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## NMAI PREMIERES NEW EXHIBITION: **AMERICAN ILLUSTRATION AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

The National Museum of American Illustration (NMAI) in Newport, RI is pleased to announce the debut of its newest exhibition, ***American Illustration and the First World War***, celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the resolution of “The War to End All Wars.” The exhibition will premiere with the opening of the NMAI’s Summer Season on May 17<sup>th</sup>.

When the First World War broke out in June 1914, United States President Woodrow Wilson declared the US to be neutral, a popular decision with the public. However, as the War escalated over several years, the United States Congress ultimately declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. Just one week later, President Wilson formed the Committee on Public Information with the purpose to “sell” Americans on the War and change public support in his favor.

Featuring original paintings, works on paper, vintage posters, and accompanying artifacts, ***American Illustration and the First World War*** highlights the essential work the American illustrators accomplished in swaying opinions and rallying National support for the war effort.

Charles Dana Gibson, one of America’s most popular illustrators, was named head of the Division of Pictorial Publicity. In just over 19 months, Gibson and an army of over 300 artists, all unpaid volunteers, produced 1,438 designs for posters, buttons, cards, cartoons, and more to flood the Nation with their message. These widely circulated images strived to accomplish one of three primary goals: to raise money, to conserve food and resources, or to promote enlistment and patriotism.

One of the earliest wartime images is Gibson’s own *Help! The Women’s Land Army of America*, printed as a *Life Magazine* cover and poster, both displayed in this exhibition. Uncle Sam shakes the hand of a young woman who is ready to work the field while the men are abroad fighting. The scene is set against a battle scene with a soldier waving on his approval of her effort to support the country, inspiring patriotic participation from all viewers.

Another very popular illustrator famous for his beautiful women, Howard Chandler Christy, created a series of recruitment posters featuring an idealization of Lady Liberty herself, motivating young men to enlist in the fight. Beneath taglines including “*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 own wife Nancy, displayed in any public space across the country galvanized American troops.

With a widespread national effort by the illustrators, the country’s most popular magazines used their covers to highlight the War. Just months before the War’s end, Norman Rockwell painted *Till The Boys Come Home* for *Life Magazine*, a poignant reminder of the hardships felt by everyone, both abroad and left at home, during times of war. Four young women somberly sit on a dune by the ocean with censored mail at their feet, wishing for the safe return of their loved ones. The central figure looks out to the viewer to include them in the scene, sympathizing with the universal feelings all Americans were faced with.

These WWI artworks are powerful, emotional reminders of the hardships and threats the United States faced during this time, and highlight the critical role the American illustrators played in the outcome of the War. On this Centennial Anniversary, the National Museum of American Illustration is proud to present ***American Illustration and the First World War***.

The National Museum of American Illustration is an independent, educational and aesthetic organization with the goal to present the best venue for the public to appreciate the greatest collection of illustration art. The NMAI’s Summer Season begins May 17<sup>th</sup>, open Thursday through Sunday, 11am – 5pm, with a Guided Tour every Friday at 3pm. It is located at Vernon Court, 492 Bellevue Avenue, Newport, RI. For information call (401) 851-8949 ext. 18 or visit [www.americanillustration.org](http://www.americanillustration.org).

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