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ILLUSIONS – THE ART OF MAGIC AN IMMERSION IN SHOWS FROM THE GOLDEN AGE OF MAGIC, OPENING AT THE MCCORD MUSEUM

Montreal, May 23, 2017 – From May 26, 2017 to January 7, 2018, the McCord Museum presents *Illusions – The Art of Magic*, an exhibition featuring magic show posters never seen in public before. Dating from the Golden Age of Magic, the 1880s to the 1930s, the illustrations use phantasmagorical imagery to advertise magic acts beyond the comprehension of ordinary people. Consisting of 71 magnificent chromolithographs and wood engravings, some of them very large format, the exhibition highlights the most celebrated stars of the period: Herrmann, Kellar, Chung Ling Soo, Thurston and, of course, Houdini. Developed by the McCord Museum, *Illusions – The Art of Magic* draws from its Allan Slaight Collection, acquired in 2015.



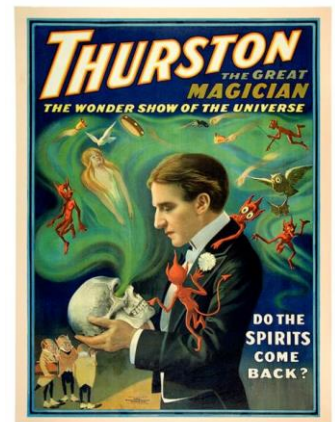
Le Roy, Talma, Bosco
World's Monarchs of Magic
Adolph Friedländer, 1905
M2014.128.318
© McCord Museum

One of the world's top five private collections of magic-related posters and documents, the Allan Slaight Collection is under the responsibility of Christian Vachon, Curator, Paintings, Prints and Drawings, at the McCord Museum, who developed the exhibition concept with input from guest curator David Ben, a renowned magician and leading authority on magic history. The scenario and texts were written by Olivier Kemeid, while the exhibition design was conceived by Guillaume Lord, both of whom are well-known creators in the theatre community.

"We are very pleased to present this exhibition introducing visitors to these exceptional posters from the collection, the only one of its size in Canada. Its acquisition was made possible thanks to the generosity of La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso, a philanthropic foundation based in Toronto. We are particularly proud of the collection, as no other public institution has one in such remarkable condition. Many of the magicians featured in the exhibition performed in Montreal, including the legendary Houdini, who gave a series of performances in our city during his career," says Suzanne Sauvage, the Museum's President and Chief Executive Officer.

IMMERSION IN THE WORLD OF MAGIC

The exhibition invites visitors to attend a veritable magic show starring the greatest magicians of the Golden Age. Each section showcases a different kind of illusion: appearance and disappearance, decapitation, levitation, escape and mentalism. At the same time, the exhibition helps visitors interpret the posters using themes such as Spiritualism, Orientalism, the transmission of knowledge and the role of women in the world of magic. To make the intangible, tangible, three short videos of magicians performing various tricks are projected, using the legendary special effects technique known as Pepper's Ghost, which is often employed by magicians. Visitors are immersed in a dynamic sensory universe of



Thurston
Do the Spirits Come Back?
Stobridge Lithographing Co., 1915
M2014.128.421
© McCord Museum

sights, sounds and colours that evokes the world of magic by creating a mysterious, spellbinding atmosphere.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF MAGIC

Alexander Herrmann, Adelaide Herrmann, Harry Kellar, Howard Thurston, Chung Ling Soo, Harry Houdini: while all of these magicians, with the exception of Houdini, have been forgotten today, they reigned supreme on stages during the Golden Age of Magic. Show business pioneers, kings and queens of mass entertainment, they attracted crowds in major cities around the world. They were also among the first artists to embark on international tours, taking advantage of improved methods of transportation to cross the seas and visit every continent.

The Golden Age of Magic coincided with the Golden Age of Chromolithography, and the posters on display reflect the evolution, innovation and artistry of this process before it was supplanted by new technology, just as magic shows were displaced by talking motion pictures. These posters are magical in their own right, full of vibrant colours and phantasmagorical imagery designed to ignite the imagination and entice passers-by to buy a ticket for the show. Many of the posters are considered "Rare or extremely rare" and some are even classified as "Unique"; all are in mint condition.

