The National Museum of American Illustration

by Lita Soln-Cohen

Newport, Rhode Island

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he New Museum of American Illustration in Newport, Rhode Island, is a place to see the past, present, and future of American art. The museum is housed in a historic building that was once home to a number of famous artists, including Louis Comfort Tiffany and Howard Pyle. The museum’s mission is to preserve and promote the art of American illustration, which has been traditionally defined as the art of telling a story through images. The museum is located in the heart of Newport, Rhode Island, a picturesque seaside town known for its historic homes and gardens. The building that houses the museum was once home to the Cutler family, who were long-time collectors of American illustration art. The Cutlers established the museum in 2003, and it opened to the public in 2007.

The museum’s collection includes over 2,000 works of art, including paintings, drawings, prints, and photographs. The collection features works by many of the most famous American illustrators, including Norman Rockwell, Maxfield Parrish, and N.C. Wyeth. The museum also offers a number of educational programs and events, including workshops, lectures, and tours. The museum is open year-round, and admission is charged.

Judy and Laurence Cutler, the founders of the museum, are childhood sweethearts who met while they were students at the Rhode Island School of Design. They have been collecting American illustration art for over 20 years, and their collection includes works by some of the most famous American illustrators. The museum is dedicated to preserving and promoting the art of American illustration, and it is open to the public year-round.
Finding themselves with a 52-room Newport cottage with tiles missing from the roof, glass missing from 61 windows, and in need of heating, the Cutlers hired(building) the interior, designed by Jules Allard et ses Fils, decorators who worked in a number of Newport cottages, including a marble entrance hall and Italian walnut paneling in the salon. Allard commissioned James Welland, an associate of Louis Comfort Tiffany, to paint trees of flowering vines on the walls and ceiling of the loggia. In the north loggia the painting remained in fine condition, but the painting was gone in the north loggia where the Cutlers have installed most of Parrish’s A Florentine Fete. “When I walked in and saw it, I knew this was the right place for themuseum,” said Judy.

In December 1998 Laurence Cutler bought Hiram Powers’s America of Sotheby in New York to use in the entrance hall of Vernon Court. “I have always called Judy America. When that bust came up for sale, I had to have it,” said Laurence. He saw Parrish’s America in her home. “We always say American illustrators are the stars on our flag.”

The garden statuary are reproductions of Classical and 18th-century statuary. “In the Gilded Age much of the garden statuary was reproduction. We had period photographs, so we went to Italy and bought replacements,” Laurence said.

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The entrance to the National Museum of American Illustration at Vernon Court on Bellevue and Victoria Avenues, Newport, Rhode Island.

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