

Cyrus Leroy Baldrige (1889-1977): Illustrator, Explorer, Activist

Introduction

Cyrus LeRoy Baldrige (1889 - 1977) was a renowned American illustrator and author. His extensive travels during the 1920s and 30s took him across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the Far East. His prodigious artistic talents were recognized at age 9 when he was enrolled at the School of Illustration in Chicago. This was followed by an education at the University of Chicago, where Baldrige (PhB1911) excelled in a variety of pursuits. He was always keen for adventure, and in 1914 he travelled to Europe at the outbreak of World War I. It was here that his career began as a frontline war artist.

In the decades that followed, Baldrige and his partner, the author Caroline Singer, journeyed together across continents on a limited budget. They experienced hardships along the way, but they met a wide variety of fascinating people and visited places few other Americans had seen. Together they produced several publications, written by Singer and lavishly illustrated by Baldrige, chronicling their journeys. This exhibition showcases several of his original illustrations, on display for the first time.

In the 1950s Baldrige presented over 200 of his artworks to the University of Chicago, and these are now a part of the collection of the Smart Museum of Art. Also on loan to this presentation are letters, photographs, and artworks from the private collection of Jay Mulberry (AB'63, MAT'71), co-curator of the exhibition and a friend of Baldrige. Additional materials on display documenting Baldrige's student days on campus are from the University Archives in the Special Collections Research Center.

Cyrus LeRoy Baldrige: Illustrator, Explorer, Activist was curated by Alice Kain and Jay Mulberry. Special thanks to Alice Mulberry; The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art staff Christine Granat, Sara Hindmarch, Amy Ruehl; and to the staff of the Special Collections Research Center.

Case 1: Early Years and School of Illustration

My early years were blessed with a wonderful mother whose affection carried me through. It was great luck to have come under the influence of that artistic genius Frank Holme.

- Cyrus Baldrige to Blanche Matthias, 1976

In 1892, at the age of three, Cyrus Baldrige became the child of a single mother when Eliza Burgdorf Baldrige left her husband and began to support herself selling cookware from town to town. Travelling from Oregon to Indiana, they were poor and life was hard, settling for no more than a few months in each town. Cyrus's mother was a woman of iron determination to succeed, and from a very young age Cyrus found solace in drawing and a passion for art.

By the time Cyrus was nine, he had attended 16 schools. Eliza found a family in Chicago to look after him while she continued to work on the road. Recognizing his artistic talent, his mother enrolled him in the School of Illustration in Chicago, an institution founded by Frank Holme that trained journalists to draw in a variety of mediums. Eliza cajoled Holme to take the nine-year-old Cyrus on as a pupil. This was to be the only formal art training that Cyrus Baldrige would receive.

Photograph, Frank Holme and Roy Baldrige, 1901
From the collection of Mrs. & Mr. Jay Mulberry

While living in Chicago, Cyrus attended public school until noon each day, then travelled to the Loop to the School of Illustration run by Frank Holme. Here Cyrus joined the adult students to draw nude models, examine cadavers, and sketch life on the streets.

Frank Holme, a successful newspaper artist and book publisher, became a father figure and mentor to the young Baldrige. Holme was his hero and guide, but was fated to die of tuberculosis in 1904.

Case 2 – At the University of Chicago

The University of Chicago – an accident I ever attended.

- Cyrus Baldrige to Blanche Matthias, 1976

Baldrige entered the University of Chicago in 1907 having been led to believe by his high school teachers that he was expected and had a scholarship waiting. Upon arrival he found his name was not listed and there was no funding for his tuition fees. However, through working in a factory he had saved enough to pay tuition for a year. His living accommodation consisted of an attic room with no heat, which he easily endured due to his previous life on the road with his mother.

With no scholarship, he worked throughout his time at the University. Starting with a position in Student Services making posters, he also served tables, acted in vaudeville theater, tutored other students, and managed an undergraduate dorm. His University roles included presidency of the Reynolds Club, editor of the yearbook *Cap and Gown*, singer in the Blackfriars theatricals, captain of the fencing team,

chairman of the social service committee and a volunteer in Mary McDowell's settlement house. At graduation, he was appointed as the Grand Marshall and, carrying the graduation baton, he led the Class of 1911 as they marched to receive their diplomas.

