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LOCAL & STATE

Exhibit celebrates 100th anniversary of world war's end

By Sean Flynn
Staff writer

NEWPORT — A new exhibit celebrating the upcoming 100th anniversary of the end of the World War I on Nov. 11, 1918, has been enthralling visitors to the National Museum of American Illustration this summer.

The “American Illustration and the First World War” exhibit continues through December and takes an in-depth look at the original paintings, drawings and vintage posters that noted artists created to sway opinion and rally national support for the war effort.

A new summer lecture series will accompany the exhibit at the museum’s Vernon Court, 492 Bellevue Ave., beginning on Saturday, July 28, at 1:30 p.m. John Howard Sanden, a well-known portrait artist for 50 years, will discuss 10 masterpiece paintings from the Golden Age of American Illustration that shaped and influenced the national culture of the time. That period extended from about 1890 to 1940.



Judy Cutler, the co-founder and curator of the National Museum of American Illustration in Newport, stands recently next to works from the museum's latest exhibit, 'American Illustration and the First World War.' (SEAN FLYNN/DAILY NEWS PHOTO)

Sanden painted approximately 85 portraits for Reader’s Digest during the late 1960s and early 1970s. He was commissioned to paint the official portraits of President George W. Bush and first lady Laura Bush, which have hung in the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., since their unveiling on May 31, 2012.

The second speaker in the series, Brian Wallin, will discuss on Saturday, Aug. 11, at 1:30 p.m., the story of a German U-Boat’s brief surprise visit to Newport Harbor on October 7, 1916, and its implications in the months leading up to U.S. involvement in World War I. Other speakers will follow in later weeks.

Judy Cutler, the co-founder and curator of the National Museum of American

Illustration, began collecting the original artwork of illustrators like Norman Rockwell in the 1970s, when their work was underappreciated.

For example, she received a large number of original paintings by Howard Chandler Christy, a popular illustrator in the early 1900s, from a man who later married Christy’s first wife.

“I was working on a book about Christy and later received a rejection letter from a publisher who said there was no interest in him,” Cutler said. “I’ve since proven him wrong.”

Some of Christy’s work is featured in the new exhibit.

He created a series of recruitment posters featuring idealizations of Lady Liberty motivating young men to enlist. Beneath taglines like, “Gee!! I

Wish I Were A Man I'd Join the Navy," "I Want You for the Navy," and "If You Want to Fight! Join the Marines." These All-American girls, modeled

after Christy's wife Nancy, were displayed in public spaces across the country and galvanized the war effort.

When the First World War broke out in June 1914, President Woodrow Wilson declared the U.S. to be neutral, a popular decision with the public.

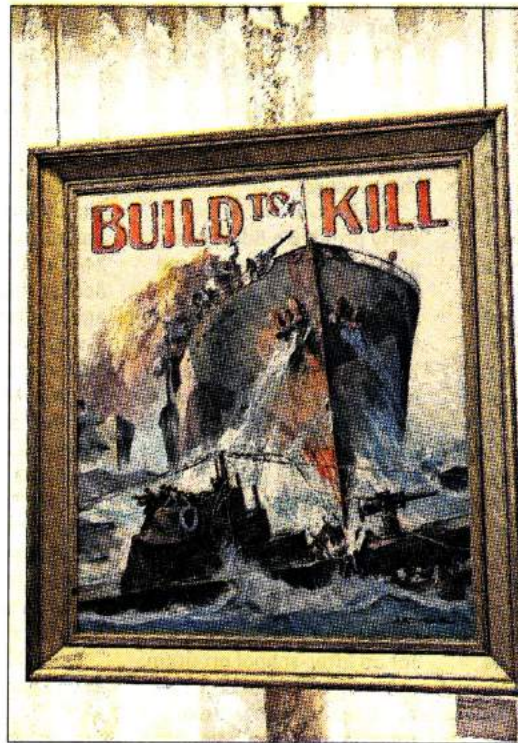
However, as the war escalated over the years, and German U-Boats sank commercial and passenger ships besides naval vessels of the Allies, Congress ultimately declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. Just one week later, President Wilson formed the Committee on Public Information to "sell" Americans on the war and change public support in its favor.

Charles Dana Gibson, one of America's most popular illustrators, as well as editor and later owner of Life Magazine, was named head of the Division of Pictorial Publicity.

In just over 19 months, Gibson and an army of more than 300 artists, all unpaid volunteers, produced 1,438 designs for posters, buttons, cards, cartoons, and more to flood the nation with their messages.

One of the earliest images was Gibson's own "Help! The Women's Land Army of America" that was printed as a Life Magazine cover and poster. Both are displayed in the exhibition. Uncle Sam shakes the hand of a young woman who is ready to work the fields while the men are abroad fighting.

These widely circulated images had three primary goals: to raise money for the war effort



American illustrator John Olaf Todahl created this depiction of a ship bearing down on one of the German U-boats that were devastating shipping lanes in the Atlantic.

[SEAN FLYNN/DAILY NEWS PHOTO]

through the sale of bonds, to conserve food and resources, or to promote enlistment and patriotism.

Gerrit Beneker's "Partners for Victory" motivates workers across the country to trade in their tools for a rifle to defend the country. Lady Liberty stands tall between the men, leading them forward to the fight.

J. C. Leyendecker's "Weapons for Liberty" called on the public to purchase bonds in order to supply the troops, a message symbolized by Lady Liberty holding the weapons they needed.

Cushman Parker's "Little Americans: Do Your Bit" implores even the country's young children to support the war effort by conserving food to allow for more to be sent overseas.

Rockwell painted "Till The Boys Come Home" for Life Magazine. Four young

women somberly sit on a dune by the ocean with censored mail at their feet, looking out to sea and pining for the safe return of their loved ones.

These illustrators and others produced long-lasting images, including perhaps the most iconic: James Montgomery Flagg's self-portrait as Uncle Sam, pointing to the viewer and saying "I want YOU for U.S. Army," rallying the nation's men to stand up and join the fight.

Cutler does not have Flagg's original painting, but obtained one of the earliest posters, which is on display.

The museum is open Thursdays through Sundays, 11 a.m. - 5 p.m., with a guided tour on Fridays beginning at 3 p.m. For more information about the exhibit or additional upcoming speakers call 851-8949, Ext. 18, or visit americanillustration.org.