



THE ORIGINAL MAD MAN

Illustrations by Mac Conner



The Original Mad Man: Illustrations by Mac Conner presents Conner's hand-painted illustrations for advertising campaigns and women's magazines such as Redbook and McCall's, made during the years after World War II, when commercial artists helped to redefine American style and culture during the heyday of New York City's eponymous Madison Avenue.

The exhibition is curated by Terrence C. Brown, a City Museum guest curator and the Former Director of the Society of Illustrators, with consulting curator D.B. Dowd, Professor of Art and American Culture Studies at the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts and Faculty Director of the Modern Graphic History Library, both at Washington University in St. Louis.

Conner's extraordinary career emerged from humble beginnings; he began to study illustration by correspondence course during the

Depression. Later, he attended the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Art and earned distinction as one of the youngest artists to have his work on the cover of The Saturday Evening Post, one of the most prestigious media outlets of the era. Conner eventually studied under Harvey Dunn at New York's Grand Central School of Art, moving to the city to illustrate wartime Navy training aids and then staying on to establish his vocation.

By 1950 Conner was well established on Madison Avenue and

joined with William Neeley to create Neeley Associates, a studio with up to 10 artists servicing publishing and advertising clients. For the next 15 years, Conner was a mainstay illustrator for The Saturday Evening Post and for top women's and general interest magazines, including Ladies' Home Journal, Redbook, McCall's, Cosmopolitan, Good Housekeeping, Woman's Day, Woman's Home Companion, and Collier's. His advertising accounts included United Airlines, U.S. Army Recruiting, General Motors, and Greyhound Lines. Correspondences with editors and art directors provide a glimpse inside the dynamic world of publishing at a time when the advertising industry was at its height and almost entirely centered on New York's Madison Avenue.

Conner considers himself an illustrator rather than an artist, and his striking graphic approach seems as modern today as it was at the height of his career. With dramatic perspective, bold color blocks, and eye-catching patterns, Conner's illustrations exude an impeccable sense of style and capture ideals of female beauty, comportment, and romance that Betty Friedan later famously—and critically—labeled “The Feminine Mystique.” The themes presented in his work mirror the perspectives of the publications of the post-World War II era and of their readership, with an emphasis on glamour, family values, and youth. The sophisticated, beautiful women in the illustrations are often depicted as the principal players, with men taking supporting roles.

Cover: *Do You Love Me?*, c. 1950 © Mac Conner, courtesy of the artist.

Top: *Let's Take a Trip Up the Nile*, November 5, 1950 © Mac Conner, courtesy of the artist.



Anxieties about postwar culture can be found in the work as well, reflecting the national scare over the “juvenile delinquent problem,” or the Cold War-era fascination with noir topics such as crime, intrigue, and mystery—subjects that Conner interpreted with dramatic compositions reminiscent of Hitchcock thrillers.

The exhibition includes reference photographs, pastel sketches, and final printed pieces that illuminate Conner’s illustration process and the nature of his collaboration with colleagues and clients, relationships that helped to shape the final work.

By the 1960s Conner’s style changed in accordance with changing artistic preferences cultivated by a younger cadre of illustrators who began to fill the pages of popular magazines. Women’s publications shifted their focus away from fiction, and advertising agencies began to explore the possibilities of television over print. The exhibition shows that Conner, like many of his contemporaries, reinvented himself as a paperback cover artist, creating lush paintings that depict exotic locales and historical themes for romance novels and women’s fiction; published by Warner and Harlequin Books. Later in his career, Conner investigated portraiture and illustration for children’s books.

The exhibition is co-sponsored by The Modern Graphic History Library at Washington University in St. Louis and the Rockwell Center for American Visual Studies at the Norman Rockwell Museum.



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From top:

The Trouble With Love, July 1952 © Mac Conner, courtesy of the artist.

Veni, Vidi, Video, c 1949 © Mac Conner, courtesy of the artist.