

# Illustrious

Judith Goffman Cutler and Laurence S. Cutler usher in a new "Golden Age" of American illustration.

By Margie Goldsmith



**Y**ou know how Imelda Marcos collects shoes?" asks Laurence S. Cutler, in reference to his wife, Judith Goffman Cutler. "That's how Judy collects American illustration." Judy, known as the doyenne of the American illustration market, and Laurence, a former professor of architecture and urban design at Harvard, MIT and the Rhode Island School of Design, are the driving forces behind the National Museum of American Illustration in Newport, Rhode Island. The first museum of its kind dedicated to American illustration art, NMAI also has another distinction: It is the Cutlers' home.

The Cutlers' blue-chip collection, which focuses on the Golden Age of American Illustration (1870–1965), represents the greatest assemblage of Maxfield Parrish works in the world: 68 illustrations. The museum also houses the largest collection of works by J.C. Leyendecker, James Montgomery Flagg and Charles Dana Gibson. The astounding inventory: roughly 2,000 paintings, 80,000 works on paper and limited-edition prints by 80 illustrators, among which is the second-largest collection of Norman Rockwell pieces after the

Norman Rockwell, "Miss Liberty," 1943, oil on canvas, 41 3/4" x 31 1/4".  
FACING: Treillage Loggia, featuring murals by Tiffany Studios' James Wall Finn (above). Maxfield Parrish, "A Florentine Fête" (middle), 1916, oil on canvas, 126" x 207". Treillage Loggia with the American Imagist Collection.

# Achievements





Rockwell Museum. The couple also has amassed key pieces of illustration memorabilia, such as Parrish's various pens and Rockwell's first paint box with his name stenciled on the front from which he derived his unique signature.

Illustration is art created to be reproduced in books, advertisements, periodicals, murals and new media. What makes it so attractive, Judy says, is that it serves as a visual record of America's social and cultural history. The genre began after the Civil War when literacy—and the printing process—improved. With industrialization, thousands of new illustrated periodicals appeared on the market and the illustrators became celebrities.

The Golden Age of American Illustration coincided with the Gilded Age in Architecture and continued through the mid-'60s, when the *Saturday Evening Post* was discontinued and film and television changed the publishing industry. At the time, publishing was centered in Philadelphia—as was Judy, who was an art history

N.C. Wyeth, "The Doryman," 1933, oil on canvas, 42" x 35". Howard Pyle, "Red Coat Soldiers Toasting the Ladies of the House" (above, left), 1895, oil on canvas, 24 1/2" x 36 1/4". Maxfield Parrish, "Tallwood Pearl (Sheltering Oaks)" (top), c. 1955, oil on mother of pearl, smooth faced button, 1 1/2" diameter.





and American civilization major at the University of Pennsylvania. “My courses were in American art but never touched on American illustration,” she says. “I liked the art and was looking for original paintings that were affordable as an investment. In the '60s, everything was French Impressionist and nobody was collecting illustrations because they were considered commercial. These American artists were very low on the totem pole.”

This presented the perfect opportunity for Judy, who made her first purchase in 1966: five illustrations by Howard Chandler Christy for which she paid \$100. (Today, they are worth around \$125,000 together). From there, she went on to acquire works by Rockwell; Howard Pyle, considered “The Father of American Illustration”; N.C. Wyeth, who studied under Pyle; Maxfield Parrish, whom Rockwell called America’s most gifted illustrator; John Clymer, famous for documenting the American frontier; and Stevan Dohanos, known as the “American realist.”

“Originally, I just planned on collecting because I thought [these pieces] would be something to build for the future,” Judy says. “But as I realized how expensive these



The ballroom at Vernon Court.  
Norman Rockwell’s paint box (top).  
Marble Terrace with two bronze  
sculptures by Marc Mellon, on loan  
to the museum (top, right).



