

Works by noted Appalachian illustrator on display at Reece Museum

“John Alan Maxwell: Illustrator of Romance,” a retrospective exhibit of works by the late 20th century Appalachian artist along with new research on his career, is on display at the Carroll Reece Museum through April 2.



John Alan Maxwell's painting for John Steinbeck's novella, "The Pearl of the World," first appeared in *Woman's Home Companion* in December 1945.

This exhibit features key illustrations that Maxwell produced for such authors as John Steinbeck, Pearl S. Buck, Christopher Morley, Edna Ferber, Hervey Allen, Booth Tarkington and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Maxwell's great-nephew, Douglas McDaniel of Knoxville, spent 22 years researching and documenting his uncle's endeavors.

"I think this exhibit will encourage a new period of interest in my uncle's work," McDaniel said. "There are still fans of his out there who knew him personally, and I hope not only to reconnect with some of those folks, but to also introduce my uncle to my own 'Gen X' generation with this important retrospective.

"More and more in this modern digital age, those in the arts are recognizing the intrinsic value in 20th century mediums, from letterpress to pen and ink illustration in the book and magazine trades."

Maxwell (1904-1984), best known for his accurate portrayals of historical subjects, was born in Roanoke, Va., and raised in Johnson City. He spent much of his childhood in East Tennessee hearing stories of the Civil War and Robert E. Lee, J.E.B. Stuart and other Southern heroes, according to *The Illustrator in America, 1860-2000* by Walt Reed.

Maxwell left Johnson City at age 16, enrolling in the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C., where he studied for a year before heading to the Art Students League in New York. There, he studied under George Luks and Frank Vincent Dumond, whose students included Georgia O'Keeffe and Norman Rockwell.

As early as 1925, though only 21, Maxwell was illustrating works for *Collier's Magazine*. By 1933, he had been named one of the top 10 illustrators in the United States by the Society of Illustrators and was soon producing works for Nobel Prize-winning writer Pearl S. Buck. A 1948 *Esquire Magazine* profile placed him in the pantheon of Southern art and literature, comparing him to his literary "neighbors" Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner.

While his accomplishment in historical fiction and swashbuckling novels of the 1940s and 1950s is more widely recognized, his broader work for international authors of the caliber of Steinbeck and Buck is drawing new attention to the artist.

Maxwell was a member of the Society of Illustrators and a longtime artist in residence at the famous Tenth Street Studio in New York, home to "artist entrepreneurs" for 98 years – artists from the 19th century Hudson River School and the American Impressionists to 20th century artists and illustrators. He maintained his space there until the



Noted illustrators, including John Alan Maxwell, were commissioned to paint scenes for the 1946 movie adaptation of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' *The Yearling*.

building was demolished in 1956.

Shortly thereafter, Maxwell returned to Johnson City and continued to work and teach art classes at ETSU until his death in 1984.

At the conclusion of the exhibition, McDaniel will donate prints of these rediscovered works to the Reece Museum's permanent collection. Prints are also available for sale at the museum.

The museum is free and open to the public. Regular hours are 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday and 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Thursday.

For more information, call the Reece Museum at 439-4392. For information about Maxwell, his work, ordering prints, or upcoming tour dates, visit www.johnal-anmaxwell.org.