

Robert Oliver Skemp (1910 - 1984)

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Lived/Active: Connecticut Known for: portrait, marine, illustrator
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BIOGRAPHY for Robert Skemp

Facts/Data

Birth
 1910 (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania)
 Death
 1984 (Bridgehampton, New York)
 Lived/Active
 Connecticut



Photo of Robert Oliver Skemp

Often Known For
 portrait, marine, illustrator

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This biography from the Archives of AskART:



The following is from Jennifer Skemp O'Grady, daughter of the artist:

Robert Oliver Skemp was born in 1910 the son of Olive Hess Skemp, a prominent rug designer and artist, and grew up with a love of the sea and the ships that sailed it. A librarian aunt provided books with stories like *Treasure Island*, *20,000 Leagues under the sea*, and *Mysterious Island* with illustrations by artists like N.C. Wyeth, Meade Schaeffer and others.

At age 16 he enrolled in the Arts Student's League of New York to study with Thomas Hart Benton, George Bridgeman, and Frank V. DuMond. Still a young man, he joined the merchant marines and went around the world on a cargo ship, traveling to Europe, the Middle East, India, Japan, China, Hawaii and South America.

He returned to study under Pruett Carter at the Grand Central Art School, and with George Luks in New York. He tried for a berth on the *Tusitalia*, the last commercial sailing ship, but her voyage was canceled,

and she never sailed again.

Mr. Skemp returned to France and Spain to paint and study further. His life a mix of painting and sailing, he built an ocean racing ketch in Maine with a friend, and later raced in the Bermuda race.

He began working as an illustrator for such magazines as *Colliers*, *Liberty*, *Saturday Evening Post* and *Sports Afield*, earning 3 Gold Medals among other awards from the Art Directors Clubs of Chicago and New York, and served as a flag officer of the Columbia Yacht club in Chicago, before moving to Connecticut.

In Connecticut he turned to portrait painting, and began a career which included portraits of notables such as J. Paul Getty; Admiral Richard E. Byrd; Admiral James Farley; Mayor Richard Lee of New Haven, CT; Luther B. Hodges, Secretary of Commerce; and General Douglas Mac Arthur.

Work for the Church of the Latter Day Saints included a number of portraits as well as 2 murals for the New York Worlds Fair, and the Tokyo Worlds Fair.

Mr. Skemp's marine paintings focused for the most part on the clipper ships of the first part of the 19th century, especially notable for accuracy about individual ships, their rigging, sails, weather and marine environment. He was a founding member of the American Society of Marine Arts.

Died 1984.

Collections: Pentagon; The Vatican, The U.S. Coast Guard; Kingdom of Qatar, Governors mansion, Raleigh, N.C.; Princeton University; Yale University; Cornell University, and Pace University, and many others.

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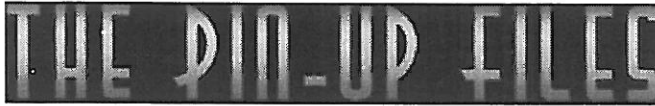
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Robert Skemp (1910 - 1984)

Skemp was born in born in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, on August 22nd, 1910.

A member of the Sundblom school of illustration, he first attended the Art Students League in New York in 1928-29, then went on to the Grand Central School of Art, studying in those years under George Luks, Thomas Hart Benton, and Harry Ballinger. But it was not until his association with Haddon Sundblom in Chicago that he came into his own as an artist.

Skemp and fellow Sundblom protégés like Gil Elvgren, Al Buell, and Joyce Ballantyne, modelled their art in large part on that of the older artist. During his pin-up and glamour career, Skemp worked for several major publishing houses, but his original paintings are very rare today.

In the field of advertising, Skemp developed national campaigns for companies like Schlitz Beer, Studebaker Cars, the Ford Motor Company and, most notably, for Coca-Cola, where his images coordinated well with Elvgren's and Sundblom's work for the firm. He also created many story illustrations for mainstream magazines, including The Saturday Evening Post, Collier's, and Sports Afield. Skemp often adopted Elvgren's "situation" poses in his work, depicting girls caught off-guard in various activities. The use of primary colours was another characteristic of his work. He painted in a large format, usually 40 x 30 inches (161.6x 76.2 cm), in oil on canvas.

Skemp was a member of the Society of Illustrators and the National Arts Club. His paintings are in both public collections (the Pentagon, the United States Coast Guard, and

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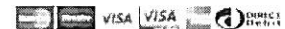
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the New York Public Library) and corporate ones (AT and T, Reynolds Tobacco, and the Franklin Mint). Between 1949 and 1953, Skemp won numerous medals from The Art Directors Club of Chicago.





He died in 1984 from injuries sustained in an automobile accident in Southampton, New York, on the way to his summer home.

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