

The fourth in a series of essays featured in conjunction with Greenwich Faces the Great War

# Artists Respond to World War I

By Karen Frederick

**A**rtists of the Cos Cob art colony, like many other Americans, responded to the Great War by supporting the war effort. Four artists' stories illustrate the range of their contributions from the home front to the battle front—Childe Hassam, Elmer MacRae, Rose O'Neill and Kerr Eby.

Childe Hassam studied and lived in France, and, not surprisingly, demonstrated a strong allegiance to its people and culture. In September 1914, while the United States was officially neutral, Hassam joined the American Artists' Committee of One Hundred, formed by New York painters and sculptors in order to raise money to aid families of French soldier-artists. *The New York Times* (August 15, 1915) reported that its members "felt that the suffering and distress caused by the war gave them their opportunity to express their own feeling of grateful obligation in a material way." In addition to donating a painting, Hassam



*Childe Hassam, Allies Day, May 1917. Oil on canvas. Collection of the National Gallery of Art. Gift of Ethelyn McKinney in memory of her brother, Glenn Ford McKinney.*

and his wife served on the committee that organized the inaugural fundraising exhibition held at M. Knoedler & Co. from February 1 through 13, 1915.

Of Hassam's work from 1914 to 1919, his paintings documenting Fifth Avenue bedecked with flags are the best known. The critic Albert Gallatin later wrote about the importance of his depictions of American patriotism and how "fortunate that NEW YORK had such an artist [as Hassam] to paint her bannered beauty." Following the U.S. entry into the war on April 6, 1917, emissaries from the Allied countries came to New York and Washington, D.C. Hassam's oil painting, *Allies Day, May 1917*, celebrates the visits of the French and British war commissioners, General Joffre and Mr. Balfour. The

French and British flags fly alongside the Stars and Stripes for the first time, commemorating the British-French-American alliance in the fight for liberty and democracy. This painting was used as the frontispiece in *The Avenue of the Allies and Victory*, a book of poems published in 1918 by Alfred Noyes. Reproductions of the painting, as well as copies of the book, were sold for the Art War Relief Fund.

When war broke out in 1914, many other organizations formed to raise money for a variety of war relief efforts. In 1917 many took part in Hero Land, "the greatest charity bazaar ever held in America," at the Grand Central Palace in New York City from November 24 to December 12. "The 16-Day Military Pageant, Theatrical Entertainment, Oriental Wonderland and Charity Mart; Devised, Created,



*Elmer Livingston MacRae, Garden Chair, ca. 1918. Painted Wood. Collection of the Greenwich Historical Society. Holley-MacRae Collection.*

*Elmer Livingston MacRae, Garden Bench, ca. 1918. Detail of back. Painted Wood. Collection of Choate Rosemary Hall.*



## The Smiling Kewpies

By Rose O'Neill



To save for Thrifty Stamps this Kewp  
Now cuts his bills in two,  
And if it's not too personal  
I fain would ask --Do you?  
--The Kewp Who Sells Thrifty Stamps

Rose O'Neill, McClure's  
Newspaper Syndicate.

children have been taught to idolize toy soldiers. . . . Perhaps had they played with smiling dolls instead of stern soldiers all

Europe would be smiling now, instead of weeping." In 1917 and 1918, Kewpies began to address such issues as food conservation, buying Thrift Stamps, aiding the Red Cross, even telling Santa to give presents to the orphans in France and suggesting ways to foil German U-boats—"take the stopper out and let the seas run dry." In addition, O'Neill designed war-themed Kewpie patterns, including doughboy figures, which could be embroidered on quilts, pillowcases, hand towels and other home decorative items.

Kerr Eby was 28 when the United States entered the war. He first served in the Ambulance Corps as a driver, then joined the 40th Engineers, Artillery Brigade, Camouflage Division and later fought in the battles of Belleau Wood, Meuse-Argonne, Château-Thierry and Saint Mihiel. Whenever he could, Eby drew what he witnessed and created powerful images of the harsh reality of war. In 1919 he translated some of these drawings into prints. One of these, *Stuck*, illustrates soldiers putting their shoulders to the wheels of a gun mired in a sea of mud. Later he included this print in *War*, a book he wrote as the probability of a second world war loomed. Published in 1936, dedicated "To those who gave their lives for an idea, the men who never came back," Eby's hope was "that somehow [this book] may be of use in the forlorn and seemingly hopeless fight against war."

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Managed, and Financed by One Hundred Approved National War Relief Organizations for the Benefit of American and Allied Relief" hoped to bring in one million dollars.

Over 250,000 people attended. Elmer MacRae contributed three large carved and painted pieces of garden furniture that were shown in the booth of Mrs. William Astor Chanler. Included were a chair featuring Japanese irises (in the collection of the Greenwich Historical Society), a bench with pink flamingoes and white cranes (owned by Choate Rosemary Hall) and a peacock chair (owned by Mrs. John D. Chapman in 1918, current location unknown).

Rose O'Neill used her enormously popular Kewpies to encourage the public to do "one's bit" for the war. Her Kewpie drawings began appearing in 1909 in such magazines as *The Ladies' Home Journal*, *Woman's Home Companion* and *Good Housekeeping*; they were also featured in newspapers across the United States. In 1915 she urged parents not to buy toy soldiers: "Generations and generations of European



Kerr Eby. *Stuck*, 1919. Lithograph. Collection of the Greenwich Historical Society. Gift of Meriwether Cowgill Schmid in memory of Captain W. Cowgill, U.S.M.A. '17, 19th Field Artillery, 5th Artillery Brigade, 5th Division, American Expeditionary Forces.

The primary source for information on Hassam's flag paintings is Ilene Susan Fort, *The Flag Paintings of Childe Hassam*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1988

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*The New York Times*, November 24, 1917

"Expect 'Hero Land' to Yield a Million," *The New York Times*, November 18, 1917

Charles Justus, "Unique Furniture for the Garden," *The Spur*, May 1, 1918, p. 26

The primary sources for information on Rose O'Neill are Rowena Godding Ruggles, *The One Rose: Mother of the Immortal Kewpies*, 1964 and Shelley Armitage, *Kewpies and Beyond: The World of Rose O'Neill*, University Press of Mississippi, 1994

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