Cyrus Leroy Baldrige (1889-1977)

Ranch 6666, Texas, 1912

Lent by The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago;
University Transfer from Max Epstein Archive

Shortly after his graduation Baldrige enrolled in the Illinois National Guard, where he learned to ride a horse. This particular skill would be useful 18 months later when he travelled to Texas. Searching for adventure Baldrige ended up at the 6666 Ranch (later known as King Ranch), herding cattle on one of the last unfenced ranges in Texas. Upon his return to Chicago, news came that Archduke Franz Ferdinand had been assassinated in Sarajevo and that war in Europe was imminent. Baldrige immediately cancelled the lease on his apartment and rushed to request a passport to head to the front lines, confident as many people were that 'the war will be over by Christmas'.

Case 3 - First World War

If only I can make the public see what war is—what a dirty, low thing it is, and how brutal it makes men, fine clean men—then they'd fight to the last ditch for the League of Nations.

- Cyrus Baldrige to Harry Hansen, class of 1909

Baldrige's career and success as an artist began during World War I. In 1914, almost on impulse, he travelled to Europe eventually reaching German-occupied Belgium. His sketches began to appear in newspapers such as *Scribner's Magazine* and *Leslie's Weekly*. There were many illustrators and correspondents working the war beat, but not many had travelled to the front, and even fewer reported from behind German lines. Baldrige began to receive recognition as he depicted scenes in Holland and Belgium that few others had witnessed.

He joined the French Army as a truck driver, but he sketched continuously. When the Americans entered the war in 1917, he was transferred to the AEF (American Expeditionary Force) as chief illustrator for the US infantryman's paper, *Stars and Stripes*. His pictures appeared in nearly every issue, reaching some 500,000 soldiers weekly and making him one of the best known illustrators in America.

Baldrige's decision to go to Europe turned his life around. "He came home loathing war, and fiery with the knowledge that he must do something about it," wrote a friend.

Hilmar R. Bachlage

I Was There! With the Yanks in France...

Cyrus Leroy Baldrige (1889-1977), Illustrator

Paris: The Lafayette Co, 1919

From the collection of Mrs. & Mr. Jay Mulberry

The popularity of Baldrige's illustrations from the front resulted in the publication of his first book, *I Was There! With the Yanks in France...* This was a collection of his sketches and observations accompanied with poetry by a fellow soldier and friend from his days at the University of Chicago, Hilmar Baukage. The book was successful, but Baldrige had been left shaken and unsure by the experience of the First World War. It had changed him.

Case 4: Travels (side 1)

Caroline Singer is his partner in vagrancy. [They travel] light through this complicated world, and lodge with equal comfort in the Ritz or the nearest haystack and move from one to the other with the readiest adaptability.

–Alexander Woollcott

After World War I, Baldrige and his partner, the writer Caroline Singer, began to travel across the globe to "escape from all thought of war". Rather than simply acting as tourists, they used their travel experiences to write and illustrate lavish books which they published back at home in New York.

Baldrige and Singer began their journeys together in 1922 with a six-month visit to Europe. This was followed by an extensive trip to the Far East; they spent the majority of their time in China but also visited Japan and Korea. While in China, Baldrige and Singer became friends with the Nobel Prize winning author Pearl Buck, who had spent most of her life living in Zhenjiang. United by a similar political and humanitarian vision, Buck praised Baldrige's artworks of street life and ordinary people, claiming he was the only artist that could draw Chinese people.

In 1928 came a journey across Central Africa where they desired to understand the history of the continent through the peoples that lived there. From this 14-month-long expedition, they published the book *White Africans and Black* (1929), where Baldrige's sketches captured what he described as the 'human dignity' of the variety of people they met. They later visited South Asia and the Near East, traveling

across India, Persia (present day Iran), and Iraq. Most of these expeditions were done with very little money, often on foot or using basic forms of transportation. Through Baldrige's charisma and contacts, they gained acceptance wherever they went from beggars and street urchins to native chiefs and government officials.

Travels Side 2: Observing People

Baldrige had a natural charm and a personality that enabled him to communicate with people across the globe, regardless of language barriers. His artistic skills could transcend boundaries of class, race, and gender; it was a unity of the human condition that Baldrige wished to capture and show in the books that he published with Caroline Singer.

He drew many portraits during his travels—young and old, rich and poor, as well as a number of notable and influential people. During his visit to India he met the poet and painter Rabindranath Tagore, and he witnessed protests by Gandhian nationalists. In the Middle East he encountered King Faisal I of Iraq, met Sufi mystics in Iran, and observed child laborers in the markets. He drew everyone that he encountered with great care and captured their daily routines. Charles Johnson, the first African American President of Fisk University, declared the artwork of Baldrige to be “the best representation available of African life.”