MAGIC VENUES IN MONTREAL

From the early 19th to the early 20th century, Montreal was home to nearly fifty theatres and performance halls. Driven by American vaudeville, they presented a variety of entertainments, including magic acts. Among these venues, the Academy of Music on Victoria Street welcomed Alexander Herrmann and Harry Kellar –a favourite of Montrealers, while Samri Baldwin, known as the “White Mahatma” (1848-1924), performed at the Queen’s Theatre. The Theatre Français on Saint-Catherine Street hosted a vaudeville troupe in 1897 that included Charles Carter. In 1899, American mentalist Anna Eva Fay (1851-1927) performed at Windsor Hall on Peel Street. The Orpheum on Saint-Catherine St. welcomed Houdini in 1911, and again in 1915, when he presented his famous “Water Torture Cell” illusion for the first and last time. He came back to Montreal in 1925, performing at the Imperial Theatre, then in 1926, at the Princess Theatre.

ACTIVITIES

Designed for all ages, the exhibition will be, in the autumn 2017, accompanied by numerous programming initiatives: a film retrospective, workshops, a lecture series and educational activities. Just like in a magic show, everything is orchestrated to enthrall spectators and convince them, however briefly, that nothing is impossible!

**To better appreciate *Illusions – The Art of Magic*
Wednesday, May 31 at 6 p.m. (in French)**

Discussion about the exhibition with Christian Vachon, Curator, Paintings, Prints and Drawings and Olivier Kemeid, Artistic Director and Managing Co-Director of Théâtre de Quat’Sous and writer for the exhibition.
Free admission.



Miss Marianna De Lahaye
Magic & Illusion
Charles Lévy, about 1898
M2014.128.558
© McCord Museum



Imperial Theatre, De Bleury
St., Montreal, 1913 (detail)
MP-1977.140.18.1, McCord
Museum



Houdini
The Water Filled Torture Cell
Strobridge Lithographing Co., 1916
© McCord Museum
M2014.128.223

AFTER HOURS AT THE MCCORD – ECCENTRIC MONTREAL
Thursday, June 1, from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Presented by **National Bank**, *After Hours at the McCord – Eccentric Montreal* will take participants back to the Golden Age of Magic and immerse them in a fairground atmosphere worthy of La Belle Époque.

BOOK

Published in conjunction with the exhibition, a 248-page linen hardcover book about magic features some 230 colour reproductions of posters from the Allan Slight Collection and also includes essays by various experts. In addition to explaining the production processes behind these posters that are now considered veritable works of art, this publication offers some novel perspectives on the world of magic. Co-published by 5 Continents and the McCord Museum, the catalogue is available in both French and English. Cost: \$59.99

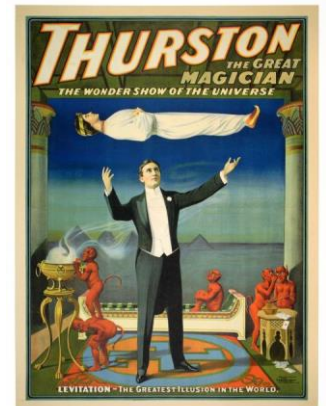
THE ALLAN SLAIGHT COLLECTION

This collection contains 600 posters from the late 19th and early 20th centuries—the Golden Age of Magic—as well as over 1,000 rare books, programs, handbills, photographs, mementos, letters, autographs, ephemera and objects related to the legendary Harry Houdini (1874–1926). It is the ultimate reference for all magic collectors.

Thanks to La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso, the collection has been stored under optimal conditions, catalogued and will be digitized, thus making the McCord Museum a centre for information on the subject, making it accessible to members of the public and researchers from around the world who share an interest in magic.

ABOUT THE MCCORD MUSEUM

The McCord Museum is dedicated to the preservation, study and appreciation of Montreal’s history, as recounted by its people, artists and communities living in the city’s past and present. The McCord Museum is home to one of the largest historical collections in North America, consisting of First Peoples objects, costumes and textiles, photographs, decorative and visual artworks, and textual archives, totalling more than 1.4 million artefacts. The McCord Museum produces exciting exhibitions that engage visitors from Montreal, Canada, and beyond by offering them a contemporary look at the world. The McCord Museum also offers educational and cultural activities, as well as innovative projects on the Internet. ***McCord Museum: Our People, Our Stories.***



Thurston
Levitation – The Greatest Illusion in the World
Strobridge Lithographing Co., 1914
M2014.128.542
© McCord Museum

Photographs available at: <http://ow.ly/O6TA301V3ES>

Interviews can be arranged with Suzanne Sauvage, President and Chief Executive Officer of the McCord Museum, and Christian Vachon, Curator, Paintings, Prints and Drawings, at the McCord Museum

Source and information:

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