

**Images of Value: The Artwork Behind U.S.
Security Engraving 1830s-1980s**
at the Grolier Club



© Mark Tomasko

The paper money we handle every day depicts familiar portraits of presidents and statesmen, but how many people know that a woman's portrait was once a standard likeness on federal currency? Or that a notorious showgirl's portrait was engraved for bond coupons? Or that a portrait of one of Queen Victoria's daughters was turned into "Young America" for use on stock certificates? The exhibition **Images of Value: The Artwork Behind U.S. Security Engraving 1830s-1980s**, on public view at the Grolier Club from February 22 to April 29, 2017, presents a rare look behind the images that appeared on bank notes and securities produced in the United States for over 150 years.

For the first time visitors can see a remarkable range of original wash drawings and paintings, period photographs and prints used to engrave the images on documents of value for the United States and countries ranging from Argentina to China to Spain, along with the documents on which the resulting engravings appeared. The exhibition is primarily from the holdings of Mark D. Tomasko, a private collector, scholar, and researcher who documents the engravers, artists, designers, and bank note firms.

Much news has been made in recent months about portraits of women coming to U.S. federal paper money, but in reality it's a case of women coming *back* to federal paper money. Martha Washington's portrait was a constant presence on US Silver Certificates from 1886 to the turn-of-the-century, and possible sources for the image used are on display along with the Silver Certificates on which she appeared.

Before the Civil War banks were chartered by the states, and most local banks issued their own bank notes. This created a large demand for quality paper money and gave rise to a thriving group of bank note engraving firms, effectively making the U.S. the world leader in security engraving by the late 1850s.

Exquisite miniature drawings by Asher B. Durand, George W. Hatch, Henry Inman, and Thomas Birch illustrate the era when artwork needed to be drawn in a very small size to be engraved. Photography later liberated the artwork from the miniature size (the art could be photo-reduced to the size to be engraved). The result was the golden age of wash drawings, 1850s-1870s, with

marvelous allegorical and genre drawings by American artists including the outstanding F. O. C. Darley, whose drawings of the American scene set a high standard. Featured in the exhibition are Darley's drawings of Union Civil War soldiers, and some of his genre subjects. Other noted artists shown for this era include James D. Smillie and Walter Shirlaw.

American and European prints of the mid- and late-nineteenth century include several remarkable mid-century French chromolithographs of female heads, an art engraving of one of Queen Victoria's daughters (turned into a security engraving entitled "Young America"!), a large theater poster, and a large print of Rosa Bonheur's *Horse Fair* (one of the largest paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, at 8' x 16'). *Horse Fair* became an engraving 1 ½" x 3 ½" and was used on documents as diverse as an 1870s Bolivian bank note and an 1880s New York City street railway bond.

By the twentieth century photographs became more commonly used as the artwork source for bank note picture engravings. On view are photographs of Chinese subjects turned into engravings on bank notes for China but produced by American bank note firms. Other period photos used for engravings include a large panorama of Lower Manhattan in 1904 and a portrait of Evelyn Nesbit, the "girl in the red velvet swing" who became a decorative engraving for coupon bonds.

Alonzo E. Foringer, a muralist who had worked for Edwin Blashfield, is a star of the show, with his large oil paintings of allegorical females produced from the 1910s to the 1940s. The finest picture engravers created the best allegorical engravings of the twentieth century from Foringer's work, a marriage of engraving and art that has never been equaled. Known today primarily for a World War I Red Cross poster, Foringer's real achievement is his bank note art, which graced the stocks and bonds of hundreds of U.S. companies and at least 50 bank notes of foreign banks and governments.

Robert Lavin followed Foringer and became the second greatest security engraving artist of the twentieth century, working in the 1960s-1980s. His allegorical paintings, and paintings of working people (perhaps best described as "Capitalist Realism"), became the leading picture engravings for stocks and bonds in the later twentieth century. Some examples of other artists' work of the 1950s and 1960s are also shown in the exhibition.

CATALOGUE:

The exhibition **Images of Value: the Artwork Behind U.S. Security Engraving 1830s-1980s**, sponsored by the Grolier Club's Committee on Prints, Drawings, and Photographs, is accompanied by a full-color catalogue with a preface by William H. Gerdt.

PUBLIC EVENTS:

Free Luchtime Exhibition Tours led by curator Mark Tomasko: February 22, March 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29, 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm.

Illustrated Talk by the curator followed by a Panel Discussion on the Artwork Behind U.S. Security Engraving: Tuesday, March 7, 2017, 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm.

ABOUT THE GROLIER CLUB:

Founded in 1884, the Grolier Club of New York is America's oldest and largest society for bibliophiles

and enthusiasts in the graphic arts. Named for Jean Grolier, the Renaissance collector renowned for sharing his library with friends, the Grolier Club's objective is to foster the study, collecting, and appreciation of books and works on paper.

VISITING THE GROLIER CLUB:

47 E. 60th Street,

New York, NY 10022

212-838-6690

Hours: Monday-Saturday, 10 AM to 5 PM

Admission: Open to the public free of charge

www.grolierclub.org

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: please contact Exhibitions Manager Jennifer Sheehan, jsheehan@grolierclub.org, 212-838-6690; or PR Consultant Susan Flamm, sflamm212@gmail.com, 212-289-2999.

FORTHCOMING EXHIBITIONS:

January 26 - March 11, 2017 "For Art's Sake: The Aesthetic Movement in Print & Beyond, From the Collection of Eric Holzenberg"

May 17 – July 29, 2017. "The Calligraphy Revival: Major Works from 1906 to 2006." Curated by Jerry Kelly

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