Case 5: Techniques

Baldrige used a variety of processes to create his illustrations. Trained in life drawing and intaglio printmaking techniques, including etching and drypoint engraving at the School of Illustration, he was capable of working confidently in various media from a young age. He practiced several different techniques throughout his career, traditionally sketching with charcoal and ink for life drawings and portraiture. During his travels Baldrige was able to capture a huge range of people and places with this fast and fluid style.

He was also interested in architecture, in particular the Islamic buildings and decoration that he encountered on his journey across the Middle East, which he rendered in great detail. His more elaborate full color works, primarily used to illustrate fictional books, were usually painted in watercolor or gouache. He worked on this larger and more complex format in his studio.

Baldrige was open to stylistic changes and new challenges. He was considerably influenced by his exposure to traditional Chinese and Japanese artwork and calligraphy, using just a few ink lines to capture a landscape or structure. In addition to this he was an acclaimed printmaker. In 1935 he was given the annual award of the Prairie Printmakers of Chicago, and around the same time his etchings were exhibited in the Smithsonian.

Cyrus Leroy Baldrige (1889-1977)

Seiho Takeuchi, Kyoto, Japan, 1925

Lent by The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago;

University Transfer from Max Epstein Archive

*Takeuchi Seiho chose a brush and poised his hand. A few swift strokes.
Across one fan spread a stalk of bamboo, alive, quivering in the wind.*

–Caroline Singer, *Turn to the East*, 1926

During his travels to Japan in the 1920s, Baldrige met and worked with two key Japanese artists, Watanabe Shozaburo and Takeuchi Seiho. Seiho, depicted in this portrait, became Baldrige's good friend. Both of these traditional artists had an impact on Baldrige's practice, most significantly the woodcut print techniques that he learned with Watanabe. In the 1930s Baldrige revisited this medium to produce a number of fine woodblock prints. This complicated and intricate skill involving carving several different wooden blocks to produce one color image, contrasts with his more immediate approach to illustration.

Case 6: Politics

Men who knew him then will talk to you about him by the hour– but not necessarily about his drawings. They will tell you about his honesty, his candor, his sense of democracy, his unfailing good humor and his faith in his fellow man.

–Harry Hansen, University of Chicago Class of 1909

The dedication felt by Baldrige and his partner Caroline Singer towards equality and humanism was highlighted in two booklets that they published, *Race–What the Scientists Say* (1939) and *Americanism–What Is It?* (1936). The latter was written by Baldrige for the veterans group the American Legion. The text detailed simple American freedoms such as the freedom of speech, concepts of democracy and liberty, it quoted Lincoln, Washington, and the Constitution. However, the booklet was perceived by conservatives to be divisive and became the centerpiece of a national debate. Baldrige was supported by the philosopher and reformer John Dewey, as well as University of Chicago President Robert Maynard Hutchins, but he was denounced by the press and lost the support of the American Legion itself. The booklet was even discussed on the floor of the House of Representatives. Baldrige regarded this 16-page pamphlet to be of the most significant works that he wrote.

United States Army Service Forces,
Special Service Division
A Pocket Guide to India
Washington: War and Navy Departments, 1943
From the collection of Mrs. & Mr. Jay Mulberry

Pocket Guide to Iran
Washington: War and Navy Departments, 1943
From the collection of Mrs. & Mr. Jay Mulberry

Pocket Guide to West Africa
Washington: War and Navy Departments, 1943
From the collection of Mrs. & Mr. Jay Mulberry

World War I had left Baldrige with the conviction that the war itself was the ultimate atrocity. He remained resolute in this belief and continued to oppose America's entrance into the Second World War, however his position shifted with the events of Pearl Harbor. His contribution to the war effort was producing a series of handy pocket guides to the countries that he and Caroline Singer had visited and knew well. The small books were designed by Baldrige and written by Singer, and intended to provide information about local customs and social behaviors. Educating the young soldiers to etiquette in Iran, Burma, India, and West Africa, the texts addressed a variety of issues such as whether it was acceptable for man to look a woman in the eye, or shake another man's hand.

Case 7: Children's Books

Two of our children's books make an attempt toward racial and religious understanding... Our book [Boomba Lives in Africa], in a rebellion, attempted a sympathetic picture of a child whose life is as reasonable as the lives of children of a different color... Children are children, their similarities greater than their differences.

