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Largest exhibit of Maxfield Parrish prints at Nassau County Museum of Art

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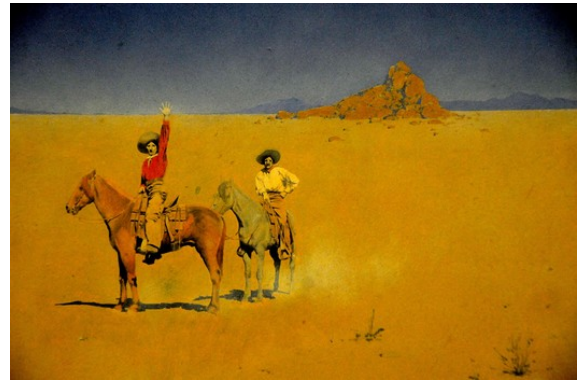
The largest exhibit of works by American illustration artist Maxfield Parrish, one of the most heralded of the Golden Age of Illustration, is on view at the Nassau County Museum of Art.

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The largest exhibit of works by American illustration artist Maxfield Parrish, one of the most heralded of the Golden Age of Illustration, is on view at the [Nassau County Museum of Art](#) through February 28, 2016.

The more than 200 works on exhibit--originals and vintage prints--are drawn from the [National Museum of American Illustration](#), Newport, Rhode Island, and curated by the museum's co-founders, Judy and Laurence S. Cutler, who are some of the foremost collectors of American illustration art. Together, the works provide a stunning portrait--an elongated landscape, as it

were--of Parrish's decades long career, from his first published work in 1895, a cover for Harper's Easter issue, at the age of 25, to his last creations, in the 1960s. Most exciting is to see the original work juxtaposed with the published images. It is the largest Parrish gathering of his work ever assembled, and the first time one of the Florentine set - "A Florentine Fete," a life-sized painting - has traveled, and can be seen next to one of the published covers.



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Parrish's universally popular and instantly recognizable images were produced between the late 1890s through the mid 1960s; they were seen on magazine covers, greeting cards, art prints, calendars, novels, advertisements and packaging. Clear and bold, with uncomplicated subjects, Maxfield Parrish's art prints papered the walls of American homes for decades.

Parrish's works set the style for the age - idyllic, fantastical, Art Nouveau. His work was characterized by romantic images, sensuous, idealized neo-Classical figures, lush dreamscapes, fantastical landscapes and featured ultra saturated hues and often intense cobalt blue. The blue was so renowned that the Windsor & Newton Paint Co. renamed their cobalt blue, "Parrish Blue." He used a distinctive technique to create a lush coloristic effect with intense luminosity that creates a sense of dimension and draws the viewer into the scene.

Interestingly, Parrish used photography extensively - even photographing himself as a model, as we see in his Jack & the Giant painting. He would project the photograph and trace half- or full-size objects or figures, then cut out and place the images on his canvas, covering them with thick, but clear, layers of glaze. "The result is realism of elegiac vivacity."

The effect was a luminosity and a sense of dimension "that you have to see in person to really appreciate," Judy Cutler said. "Through this showing of artworks and vintage reproductions, today's viewers have can see the images the same way that viewers of an earlier age observed them, comparing the mass-produced reproductions against the original luminous canvases."

The exhibit takes you through all the epochs of Parrish's long career. You see Parrish's "Great Southwest Desert Without Water," a seminal work from 1902. As Cutler's commentary notes, Parrish was in Arizona to recover from TB where he "discovered brilliant light and color that transformed his art, a turning point in his career. It was here that he crafted the earliest versions of a new "varnish" technique that captured the colors and light of the desert with extraordinary luminosity. "Parrish was a technical painter, a luminescent," according to Cutler's commentary.

"Parrish rescued America from Victorian doldrums, creating exciting new images," Judy Cutler said. "Parrish brought Art Nouveau into the popular realm, using motifs in calendars, advertisements, magazine covers. He was the earliest and set the style for the Golden Age of American illustration."

His images, though - on such covers as Ladies Home Journal, Collier's, Harper's, Life, in fact most of the major magazines of the day - and the advertisements provide such a window into cultural mores of the decades.

He was also a brilliant marketer (setting the stage for a later brilliant marketer, Andy Warhol, who acknowledged a debt to Parrish).

"Starting at the age of 25, Parrish painted magazine covers, advertisements, posters and book illustrations, with several images exclusively used on Crane Chocolate gift box covers and offered to customers as art prints by submitting a coupon," according to notes from Sotheby's for an auction of Parrish's "The Canyon" (which sold for \$2,841,000). By 1925, Parrish was the most sought after artist in America - one in four households had a Parrish print on their walls.

"The Crane images created such a popular sensation and overwhelming demand that they caused the artist to realize his art prints could be rewarding in their own right. In a contemporaneous letter to art print publisher Stephen Newman, Parrish said, *'I have the complete print rights of these covers, Life buying only the right to use them as covers. Once in a while there will be some that I have tried to make a picture of beauty ... and I dare say some would make prints with a popular appeal.'*"

"Parrish described himself as 'a businessman with a brush,' and was proud of his ability to market his artwork to the public," Judy Cutler said at the opening reception at the museum. "In 1904, a time that that the average annual income for an American worker was \$500 or less, Parrish signed a six-year contract with Collier's Magazine for \$1,250 per month. His fee rose to \$2,000 a painting, but each Parrish cover was a guaranteed sell out for that month's edition of Collier's."

Parrish's universally popular and instantly recognizable images were seen on magazine covers, greeting cards, art prints, calendars, novels, advertisements and packaging. His work was used to advertise and promote everything from chocolate to Jell-o, automobile tires to soap, silverware, beer and bicycles.

