

than other types of food. But “in an age of abundance . . . that same craving can be a one-way ticket to obesity and heart disease.”

Modern conditions also have altered the worth of some evolutionary tradeoffs, Saulnier points out. The gene that causes sickle-cell anemia once gave people who had only one copy of the gene (rather than the deadly two copies) valuable protection against malaria. Similarly, the gene that causes Tay-Sachs disease warded off tuberculosis. But with the threats posed by

malaria and TB so much diminished today, the genes’ benefits are minimal, while their dangers remain.

Only a few dozen American researchers are now at work in the field of Darwinian medicine, and the field is not well known. But that may change, says Saulnier. One big contribution Darwinian medicine could make lies in the allocation of medical resources. Why develop costly drugs to relieve morning sickness, for example, if it protects the baby?

ARTS & LETTERS

The Other Rockwell

“Rockwell Kent Rediscovered” by Stephen May, in *American Arts Quarterly* (Spring 2001), P.O. Box 1654, Cooper Station, New York, N.Y. 10276.

Painter, illustrator, printmaker, and author, Rockwell Kent (1882–1971) was recognized as a major American artist during the 1930s. But in subsequent decades his accomplishments as a painter were overshadowed, first by his commercial illustrations and political posters, then, during the Cold War, by controversy over his left-wing politics. Though not a member of the Communist Party, Kent was a staunch supporter of the Soviet Union (and a recipient of the 1967 Lenin Peace Prize).

Several recent exhibitions have revived interest in Kent’s rugged landscape paintings (some of which he gave to the Soviet Union in 1960), as well as his striking graphic images. These works are “among the finest achievements” in 20th-century American art, asserts May, a writer based in Washington and Maine.

Born in 1882 in Tarrytown, New York, Kent showed an early aptitude for drawing and studied under William Merritt Chase, Robert Henri, and Abbott Thayer. In 1905, Henri, a leader of the “ashcan” school of painting, introduced Kent to the harsh beauty of Monhegan Island, off the coast of Maine. The young artist stayed there for sev-

eral years, eking out a living as a carpenter and lobsterman. “Inspired by the soaring cliffs, pounding waves, and forested landscape of Monhegan,” writes May, “Kent produced some of the most powerful paintings of his career. In *Toilers of the Sea* (1907), the hard life of men who make their living from the sea was underscored by the dramatic backdrop of the island’s towering cliffs.”

Married in 1908 to Thayer’s niece (the first of three wives), Kent moved to Newfoundland six years—and three children—later, settling in a small fishing village. But with World War I nearing, the outspoken stranger’s “open admiration for German culture” led villagers to suspect that he was a German spy. In mid-1915, he was ordered to leave Newfoundland.

In subsequent years, he traveled to Alaska, Tierra del Fuego, and Greenland. He made his final home in the late 1920s on a dairy farm near the village of AuSable Forks, New York, with the Adirondack Mountains on the horizon. In each setting, says May, Kent produced “stark, evocative art. His crisp, modernist images, both paintings and graphic work, reflect his superb artistic gifts



Self-Portrait (It's Me, O Lord), 1934, by Rockwell Kent



The Artist in Greenland (1935), by Rockwell Kent

and his grasp of the essentials of each place.” In *The Artist in Greenland* (1935), for instance, “the tiny forms of Kent and his dog team are engulfed in the silent, white vastness of the arctic space.”

Kent used his graphic work to produce needed income. The more than 270 pen-and-ink drawings he did for a 1930 edition of *Moby Dick* established him as a top illustrator. “His bread-and-butter work,” May says, “ran the gamut from illustrations for

Sherwin-Williams paint guides to illustrations for *Beowulf* and *Paul Bunyan*.” Kent also turned out lithographs and posters that reflected his passionate political views, often by featuring idealized depictions of workers as heroes or victims. His output of paintings—mostly views of his farm in the Adirondacks—diminished. Yet his powerful landscapes, says May, “seem destined to endure as masterpieces of American realistic art.”

EXCERPT

How to Live Many Lives

One seeks sanctuary in literature so as not to be unhappy and so as not to be incomplete. To ride alongside the scrawny Rocinante and the confused Knight on the fields of La Mancha, to sail the seas on the back of a whale with Captain Ahab, to drink arsenic with Emma Bovary, to become an insect with Gregor Samsa: these are all ways that we have invented to divest ourselves of the wrongs and the impositions of this unjust life, a life that forces us always to be the same person when we wish to be many different people, so as to satisfy the many desires that possess us.

—Mario Vargas Llosa, novelist and a professor of Ibero-American literature at Georgetown University, in *The New Republic* (May 14, 2001)