Howard Chandler Christy, "The Same Old Yarn," 1918, watercolor, gouache and pencil on board, 35" x 25 1/4".  
FACING: Charles Dana Gibson, "His First Love" (top), 1897, pencil on board, 18 1/4" x 26 1/2".

John Falter, "The Family Picnic" (below, left), c. 1950, oil on canvas, 26 1/8" x 24 1/8". J.C. Leyendecker (1874–1951), "Arrow Collar Ad-Man with Narrow Tie" (below, right), oil on canvas, 19" x 16 1/2".

works were becoming, I had to become a dealer in order to pay for my habit." This "habit" led to her founding the American Illustrators Gallery in New York City, which featured (and still does) the finest original artworks of the greatest American illustration artists.

"Most good art dealers wind up with great collections, and that's what happened to Judy," says Laurence. "She became a legend in that section of the art market in those days." But Judy and Laurence took this love for American illustration one step further, co-authoring nine published books, curating more than 50 exhibitions of American illustration art throughout the United States, Asia and Europe, and opening NMAI.

Before the museum opened, Judy stored her art in her home and in a warehouse in New York City. "There was no furniture in the house, just works of art," she says. "Visitors would sit on the floor, look around and say, 'This is like a museum.' We realized that these paintings had become extremely valuable. We also saw what happens when someone dies and the relatives start fighting, and began to wonder what would happen when we passed away. So we decided to put the collection into a nonprofit foundation."

When researching for a home for their collection, the couple sought a building that was architecturally significant and could be restored as a frame to properly show off the collection. They

found the perfect venue with the Beaux-Arts "cottage," Vernon Court, in Newport, Rhode Island. Considered one of the 10 greatest mansions in America, Vernon Court had been created by Carrère & Hastings, which also designed Henry Clay Frick's Fifth Avenue home, the Neue Gallery, the Flagler Museum and the New York Public Library. The Cutlers bought the building in 1998, and over the next two years, Laurence restored it to the last corbel. On July 4, 2000, they opened NMAI to the public.

Inside, seven stunning galleries are each a treasure in their own right, including the Tiffany Studio ceiling murals, a Connemara marble fireplace and a "Romance Staircase" remodeled after the famed *escalier* at Versailles' Petit Trianon. On the walls the American illustrations present a visual record of American history. The Cutlers call these masterpieces "the American Imagist Collection" because so many are iconic: the World War I Uncle Sam "I Want You," the baby ringing in the New Year, Santa Claus.

Visitors start their journey into this American mythology in the Treillage Loggia, with Pyle's *Harpers' Weekly* illustration "Red Coat Soldiers Toasting the Ladies of the House." (Many of the represented artists attended Pyle's classes at the first illustration school in Philadelphia.) Other highlights include works by Leyendecker, illustrator of 321 *Saturday Evening Post* covers and who is best

known for "The Arrow Collar Man" and "Bellhop with Hyacinths," which started the tradition of giving flowers on Mother's Day; Christy, who created "The Christy Girl" and the American concept of feminine beauty, setting the criteria for the Miss America Pageant; and Charles Dana Gibson, who is known for "The Gibson Girl." Specific illustrations not to miss: Rockwell's "Miss Liberty" and N.C. Wyeth's "The Doryman," which he considered his magnum opus.

The museum's greatest jewel is the Maxfield Parrish collection. At one point Parrish was the most reproduced artist of the 20th century, with one out of four households owning a Parrish art print. NMAI's largest work, Parrish's "A Florentine Fete," is comprised of 18 paintings, each 10 1/2 feet high. The museum also displays Parrish's smallest work, which is on a 1 1/2 inch mother-of-pearl button.

And now that it is housed in Vernon Court, the Cutlers anticipate their collection will only grow. As Laurence explains, "Passion drives us to keep looking for the next jewel that fits into this collection, this tiara that we've created." ❖

*The National Museum of American Illustration, Vernon Court, 492 Bellevue Ave., Newport, R.I. 02840. (401) 851-8949, ext. 18. [www.americanillustration.org](http://www.americanillustration.org).*

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