From his first published work, in 1895, an Easter calendar for Harper's Bazaar, through the 1960s, "Parrish remained the most popular illustrator at a time when illustrators reigned supreme, when competition was fiercest," Cutler said.

Parris received his first major commission in 1894, for the University of Pennsylvania Mask & Wig Club which got him the Harper's Bazaar assignment. That was closely followed by a commission to illustrate L. Frank Baum's "Mother Goose in Prose" in 1897, which led to many more important projects, including Eugene Field's "Poems of childhood" in 1904, and illustrations for "Arabian Nights" in 1909, which we see in the exhibit - these are all so enchanting and delightful.

Parrish had an uncanny gift of delivering an appropriate scene for the whimsical, magical tales he was illustrating. Most interesting is seeing his illustrations for "Jack and the Giant," 1905 - and a black-and-white photograph of Parrish posing himself as Jack, which you then see in the painting. Parrish used photography to inject realism in his illustrations.

In 1922, Parrish's art print of "Daybreak," which is included in the exhibit, was released by the House of Art, becoming the most reproduced art image in history. It reached an astounding production level of many millions of copies, far greater than ever expected.

In these works, he continued to weave a sense of the idyllic and peaceful in incredibly realistic landscapes, many around his own New Hampshire home, the Oaks, like "Sheltering Oak", in 1960, and "Peaceful Country", in 1963, the last work he produced for a Brown & Bigelow calendar.

From 1947, he lived in Plainfield, New Hampshire, near the Cornish Art Colony, and spent the rest of his life at The Oaks with his wife, Lydia, who died in 1953, and his mistress and model, Sue Lewin. He painted until he was 91 years old and died in 1966, at the age of 95.

The exhibit is arranged in the epochs of his career and absolutely thrilling to see the first published illustration, from 1895 and see his work into the 1966. In the room devoted to the Brown & Bigelow Years, 1934-1963, is "June Skies-A Perfect Day" (1940) just transports you into the scene.

There are works by other illustration artists of the time interspersed - including a work by Stephen Parrish, Maxfield's father, who was an engraver and landscape artist. Maxfield (whose given name was Frederick, but he took the maiden name of his paternal grandmother), took to art at a young age and his parents encouraged his talent.

The Maxfield Parrish exhibit is drawn from the National Museum of American Illustration (NMAI) in Newport, Rhode Island, founded by Judy Goffman Cutler and Laurence Cutler, which boasts the largest collection of Maxfield Parrish and the second largest collection of Norman Rockwell.

Judy Cutler, who also has a gallery in New York, and has assembled and curated private collections for George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Whoopi Goldberg, Ross Perot, and a host of

other notable art collectors, became an avid collector of American illustration art while in college.

"It all started when I gave her an art book in college," said Laurence S. Cutler. He started out as an artist but became an award-winning architect, urban designer, author, educator and advertising executive. He developed his firm, ECODesign, an interdisciplinary, architectural and urban planning practice, into an international practice with 37 offices in 7 countries, and later was the North American head for GCT Advertising, now Omnicom.

She was enthralled and began collecting American illustration at a time when it was not appreciated, snapping up originals and vintage prints for a song. Indeed, illustration artists - even Norman Rockwell - were dismissed as major artists. "It's because they were paid to be commercial, to satisfy the client," Judy Cutler explains. But she added, to be a successful illustration artist, the artist still has to be extremely skilled. And even Michelangelo was paid to produce art on commission, to satisfy his patrons. The American illustrationists seem to have had to last laugh - a Norman Rockwell was auctioned for \$46 million, breaking a record at the time.

In this exhibit, Parrish's artistic brilliance and skill is shown in the painting for the Aladdin illustration, "Great Southwest Desert without Water" (1902), and "A Florentine Fete," "Sheltering Oak – A Fine Place to Be" (1960)(among my favorites).

With such a vast collection of American illustration art, the Cutlers opened their museum in a Gilded Age mansion in Newport, Rhode Island, on July 4, 2000. The Nassau County Museum of Art was one of the first to "come calling," and the Cutlers organized a wildly successful Norman Rockwell exhibit for NCMA six years ago.

"NCMA and the National Museum of Illustration in Newport have a special relationship," NCMA director Karl Willers said.

The Cutlers, who also are co-founders of the nonprofit American Civilization Foundation, have also published 18 books on illustration art, and most recently, gave their book with 600 Norman Rockwell images to each of the 192 heads of state who attended the United Nations General Assembly. "See America through Norman Rockwell's eyes."

The exhibit also includes works by Parrish contemporaries, including a painting, "Untitled (Seated Nude at Lily Pond)" by Louis Comfort Tiffany from the NCMA's collection, as well as an entire room of Tiffany's drawings and paintings.

Karl E. Willers, NCMA director, announced that the Tiffany collection of 150 paintings and drawings, which had been on loan, will be officially bequeathed to the museum by the end of

the year.

"It's the largest gift to the museum" and altogether amounts to two-thirds of the value of the museum's entire permanent collection, Willers said.

Nassau County Museum of Art is located at One Museum Drive in Roslyn Harbor, just off Northern Boulevard, Route 25A, two traffic lights west of Glen Cove Road. The museum is open Tuesday-Sunday, 11 a.m.-4:45 p.m. Docent-led tours of the exhibition are offered at 2 p.m. each day; tours of the mansion are offered each Saturday at 1 p.m.; meet in the lobby, no reservations needed. Tours are free with museum admission. Family tours and art activities are offered Sundays from 1 pm; free with museum admission. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors (62 and above) and \$4 for students with ID and children aged 4 to 12. Members and children under 4 are admitted free. The Museum Store is open Tuesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Call (516) 484-9337 for current exhibitions, events, days/times and directions or log onto nassaumuseum.org.

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