

Coles Phillips

Working between WWI and the late Twenties, Coles Phillips was the first to introduce Art Deco styles into advertising design. He illustrated many magazine covers for the Saturday Evening Post with very modern and seductively designed women. Some social historians actually give Phillips credit for the first pin-up girl, later known to all America as The Fadeaway Girl. During the twenty-year period between 1907 and 1927, Coles Phillips was ranked with Parrish, Leyendecker and Flagg as one of the most popular illustrators in the nation.

Born Clarence Coles Phillips in Springfield, Ohio and his lower middleclass family had no further aspirations for him other than working at the American Radiator Company where his first job was as a clerk. He soon quit that position and enrolled at Kenyon College in 1902. His first illustrations were for the Kenyon College monthly magazine The Reveille, which published his work between 1902-1904. He dropped out of Kenyon in his junior year to leave for New York City to become a professional artist. When he arrived in NYC, he had a reference letter from American Radiator and was immediately hired by their local office. After a brief stint, he was caught with a caricature of the boss, which got him instantly fired. That very evening, a friend from work told the story of what had happened to J. A. Mitchell, publisher of Life, he looked at the cartoon and asked to meet Phillips. The unfortunate sketch turned out to be a fortuitous event as Mitchell offered him a job, but the strange lad decided instead to take art lessons. A few years later Mitchell hired him as a staff artist and Coles Phillips became immediately popular with the Life audience. From 1908 onwards until just a month prior to his passing in 1927, Phillips covers appeared on Life magazine, at least once per month.

In 1908, Coles Phillips created a cover, which was to become his signature, his trademark, The Fadeaway Girl. Phillips Fadeaway Girl was cleverly linked to the background color surrounding her by dress color so that she gave the impression of being close and far simultaneously. He subtly combined the foreground and the background in the same color. It was a graphic device, which is commonly used today, but in its early uses was neither a gimmick nor a signature style, it was rather a technique. The device enhanced the entire composition and brought it into the realm of fine art, be it in an Oneida Silver advertisement or a fashion magazine cover. To create the effect, he had to study the proportions of the canvas, the cover dimensions for its end-use, and the negative shapes so that he would know whether it worked equally well with the positive shapes. All very clever, simple to understand in its solution, but difficult to strategically plan.

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Coles Phillips many illustrated books including Michael Thwaites Wife, by Miriam Michelson, The Fascinating Mrs. Halton by E. F. Benson, The Siege of the Seven Suitors by Meredith Nicholson, The Gorgeous Isle by Gertrude Atherton. He also did advertising illustrations, particularly for Willys Overland Automobiles and trucks. In 1920, Phillips entered the Clark Equipment Company's, The Spirit of Transportation competition, and his entry took everybody by storm for its unique composition and theme and his use of pastels. He sometimes wrote the copy to accompany his images, for example a Holeproof Hosiery advertisement attracted customers with this line, Trim ankles demurely alluring. How they fascinate, captivate. And well she knows glove-fitting Holeproof Hosiery makes them so.

Although he did many covers for Life, they were not exclusive, and he also did covers for Good Housekeeping, Colliers, The Ladies Home Journal, McCall's, Saturday Evening Post, Women's Home Companion, Liberty. Several books of his images

were published including A Gallery of Girls by Coles Phillips and A Young Man s Fancy. As times changed, his work changed with it opening doors to more overt sexuality, more flesh shown, and that age worn word, more titillation for the readers. In 1924, Phillips caused a sensation with his Miss Sunburn a bathing beauty created for Unguetine sun tanning lotion. The images of Miss Sunburn were placed in druggist shops nationwide, but were all stolen within a few weeks, everywhere.

Many of Coles Phillips images are reminiscent of Maxfield Parrish s in composition, if not technique. Particularly his Jell-O advertisements in 1919, even Community Silver for Oneida have images similar to the Knave of Hearts, some Luxite Hosiery ads do as well, with their Parrish-like side profiles.

While other illustrators created more elegant images, Phillips used a cerebral approach and design device to the hilt, making it something in demand for certain connoisseurs of the graphic arts. Yet, the mass audience was enthralled with his work.

Coles Phillips died at 47 years in 1927 at New Rochelle, New York, a popular residential community for illustrators including JC Leyendecker and Norman Rockwell. The day he died, his good friend and neighbor in New Rochelle, JC Leyendecker took the four Phillips children into Manhattan to see the Charles Lindbergh Parade on Fifth Avenue.

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