



Rockwell Kent

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Title

The Decameron, dust jacket illustration

Medium

Gouache and watercolor on board

Date

ca. 1940

Catalogue Number

2006.13

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Credit Line

Purchased with Museum funds, 2006

Web Description

Painter, illustrator, and wood engraver Rockwell Kent was an influential artist with extraordinary talents. His early

illustrations are adroit, trend-setting works for urbane publications such as *Vanity Fair*, *Life*, *Puck*, and *Judge*. Kent used the pseudonym "Hogarth, Jr." in such drawings, fearing that working as an illustrator would taint his reputation as a fine artist. Believing that the routines and editorial control required by a career in illustration would limit his painting, Kent periodically cut ties with society to seek artistic inspiration in remote areas of Alaska, Tierra del Fuego, and Greenland. To fund these trips from 1919 to the mid 1930s and to support his family, he wrote and published engaging travel journals, magazine articles, and books richly illustrated with ink drawings, wood engravings, and paintings. Kent's powerful designs and direct expression garnered many commissions to illustrate limited editions of classic fiction. Among these illustrated publications are *Moby Dick*, *Candide*, *Beowulf*, and *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. One of the artist's last important book commissions was for the 1949 trade edition of Boccaccio's 14th century work, *The Decameron*. His ink drawings for the book give dramatic visual character to Boccaccio's themes of vice and virtue, hypocrisy and truth, and egalitarian values. Like most of Kent's work, the utopian image for the dust jacket forecasts the passionate lives and stories of Boccaccio's characters and also reflects the artist's own spirited and unconventional life.