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NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ILLUSTRATION CELEBRATES 15TH ANNIVERSARY WITH LANDMARK FUNDRAISING GALA AND AUCTION

NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND – In an unprecedented fundraising gala and benefit auction, the National Museum of American Illustration celebrated its 15th Anniversary on July 30th. The highlight of the evening's auction, the landmark *Portrait of President John F. Kennedy* by renowned illustrator, Norman Rockwell, sold for \$900,000 at a live auction before the 330 guests. The evening also featured the American Civilization Awards which honor notable laureates for their contributions to popular American culture. This year's honorees were Matt Lauer, for his NBC broadcasting journalism; Evangeline Lilly, for her acting, including the recent hit *Ant-Man*, and writing of children's books, including *The Squickerwonkers*; and Paul Szep, for his Pulitzer Prize winning Editorial cartoons. The careers of all three laureates parallel those of the Golden Age illustrators highlighted in the NMAI's American Imagist Collection, linking the Gilded Age to the 21st Century.

Alongside the monumental Rockwell portrait of our 35th President in the live auction, John Falter's *Game Not Called on Account of Darkness*, an exciting baseball image created, sold for \$55,000, and a JC Leyendecker study of a young girl holding her doll, executed in preparation for his July 19, 1913 *Saturday Evening Post* cover, sold for \$14,000. Many artworks by notable illustrators were sold in a silent auction which took place throughout the night. In the silent bidding, Falter's painting of himself and his wife running into the Maine Surf sold for \$25,000, and a Ludwig Bemelmans' study for his iconic Madeline series sold for \$5,000.

Attendees travelled from across the globe to attend the Gala Event, from as far as Shanghai and Prague, as well as local notables and many from nearby New York City and Boston. Judy Cutler, Director of the NMAI, reflected on the evening's achievements: "We are thrilled with the outpouring of support we have received through this event and are particularly grateful for the auction's success. The funds raised will help the NMAI's endowment fund to ensure this wonderful collection remains on display at Vernon Court." At the end of the evening each attendee was gifted a copy of the NMAI's newest publication, *Norman Rockwell and His Contemporaries*. This exhibition catalogue explores the thematic similarities of over 100 of the greatest American illustrators.

The NMAI is a nonprofit, independent, educational, and aesthetic organization located at Vernon Court on Newport's historic Bellevue Avenue. It is the first National Museum devoted exclusively to illustration art, artworks created to be reproduced in books, periodicals, art prints, posters, and advertisements.

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