Everett Raymond Kinstler: Pulp to Portraits Exhibition Brochure

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Kinstler’s success as a portrait artist is evident in even a cursory glance at his illustrious roster of sitters. A Who’s Who of popular American icons, he continues to express his love of the artistic process and his connection with his subjects—confirming his father’s advice all those years ago when Kinstler first conveyed a desire to forge a career in the arts.

As a friendship with portraitist John Christen Johnson (1876-1954) inspired Kinstler to focus on a career in painting, so the direction of his art has been influenced by his connection to his subjects. "What Flagg taught me is that technique isn’t important in itself. It’s only a means to an end.”11

Kinstler’s art is a direct response to the people who sit for him. His portraits aren't overly reliant on photographs; rather, he should attempt to achieve “simplicity” in painting. “There were lessons that Kinstler took to heart. In the 1960s, the artist approached Portraits, Inc., a New York-based company that connected portraitists with sitters. This exposed Kinstler to commissions after commission, and eventually portraiture became a mainstay for Kinstler, who, in the mid-1960s, eventually left the field of illustration behind. As a natural progression "since painting people was always what I enjoyed most.”13

During the 1950s, the world of illustration underwent a monumental shift as the result of technological advances in media. The popularity of television and the increasing reliance on graphic design and photography started to supplant the use of traditional illustration, which had dominated print publications.12 Previously robust illustrated magazines found themselves in decline by the mid-1960s due to the erosion of readership and advertising revenues, which also reduced opportunities for skilled illustrators. Kinstler continued to work in the illustration field during the time of change, but his interest in painting and his skill in capturing likenesses made it possible for him to “back into portraiture,” a natural progression "since painting people was always what I enjoyed most.”14

12. Jason Hardman and Beatrice Johnson, 2011 Oil on Board. 65 x 50 inches. 5 x 10 inches.
13. Portrait Study of Christopher Plummer, 2011 Oil on canvas. 40 x 30 inches. 5 x 10 inches.
14. Portrait Study of Zorro, Hawkman and the Shadow, 2011 Oil on canvas. 40 x 30 inches. 5 x 10 inches.
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It all started with connecting with the past,” says Everett Raymond Kinstler, a belief that he firmly affirms as he talks about his life as an artist and his 70-year career. Connections are indeed what it all is about for Kinstler, whether dealing about his work with a comic book and pulp artist, the inspiration he gleaned from John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), or his close friendships with influential figures like Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848–1933) and Mark Twain’s secretary, Alice Dickinson (1890–1980). Thus this remains so in his later years while working as a highly skilled in demand portrait artist whose compositions have been collected by several renowned collectors, from the Smithsonian Institution’s National Portrait Gallery and Ohio’s Butler Institute of American Art to New York’s Plaza Club and Century Association. A native New Yorker, Kinstler’s artistic interests were supported early in his life by his parents— particularly his father, who considered him to be a gift to work on and asked what could be done for a living. At the age of 17 in the 1940s, he sold his first metropolitan as a working artist. Honing his skills as a draftsman and portraitist, and speaking to the essence of what it means to be human.

Complementing Kinstler’s visual transcriptions of the world around him are his interconnected aims of storytelling and connecting with his sitters and audience. For the artist’s paintings do more than simply document physical appearances; they portray, underlie and transcend—observes Kinstler—both his sitters and audiences. His renderings are at once iconic and immediately understandable; essentially, the viewer can connect with them in people, history, and art. Kinstler has a gift for connecting with his sitters and making them the central theme of his work.

Kinstler’s explorations led to his use of life models and working with everyday objects, his keen observation and understanding of what lies beneath. The Belleville Museum of Art is delighted to present this integral member of this famous artist: Everett Raymond Kinstler: Pulps to Portraits, an exhibit that was originally organized by the Norman Rockwell Museum (Saugerties, NY). These works, many of which have recently been examined, document the breadth of Kinstler’s career and provide an opportunity to reflect on the depth of his work and the importance he placed on his own work.

The Belleville Museum of Art is greatly indebted to the numerous individuals and organizations that made this exhibition possible: the Norman Rockwell Museum, The National Arts Club, and The Players, as well as the faculty and administrators of Fairfield University. The Museum is grateful to the many collectors and private individuals who continue to support the Museum’s goal of making its collections and galleries accessible to everyone. A special thank you to Mr. and Mrs. Tony Renz, Dr. Arnold J. Daise, Lord of Barrows Ridon, Bill and Jan Donahue, Mr. and Mrs. John J. Judd, Mr. James B. Murphy, Mr. and Mrs. Harry B. Portrait Society of America, Jack Richeson & Co.; Broom; Bill and Jane Donaldson; Mr. Gary R. Haynes, Haynes Galleries; faculty and administration of Fairfield University. We are also thankful for the Rockwell Museum, The National Arts Club, and The Players, as well as the portraits and prints of Everett Raymond Kinstler. An installation view of the exhibit is now on display at the Art Students League under DuMond. There, after the exhibit closes, it will travel to the State University of New York at Fredonia in the spring of 2012.

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