



Excerpts from Tom Wolfe's Acceptance Speech

Illustration Art in Today's Art World

July 29th, 2010

American Civilization Foundation, Inaugural Awards

The National Museum of American Illustration's 10th Anniversary Gala

Vernon Court, Newport, Rhode Island

"Clay (Felker) said to me, 'You know, very soon, within the next 50 years, all that you will see in this museum, (and the Whitney is a museum of American art) all of this, is just going to be totally forgotten. And people will remember as the great art of the 20th century in America, the illustrators.' He mentioned many of the people who are really strong in Judy and Laurence's collection: Norman Rockwell, Maxfield Parish, J.C. Leyendecker, Howard Chandler Christy... He looked at me, 'That would be a great story.'"

"...it is happening in our time that the illustrators are becoming the icons of American art. Tom Stoppard once said, 'Imagination plus lack of skill gives us modern art.'"

"Starting with Picasso... the history of modern art has been getting worse and worse on the skill level... followed by Abstract Expressionism, and it's hard to get much worse than that in a technical, skillful sense, but they found ways... Then came Pop Art. Pop Art was the first no hands art. In other words, no Pop Art painting was ever an original... Then there was Minimalism and there was almost nothing there... Then came conceptual Art where it was just the concept of the art which was all that mattered. So now we are finally down to No Hands Art and Tenure Art... and already the signs are showing that people are beginning to realize that illustrators were and are the people who cannot finesse skill. They cannot say, I'm not going to use that old fashion stuff, because that's what everything depends on. And these artists that are at the National Museum of American Illustration are made of tremendous talent and dedication to the craft. If you look at the ones who left school early, not to play basketball, but to study art. Rockwell's a very good example. Howard Chandler Christy's a very good example. Many of them ended up at the Art Students League in New York. These are men who are the last great skillful artists in America."

"I'm just here tonight to tell Laurence and Judy they've done it. This is the 10th anniversary. Thanks in no small part to Judy and Laurence, Norman Rockwell is the Picasso of the 21st Century."