

J.C. Leyendecker collection
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Finding aid prepared by Venus Van Ness



Norman Rockwell Museum Archives - Reference Center Collection
Processed in 2011

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Summary Information

Repository	Norman Rockwell Museum Archives - Reference Center Collection
Title	J.C. Leyendecker collection
Date	1903-1976
Extent	5.0 Linear feet
Contact	Norman Rockwell Museum Archival Collections, The Norman Rockwell Museum, 9 Glendale Road, Route 183 Stockbridge, MA 01262, 413-931-2251 Venus@nrm.org
Language	English
Abstract	This collection contains many examples of Leyendecker's work, including numerous advertisements and a complete set of Saturday Evening Post covers illustrated by him between the years 1903 – 1943. A well noted American illustrator, Leyendecker painted more than 400 magazine covers during his lifetime – 322 of those being for the Saturday Evening Post.

Preferred Citation

J.C. Leyendecker Collection, Norman Rockwell Museum Archives, Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

Biographical note

Born in Montabaur, Germany, Joseph Leyendecker became a noted American illustrator and graphic designer who, between 1896 and 1950, painted more than four-hundred magazine covers, most of them of an idealized America, and 322 for Saturday Evening Post. He particularly hit his stride in the 1930s. Norman Rockwell began his career as an admirer of Leyendecker and was influenced by his distinctive style.

Leyendecker came to Chicago with his family at age eight. He apprenticed to a printer, J. Manz and Co., and then studied with John Vanderpoel at the Chicago Art Institute. In 1896, he won the Century magazine cover competition, which essentially launched him professionally. Two years later, he went to Paris to the Academie Julian with his brother, Francis Xavier, and they learned the "hachure" method of drawing whereby blended shading was not allowed. It was a time when poster art was very popular, and when he returned to America, he applied these new methods to their commercial ventures. It is said that his technical skill was beyond reproach, he worked amazingly fast, and that his draughtsmanship was perfect.

With a secret recipe combining oil and turpentine, he and his brother, Frank, perfected a cross-hatch method of working in oil paint that gave the speed of pencil and the visual impact of color without the brush going dry. Many other artists were jealous of this method which allowed the brothers to work more quickly than their peers.

Leyendecker was exceedingly shy, and spoke with a stutter. He lived a reclusive life and drove himself very hard, something that began when he and his brother had decided to try to outdo each other in productivity. They made great amounts of money and built themselves a mansion in New Rochelle with separate quarters for each of their studios. The estate had a large staff and elaborate landscaping, but they competed so heatedly with each other that eventually the brothers split and Frank died at age forty six.

J.C. landed the Kuppenheimer Clothes and Arrow Collar accounts, which fit his interest in fashion advertising, and for over twenty years he worked for them on big budgets. For Arrow Collar he designed ads that laid the foundation for selling lifestyle with product. Instead of focusing on the clothes, he drew the attention of the viewer to the face of the man wearing the shirt, and these men were clean shaven, preppy and handsome. One of the models, Charles Beach, became J.C.'s companion, agent, and publicist from 1903 to the end of J.C.'s life. The Arrow Shirt illustrations ended with the Depression. Simultaneous to them had been his Saturday Evening Post covers, and he became that magazines top cover artist.

He did not use photographs but always employed models. In contrast to Rockwell who focused on the personality of his subjects, Leyendecker did figures that were personages symbolic of something rather than human beings facing real-life situations.

Throughout his life he worked tirelessly, but when he died in 1951, he left no savings and only part of a divided estate to Beach who had to resort to selling Leyendecker's sketches for money. People bought them because they were in awe of the illustrator's mastery, and from May to November, 1997, a special exhibition of those sketches was held at the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

Scope and Contents

In addition to the complete set of 322 Saturday Evening Post covers, the collection also contains many other magazine covers illustrated by Leyendecker, including those for American Weekly, Collier's, and Literary Digest.

In addition to the Post covers, there are several complete issues of the Post dating between 1903-1906. There are also two early editions of Collier's Magazine with Leyendecker covers, along with a copy of the June 1899 edition of The Inland Printer.

Also included in the collection are numerous tearsheets of Leyendecker's illustration advertisements for companies such as Arrow Collars, Kellogg's, Interwoven Socks, and Kuppenheimer Clothing.

Arrangement

The materials in the collection are arranged in chronological order.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

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Access

This collection is open to researchers by appointment.

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Provenance

This Saturday Evening Post collection, all other covers, as well as advertisement tearsheets were donated by William Hargreaves. Other items in the collection were the gift of Irwin Steinberg, Eric Corbet Williams, and Linda Gumble.

Controlled Access Headings

Genre(s)

- Art

Personal Name(s)

- Leyendecker, J. C. (Joseph Christian), 1874-1951

Subject(s)

- Illustrators--United States.
- Saturday Evening Post

Sources

Roger Reed, "J.C. Leyendecker: A Retrospective", American Art Review, December 1997, p. 128
Walt Reed, "The Illustrator in America, 1860-2000" Michael David Zellman, "300 Years of American Art"
Peter Falk, "Who Was Who in American Art"