"Under Cover: J.C. Leyendecker And American Masculinity" On View At The New-York Historical Society

Exhibition Open Through Aug. 13

June 2, 2023

Under Cover examines the work and influence of J.C. Leyendecker (1874–1951), a preeminent illustrator and commercial artist who helped shape American visual culture in the first three decades of the 20th century through captivating advertisements including the legendary Arrow Collar Man and countless covers for the Saturday Evening Post. Leyendecker's illustrations for a mainstream audience often had unspoken undertones; his work is especially revealing for what it says about the cultural attitudes of the period.

The exhibition showcases 19 of the artist's original oil paintings and a wealth of related ephemera and features both Leyendecker's editorial work, such as magazine covers, as well as commercial illustrations that appeared in the pages of popular publications, on roadside billboards, in store windows, and on mass transit.

Laying the groundwork of Leyendecker's narratives, these ads starred fashionable men in stylish settings engaged in activities such as boating, golfing, or reading in men's clubs.

Under Cover delves into the early politics of gender while simultaneously examining how Leyendecker helped establish a nationalistic ideal of elite and athletic white male beauty. To address this aspect of his work, the exhibition juxtaposes some of Leyendecker's paintings with artifacts that offer counter-narratives to his works' exclusionary nature, including depictions of fashionable African American men during the Harlem Renaissance.

Under Cover is organized by New-York Historical from the collection of the National Museum of American Illustration, Newport, R.I. The show is guest-curated by Donald Albrecht, and coordinated at New-York Historical by Rebecca Klassen, curator of material culture.

To learn more, call 212-873-3400 or visit www.nyhistory.org.