

COVERS FROM *ESQUIRE* MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY RENOWNED ART DIRECTOR AND DESIGNER GEORGE LOIS ARE THE FOCUS OF MoMA EXHIBITION

Thirty-one Iconic Magazine Covers Serve as Visual Timeline of American Culture in the 1960s and Early 1970s

George Lois: The Esquire Covers

The Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Gallery, The Philip Johnson Architecture and Design Galleries, third floor

April 25, 2008–March 31, 2009

NEW YORK, April 25, 2008—From 1962 to 1972, George Lois changed the face of magazine design with his covers for *Esquire* magazine. MoMA presents prints of 31 of the 92 covers Lois created for the magazine in ***George Lois: The Esquire Covers*** from April 25, 2008, to March 31, 2009, in the Museum's Philip Johnson Architecture and Design Galleries on the third floor. A wall in the gallery also pairs the original artwork by Lois for seven of his most iconic covers, including Muhammad Ali as St. Sebastian (1968) and Andy Warhol drowning in tomato soup (1969). The exhibition also features some original transparencies from the photo shoots for the Ali and Warhol covers. *George Lois: The Esquire Covers* is organized by Christian Larsen, Curatorial Assistant, Research and Collections, Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art. This installation continues the tradition of showcasing works in MoMA's graphic design collection, which includes noteworthy examples of typography, posters, and other combinations of text and image.

Before Lois (American, b. 1931), a renowned advertising executive, art director, and designer, even the most celebrated magazine covers like James Montgomery Flagg's Uncle Sam for *Collier's* or Norman Rockwell's poignant illustrations for the *Saturday Evening Post* depended on drawing or painting to illustrate the content or symbolize the spirit of the publication. Many covers suffered from a banal, formulaic style, and often text competed with the image. Lois stripped the cover down to a graphically concise yet conceptually potent image that ventured beyond mere illustration of the feature article. He exploited the communicative power of the mass-circulated front page to stimulate and provoke the public into debate, pressing Americans to confront controversial issues like racism, feminism, and the Vietnam War. These images hit the public with their messages artfully communicated with force and immediacy. Viewed as a collection, the covers serve as a visual timeline and a window onto the turbulent events of the 1960s. Initially received as jarring and prescient statements of their time, the *Esquire* covers have since become essential to the iconography of American culture.

When Harold Hayes became *Esquire's* editor in 1961, the monthly men's magazine founded in 1933 had passed its peak in the 1940s and was on the verge of bankruptcy. He needed to renew its image, and he recognized the cover as the most visible and important page for public recognition. He met with Lois, who suggested that a single designer produce the cover instead of the "design by consensus" approach Hayes had taken with his staff. Hayes asked Lois to design one cover for him. Lois daringly called an upcoming boxing match in favor of underdog Sonny Liston by showing the heavily favored Floyd Patterson knocked out and alone in the arena. This October 1962 cover generated the largest newsstand sales in *Esquire's* history.

Because Hayes gave Lois unparalleled freedom in creating the covers, Lois did not have to sell his ideas with a sketch or a "comp," as is customary in the graphic design and advertising business. After discussing his ideas with Hayes, Lois set to work straight away to produce the final design. He arranged photo shoots with Carl Fischer and other photographers and created montages of clip art, stock photography, and drawn elements, a process that served as a mechanical precursor of the digital assemblage and retouching widely used today. For instance, to illustrate an article on the decline of the American avant-garde in the May 1969 issue, Lois took separate photographs of Andy Warhol and a Campbell's soup and combined them to create a witty spoof on Pop Art by drowning Andy Warhol in the can of soup.

On the scandalous December 1963 cover, boxer Sonny Liston appeared as America's first black Santa Claus, a painfully ironic image that exposed the nation's growing racial divide. While this cover lost *Esquire* an estimated \$750,000 in ad revenue, the magazine's growing popular acclaim offset the financial setback. Over the next four years, *Esquire* made over \$3 million in profit as annual circulation rose from 500,000 to 2.5 million.

