Howard Pyle is not usually recognized as a master of American Art. Even in the field of American illustration, Howard Pyle is not a household name – this despite the fact that between 1877 and 1911 Pyle created illustrations that were seen by hundreds of thousands of Americans monthly. Pyle’s name and art historical importance remains obscure even though he trained a legion of artist/illustrators that would dominate the field of American illustration in the first half of the twentieth century. Howard Pyle: American Master Rediscovered seeks to place Pyle, his illustrations, and his teaching in the context of American art at the turn of the twentieth century, and to situate Pyle within a broader context of history, art history, and visual culture. Howard Pyle: American Master Rediscovered accompanies an exhibition of the same name organized by the Delaware Art Museum and traveling to the Norman Rockwell Museum.

A recent publication on Pyle by Jill and Robert May (Howard Pyle: Imagining an American School of Art) delves extensively into Pyle’s biography, leaving the editor of this work (Heather Campbell Coyle) free to assemble essays that refract the light of Pyle’s art and teaching in a more analytical prism. The book contains a generous eleven essays that illuminate and dissect variant aspects of Pyle’s art and influence.

Each of the essays draws heavily from Pyle’s own writings and from his students’ recollections, infusing the writing with the energy and animation of the man himself. The essays each cast Pyle in a new light but several are particularly illuminating. Coyle uses Pyle’s American historical illustrations for one book: The Story of the Revolution by Henry Cabot Lodge, to situate Pyle in the broader art historical search for a truly “American art”; Margaretta S. Frederick plumbs Pyle’s “visual repertoire” for influences from, and references to, the contemporary American and English art worlds; and David M. Lubin traces a line between Pyle’s pirates and American swashbuckler films of the early 20th Century.

Often exhibition catalogues are criticized for crowd-pleasing yet superfluous essays – however in this case, nothing could be further from the truth. These essays, combined with Paul Preston Davis’s opus on Pyle’s illustrations (Howard Pyle: his life—his work: a comprehensive bibliography and pictorial record of Howard Pyle: illustrator, author, teacher: father of American illustration, America’s foremost illustrator), comprise a substantive resource for current Pyle research and should be on the shelf of every library that has holdings in American art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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