyle's techniques continued to be passed on to artists.

"Rockwell had seven Howard Pyle paintings in his home," Cutler said. "That's how much he revered Pyle."

In this exhibit, Cutler makes the viewer aware of the wide range of talent that Pyle and his students demonstrated in their paintings again and again over decades. They are carefully



Howard Pyle (1853-1911), shown in his studio, taught many illustrators who went on to become famous in their own right.

crafted images that had inherent stories, and Cutler brings them to life in the exhibition.

Many Americans grew up with an edition of "Mother Goose Rhymes" that featured illustrations by Elizabeth Shippen Green and Jessie Willcox Smith. Both women were students of Pyle's. Another of his students, Violet Oakley, went on to create the murals found throughout the Statehouse in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

"Pyle treated women equally," Cutler said. "Up to 50 percent of the students in his classes were women."

Pyle was refused admission to the Pennsylvania Academy of Arts with the explanation that "illustration was not fine art." He went on to found, in 1894, the first School of Illustration in the country at the Drexel Institute of Art, Science and Industry, now Drexel University in Philadelphia. He taught there until 1900, when he founded the Howard Pyle School of Illustration in Wilmington, Delaware.

At these schools, he shaped the way illustrators created artworks thereafter. He told N.C. Wyeth that if he wanted to paint images and landscapes in the West, he should move there and first get a job as a ranch hand, so he could feel what he was painting. Wyeth followed the advice, Cutler said.



Howard Pyle's students pose with various costumes and props.

Pyle's students at both schools became known as the Brandywine School, which included some of America's greatest illustrators: Stanley Arthurs, Anna and Ethel Betts, Harvey Dunn, Anton Otto Fischer, Philip R. Goodwin, W.H.D. Koerner, Frank Schoonover and Sarah Stilwell Weber, as well as Green, Smith, Oakley and Wyeth.

illustrators are included in the exhibit, giving viewers a chance to see how each artist interpreted the lessons of their shared teacher.

"This exhibition will give viewers a firsthand and close-up look at the marvelous original paintings that most people have only seen in reproduction form," Cutler said.

Artworks by each of these Flynn@NewportRI.com