

# The 15th Anniversary of the National Museum of American Illustration

by Lita Solis-Cohen

Judy Goffman Cutler and Laurence Cutler's National Museum of American Illustration (NMAI) celebrated its 15th anniversary on Thursday, July 30, at a gala in the garden of the museum at Vernon Court on Bellevue Avenue in Newport, Rhode Island. The fund-raising dinner, dance, and benefit auction was attended by 330. After dinner, American Civilization Awards were presented to NBC *Today Show* host Matt Lauer, to actress and children's book author Evangeline Lilly, and to Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Paul Szep.

"The *Today Show* is the twenty-first-century equivalent of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Matt Lauer popularizes news like the great illustrators did. Like them he is an artist contributing to popular culture," said Judy Goffman Cutler. "Evangeline Lilly told me her day job is acting, so she can write children's books and work with illustrators. Paul Szep is part of a dying breed of political cartoonists whose work is now found only in online publications."

An auction, live and silent, followed the presentations and raised \$1.5 million for NMAI's endowment fund. Norman Rockwell's 1963 portrait of John F. Kennedy, a study for the April 6, 1963, *Saturday Evening Post* cover, was donated by a private collector and sold for \$900,000 to an anonymous collector, who left a bid with the auctioneer.

Robbie Gordy, a personable Christie's auctioneer, sold John Falter's *Game Not Called on Account of Darkness*, a baseball image, for \$55,000 to a Connecticut collector. It and the Kennedy portrait were left on loan to the museum for exhibition during this summer. J.C. Leyendecker's study of



Norman Rockwell's 1963 portrait of John F. Kennedy, a study for the April 6, 1963, *Saturday Evening Post* cover, sold for \$900,000 to an anonymous collector. National Museum of American Illustration photo.

a young girl holding her doll, a preparatory sketch for the July 19, 1913, *Saturday Evening Post* cover, sold for \$23,500 in a post-sale auction between two bidders who missed the party. Other illustrations and vacations were sold in the silent auction. Among them was a painting of *The Falterers in the Maine Surf*, a 1948 gouache on paper, 18" x 26", which Falter had done for himself and later used for an August 1948 *Post* cover; it sold for \$25,000. A study by Ludwig Bemelmans for a Madeline book sold for \$5000. All were donated by collectors to build an endowment for the future of the museum.

Collectors, art dealers, and auctioneers from as far away as Shanghai and Prague joined locals to celebrate the museum's anniversary. "I am grateful for the evening's success," said Judy Goffman Cutler. "We want the collection to remain at Vernon Court for future generations to enjoy."



Evangeline Lilly (right) is shown accepting her American Civilization Award on stage with Judy Goffman Cutler and Laurence Cutler. Lilly is not only an actress; she wrote a children's book. *The Squickerwonkers* is her first published work. National Museum of American Illustration photo.

The items for auction were shown in the gallery. There were 44 lots including 40 works of art; a platinum and diamond necklace with 33 carats of diamonds, which would retail for \$220,000; and vacations in Grenada, West Indies; four nights at the Old Swan Garden in the Cotswolds; and Linda Bean's house that sleeps eight on Davis Island, south of Port Clyde, Maine, including two roundtrip tickets from Boston's Logan Airport to Bar Harbor, Maine, provided by Cape Air's *Bird's Eye View* magazine.



Cocktails on the terrace before the dinner at NMAI's 15th anniversary party. Everyone made it from the cocktail tent to the dinner tent before the rains came.