



The Hirschfeld Century: Portrait of an Artist and His Age

Al Hirschfeld

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I am down to a pencil, a pen, and a bottle of ink. I hope one day to eliminate the pencil.

Al Hirschfeld redefined caricature and exemplified Broadway and Hollywood, enchanting generations with his mastery of line. His art appeared in every major publication during nine decades of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as well as on numerous book, record, and program covers; film posters and publicity art; and on fifteen U.S. postage stamps.

Now, *The Hirschfeld Century* brings together for the first time the artist's extraordinary eighty-two-year career, revealed in more than 360 of his iconic black-and-white and color drawings, illustrations, and photographs—his influences, his techniques, his evolution from his earliest works to his last drawings, and with a biographical text by David Leopold, Hirschfeld authority, who, as archivist to the artist, worked side by side with him and has spent more than twenty years documenting the artist's extraordinary output.

Here is Hirschfeld at age seventeen, working in the publicity department at Goldwyn Pictures (1920–1921), rising from errand boy to artist; his year at Universal (1921); and, beginning at age eighteen, art director at Selznick Pictures, headed by Louis Selznick (father of David O.) in New York. We see Hirschfeld, at age twenty-one, being influenced by the stylized drawings of Miguel Covarrubias, newly arrived from Mexico (they shared a studio on West Forty-Second Street), whose caricatures appeared in many of the most influential magazines, among them *Vanity Fair*. We see, as well, how Hirschfeld's friendship with John Held Jr. (Held's drawings literally created the look of the Jazz Age) was just as central as Covarrubias to the young artist's development, how Held's thin line affected Hirschfeld's early caricatures.

Here is the Hirschfeld century, from his early doodles on the backs of theater programs in 1926 that led to his work for the drama editors of the *New York Herald Tribune* (an association that lasted twenty years) to his receiving a telegram from *The New York Times*, in 1928, asking for a two-column drawing of Sir Harry Lauder, a Scottish vaudeville singing sensation making one of his (many) farewell tours, an assignment that began a collaboration with the *Times* that lasted seventy-five years, to Hirschfeld's theater caricatures, by age twenty-five, a drawing appearing every week in one of four different New York newspapers.

Here, through Hirschfeld's pen, are Ethel Merman, Benny Goodman, Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney, Katharine Hepburn, the Marx Brothers, Barbra Streisand, Elia Kazan, Mick Jagger, Ella Fitzgerald, Laurence Olivier, Martha Graham, et al. . . . Among the productions featured: *Fiddler on the Roof*, *West Side Story*, *Rent*, *Guys and Dolls*, *The Wizard of Oz* (Hirschfeld drew five posters for the original release), *Gone with the Wind*, *The Sopranos*, and more.

Here as well are his brilliant portraits of writers, politicians, and the like, among them Ernest Hemingway (a pal from 1920s Paris), Tom Wolfe, Charles de Gaulle, Nelson Mandela, Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill, and every president from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Bill Clinton.

Sumptuous and ambitious, a book that gives us, through images and text, a Hirschfeld portrait of an artist and his age.

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