

AMERICAN
FINE ART
M A G A Z I N E

ISSUE 21

MAY/JUNE 2015



The Great Leyendecker

Norman Rockwell Museum hosts a new J.C. Leyendecker show featuring covers from The Saturday Evening Post

Through June 14

Norman Rockwell Museum

9 Route 183

Stockbridge, MA 01262

t: (413) 298-4100

www.nrm.org

Before the Internet, cable TV and even before color photography in newspapers, the bastion of American culture and ideals could be found residing in one publication—*The Saturday Evening Post*.

The weekly magazine's famous cover, home in later years to Norman

Rockwell, was first largely occupied by J.C. Leyendecker, who, like Rockwell, tapped into the American subconscious with his illustrative images. Leyendecker's 322 *Post* covers depicting elegance, strength, resolve and hope are part of an ongoing exhibition, *J.C. Leyendecker and The Saturday Evening Post*, at the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

"*The Saturday Evening Post* was the greatest show window for an artist in America. It was a magazine that had something for everyone: cartoons, fictions, articles about politics, fashion... and no matter who picked it up, there was something to engage them," says Stephanie Plunkett, Norman Rockwell Museum deputy director and chief curator. "The most noted illustrators in the country were part of a stable of artists that were cycled through the magazine. These artists, including Leyendecker, became celebrities whose works were seen by millions of readers."

Leyendecker was so famous that he became an almost Gatsby-like figure: he hosted classy parties, lived a lavish lifestyle and his male subjects were always of the highest order of society, and they dressed for the occasion.

"Leyendecker was very stylish, and very of the era of the 1920s. He [and roommate Charles Beach] dressed beautifully, they had the feeling that they wanted to live a lifestyle that was an elegant one and they worked extremely hard to keep that lifestyle going," Plunkett says, adding that it is widely believed that Leyendecker

J.C. Leyendecker (1874–1951), *Football Player*, advertisement for B. Kuppenheimer & Co. Clothing Company. Oil on canvas. Private collection.



and Beach were partners. “Rockwell later thought that Leyendecker had accepted some commissions that he otherwise wouldn’t have done because they lived above their means.”