The April 1968 cover featured Muhammad Ali. Born Cassius Marcellus Clay, Ali changed his name after joining the Nation of Islam. For religious reasons, Ali refused military service in the Vietnam War as a conscientious objector. He was sentenced to five years of jail for draft evasion, and boxing commissions suspended him and stripped him of his title. In 1968, while Ali was awaiting his appeal to the Supreme Court, Lois posed him as the Christian martyr St. Sebastian, who miraculously survived being shot with multiple arrows. During the photo shoot, Ali named each of the arrows after his tormentors: General Westmoreland, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, and President Johnson, among others. The image was so popular that it was later reproduced as a protest poster.

The August 1970 issue of *Esquire* featured several articles that focused on the spread of youth culture. Given the broad range of opinions in the issue, Lois took the liberty of asserting his point of view on the subject. As Lois saw it, the film *Easy Rider*, released the previous year, was celebrated as a new religion among youth. He shot a marquee for the film, and superimposed it on the façade of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York.

Sponsorship:

The exhibition is supported by Douglas Lloyd.

About George Lois

Born and raised in the Bronx, George Lois (American, b. 1931) went to Manhattan's High School of Music and Art. He attended Pratt Institute for one year before leaving, at the urging of his advertising professor, for a job in the design studio of Reba Sochis. Having left college, he became subject to the draft and served in the Army for 2 years in the Korean War. When he returned in 1953, Sochis wanted to make him a partner in her studio, but Lois decided to work for CBS and William Golden's renowned advertising and promotions department.

After leaving CBS and taking on short stints at the advertising agencies Lennen & Newell and Sudler & Hennessy, Lois joined Doyle Dane Bernbach in 1959, the agency that gave birth to Big Idea Thinking, the basis of truly modern advertising. Lois left Doyle Dane Bernbach in 1960 to open up his own agency, Paper Koenig Lois. Unconstrained by convention and static corporate hierarchies, PKL soon became a sought-after agency, creating memorable campaigns for everything from gourmet pickled Dilly Beans and Xerox to Aunt Jemima and National Airlines. Lois established several agencies in his career including Lois Holland Callaway, Creamer Lois, Lois Pitts Gershon, Lois/EJL, Lois USA, and presently, Good Karma Creative, with his son Luke.

In addition to the iconic *Esquire* magazine covers, Lois has created a senatorial campaign for Bobby Kennedy (1964), the concept and name for the low-calorie Stouffer's product Lean Cuisine (1979), and the campaign "I want my MTV" (1982). Lois is the author of the following books: the autobiography *George, be careful* (1972); *The Art of Advertising* (1976); *What's the Big Idea?* (1991); *Covering the 60s* (1996), about the *Esquire* magazine covers; *\$ellebrity* (2003), a book showing Lois's campaigns using celebrities; *Ali Rap. The First Heavyweight Champion of Rap* (2006), a compilation of over 300 rap rhythms, witticisms, insults, and wisecracks from Muhammad Ali; and *Iconic America* (2007), a look at American pop culture. He has been inducted into the Art Director's Club Hall of Fame, the Creative Hall of Fame, the Society of Publication Designers, and been awarded the American Institute of Graphic Arts Gold Medal.

About the Curator:

Christian Larsen, Curatorial Assistant, Research and Collections, in the Department of Architecture and Design, joined MoMA in 2000. He recently organized the exhibitions *50 Years of Helvetica* (2007), MoMA's first to focus on typography, and *Digitally Mastered: Recent Acquisitions from the Museum's Collection* (2006-07, coorganized with Paola Antonelli, Senior Curator, Department of Architecture and Design). He also coorganized the current exhibitions *Just In: Recent Acquisitions from the Collection* (with Paola Antonelli) on view until November 30, 2008, and *Ateliers Jean Prouvé* (with Max Risselada, professor, Technical University Delft, the Netherlands), on view until March 31, 2009.

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