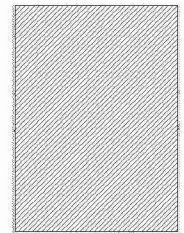




Antonio Lope's "Female Figure With Hat and Borzoi Dog" (1975), marker pastel. Courtesy Society of Illustrators.



# FASHIONABLY DRAWN

**“Fashion Illustration: The Visionaries, A Century of Illustrations From the Frances Needy Collection” – at the Society of Illustrators Jan. 7 through March 7 – had us at the catalog’s cover.**

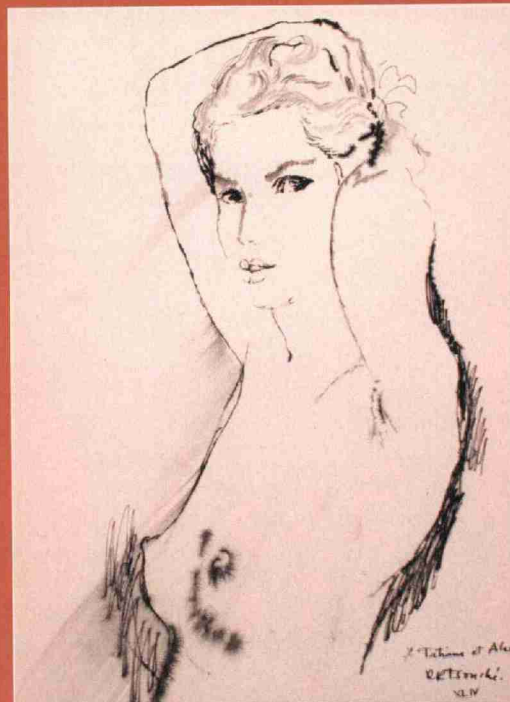
BY GEORGETTE GOUVEIA

It features Tobie Giddio's 2003 work in medium ink and colored Pantone paper, created for Chanel for Amica, which has a Zen-like, calligraphic quality. A fascinator, a pair of lowered, heavily fringed eyes with wings of shadow and a small, rouged mouth bordered by an abstracted mermaid gown that looks like an instand evoke the whole of a woman. Here, the eyes have it, a fitting metaphor for the eye of the illustrator and the eye of the designer that the illustrator captures.

“Informed by intuition and chance,” the accompanying text notes, “(Giddio’s) work is at once unexpected and beautiful to behold.”

The same might be said for the other visionaries in the show, including Bil Donovan, chairman of the Frances Needy Collection of Original Fashion Illustration, which the exhibit celebrates. Needy, who taught fashion illustration for 50 years at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) and Parsons School of Design, both in Manhattan, didn’t create the collection, Donovan says, but rather inspired it. Held by FIT’s Special Collections, the Needy Collection now contains more than 400 pieces, 65 of which are in the show and 28 of which were acquired for the exhibit. They not only display the artistry of fashion illustration’s biggest names, Donovan says, but chronicle its history and the changing tides of America.

In the early 20th century, he says, fashion plates in books and magazines – which, by the way, are the origins for the term “fashion plate” to describe a fashionable person – had the studied quality of the Art Nouveau movement. With the advent of jazz, Art Deco and



René Bouché's "Tatiana et Alex" (1944), ink on paper.





Maud DeForest Bogart's "Three Figures in Evening Gowns" (1929), wash and inks on paper.

Coco Chanel in the 1920s, fashion started to loosen up and so did illustration.

"It was the genesis of fashion illustration to come," Donovan says. In the show, the Jazz Age is represented in part by Carl Erickson's (known as Eric) "Jazz Club Scene" (1927, medium wash watercolor), in which a flapper with a top-hatted gentleman drops her fur stole from her shoulders to reveal the low back of her short, form-fitting dress. It was an age in which anything went, as long as you were soigné about it, as "Three Figures in Evening Gowns" (1929, wash inks) attests. The women, in handkerchief gowns, pose against the backdrop of a party and New York City at night in this drawing by Maud Humphrey DeForest Bogart, the illustrator and suffragist, who served as art director of the fashion magazine *The Delineator* from the 1890s to 1920 and who is better-known to film buffs as the mother of movie star

Humphrey Bogart.

Donovan describes the 1940s and '50s as the golden age of fashion illustration even though "still photography had a huge presence in advertising." The era is represented by René Bouché's come-hither nude ("Tatiana et Alex," 1944, ink) and "Woman in Bouffant Skirt," a charcoal, pastel, ink and gouache work by Esta Nesbitt, known as Esta, that catches the sweep of '50s fashion.

With the Cultural Revolution of the '60s, fashion, which had been the province of an exclusive crowd, began to become more democratic.

"Antonio Lopez was instrumental in this," Donovan says. "He brought sex and street cred to fashion," as in his "Amelia Earhart Series" (1978, graphite ink) for Bloomingdale's, with an idealized version of the boyish subject flying on a swing – a long scarf whipping about her starry aviator's cap, crowned in sparkling goggles, her pleated mid-length dress blowing back to reveal tapered legs in spiked-heel sandals.

In the 1980s, the field of fashion illustration became monopolized by photography, but drawing returned in the 1990s, Donovan says, with the advent of the cultural magazine *Wallpaper*.

"Graphics is a major part of the magazine, and it made people look at fashion illustration in a different way."

Today, it has benefited, he adds, from both digital technology and social media. The work is no longer primarily in publications but has migrated to promotions for everything from retail to credit card companies. Indeed, when we first met Donovan at the end of 2017, he was doing sketching at Louis Vuitton in The Westchester as part of a day of curated shopping sponsored by the mall and Harper's Bazaar.

"For all the complaints that fashion illustrating might've gone away," Donovan says, "it's always there." ■

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