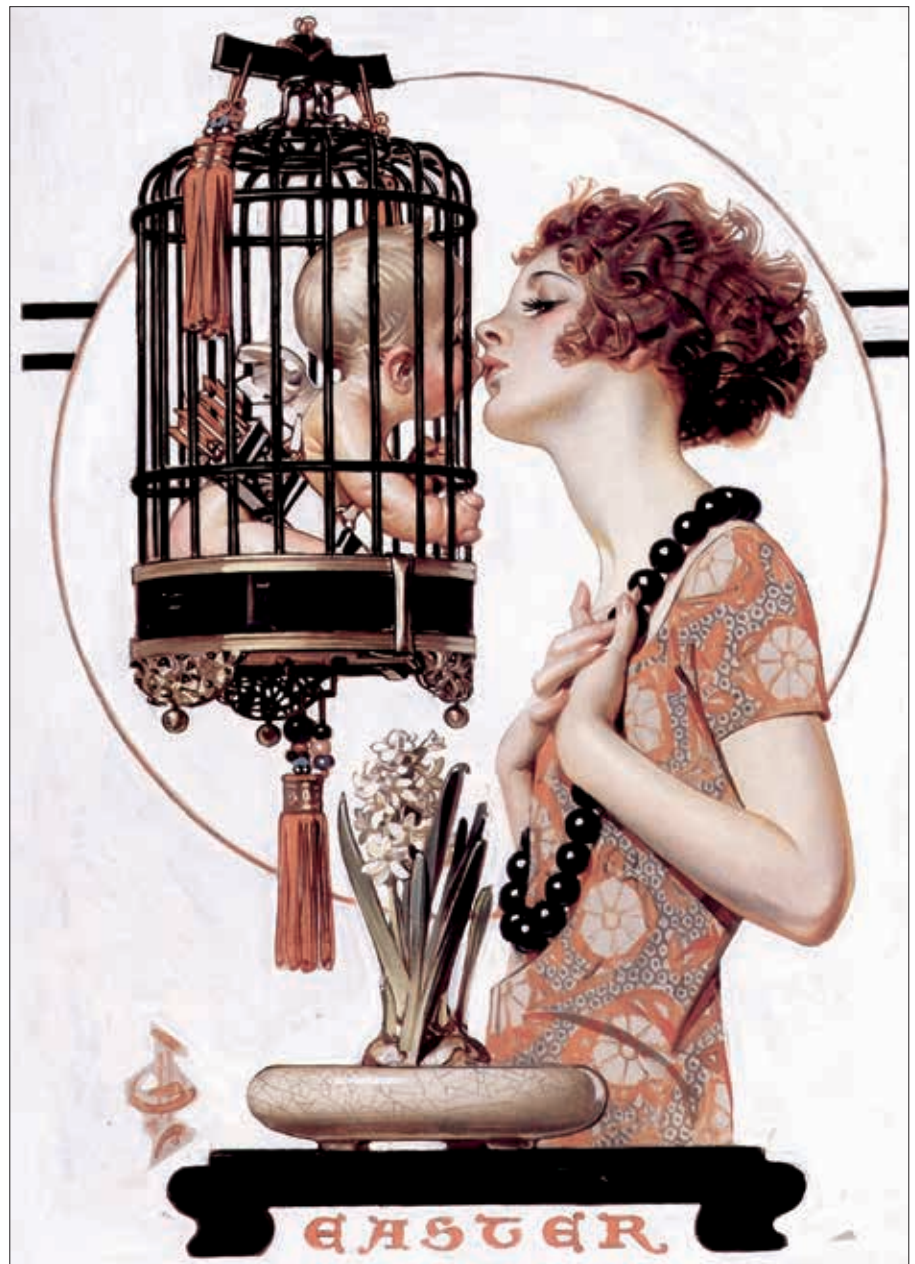
This elegance and opulence can be seen in many of his works, including *Kissing Cupid*, featuring a 1920s flapper with a bob haircut and straight dress, and in *Beau Brummel is the Fairest*, one of his famous Easter covers depicting cherubs and a male subject in a coat with tails and a top hat.

In addition to the 322 *Post* covers featuring Leyendecker’s works, the exhibition also features 26 original artworks by the artist, including a number of his most famous subjects such as New Year’s Baby and elegant male subjects in the spirit of his famous Arrow Collar Man, an advertising symbol he made famous.

In *Football Player*, he paints an athlete on a bench flanked on either side by two mysterious men. “He really presented the all-American male: this very strapping, good looking, strong man in this wonderful collegiate



J.C. Leyendecker (1874-1951), *Beau Brummel is the Fairest*, cover illustration for *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 11, 1925. Oil on canvas. The Kelly Collection of American Illustration.



J.C. Leyendecker (1874-1951), *Kissing Cupid*, cover illustration for *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 31, 1923. Oil on canvas. The Kelly Collection of American Illustration.

uniform. This was for a lifestyle ad, and you can see the men and their beautiful coats, shined shoes... maybe they are the owners of the football team,” Plunkett says. “He was really trying to capture the idea of the fashionable male.”

The exhibition also allows guests to compare Leyendecker’s 322 *Post* covers with Rockwell’s 321 covers. No significance is placed on the nearly identical cover counts, and Plunkett says that neither artist likely knew the number of each other’s covers, or even their own. The show will also encourage viewers to compare the

similar styles of each artist.

“Rockwell keyed into something about the human spirit and the way we aspire to be on a daily basis. Leyendecker was a great designer and he was going for the ideal. So some people could connect to Leyendecker’s more idealistic view and his elegant ideas of beauty, or maybe to Rockwell’s views of the world,” Plunkett says, adding she “hopes people appreciate the incredible skill that both men brought to their works. Especially Leyendecker. His legacy and contribution to art are extraordinary.” ■