—Cyrus Baldrige, in *Time and Chance*, 1947

Children's books were another important outlet for Baldrige's illustrative talents. They provided a rich opportunity for him to produce colorful and imaginative images. He was commissioned to produce several front covers for books by a number of different authors. Children's books also interested Baldrige and his partner Caroline Singer from an educational perspective. Together they produced two significant works *Boomba Lives in Africa* (1935) and *Ali Lives in Iran* (1937.) Both of these were fictional stories written by Singer that used locations they had visited as the backdrop to tales of the lives of ordinary children. The aim of the books was to normalize rather than exoticize the people living in these distant countries.

Book Prototype: “Little Floyd”

From the collection of Mrs. & Mr. Jay Mulberry

The books that Singer and Baldrige published were very different in tone from other children’s books at the time. Their focus on friendship and the similarities between people were a common theme that runs through all of their work. Also on display in this case is a rare prototype book that they worked on together. Titled “Little Floyd,” the book was never produced but offers an insight to Baldrige’s design ideas and working practice.

Case 8: Turn to the East

[A book] by two who seek to intimate the richness of their adventure.

–*Turn to the East* title page, 1926

Baldrige travelled to Far East Asia three times, including a 1924 trip with his partner Caroline Singer. This extensive 12-month journey resulted in their first joint publication *Turn to the East* (1926). The book recorded their visits to Japan, Korea, and China, where they lived in Beijing (then known as Peking) for an extended period of time.

During their visit Baldrige made hundreds of sketches of a wide variety of people and places. The layout of the book was conceived by Baldrige with every page featuring red ink reproductions of his sketches wrapped around Caroline’s text. The observations that she makes regarding events, etiquette and the emotions of a situation are vividly brought to life by the accompanying images. However, the illustrations act as a compliment to her words rather than specifically referring to the particular story that is being told. Together they work to create a travelogue of two distinct mediums that combine to produce an entire artistic vision of their experience.

During their journey, Baldrige and Singer travelled extensively through China and Japan. They met a variety of colorful characters, and in Beijing they made their home in the elaborate mansion of a Chinese warlord, who was seldom present. Their stay in Beijing coincided with a particularly chaotic and politically tumultuous time in Chinese history. The year 1924 was marked by the expulsion of Puyi, the last Chinese emperor, from the Forbidden City, an event that Baldrige and Singer were witness to. During their stay the city was occupied by two different warlords, and it was the second general who ordered them to leave.

From Beijing they travelled to Shanghai, making a stop at Tai-shan on the way there. Mount Tai, as sketched by Baldrige several times in *Turn to the East*, is a renowned sacred mountain which is famed for its flight of 7,200 stairs and its many temples,

gates, and viewing platforms. It was somewhere Baldrige had stayed during his first trip in 1919, and he wanted to take Caroline there to have the “breathtaking experience of being carried up Tai-shan’s steps and through the South Gate of Heaven.”

Ando Case - General Overview Label

The artworks on view in this case are all original illustrations taken from five of Baldrige’s key publications. Beginning with an image of two soldiers from World War I, featured in the 1919 book *I Was There! With the Yanks...*, the case showcases a chronology of illustrations from a range of books published between 1936-1948.

These illustrations were reproduced as full color pages in the books. Several of the illustrations were available as individual prints through the Book of the Month Club, the distributor of a selection of Baldrige’s works.

The illustrations that Baldrige created for his travel books were sometimes drawn directly from life, beginning as sketches drawn quickly and later worked into larger pictures in his New York studio. In contrast, for works of fiction he drew completely from his imagination, distilling his observations from his travel experiences into images designated purely for fantastical storytelling.

Label for November 11th 1918

The title given to the image of two soldiers standing in a battlefield refers to the date of the Armistice, the official end of the First World War. In this image the expression on the faces of the young infantrymen suggests that the experience of the war would not necessarily be over for those that fought in it, they appear haunted by the landscape in which they stand. This striking image was reproduced in Baldrige’s book *I Was There With the Yanks* (1919) as well as appearing in the newspaper *Stars and Stripes*.

Caroline Singer (1888-1963)

Cyrus Leroy Baldrige (1889-1977)

Half the World is Isfahan

New York: Oxford University Press, 1936

Regenstein Library

The book *Half the World is Isfahan* (1936) was a work based on a year-long journey made by Baldrige and his partner, Caroline Singer, through Iran (then known as Persia) and Iraq. The book was written by Singer and illustrated by Baldrige. There are six major, full-color pieces in the book accompanied by over 100 marginal sketches, which was a typical format to their collaborative travel books. The three color illustrations and the sketch on display here were drawn from life, directly referencing people and places from their travels. Baldrige worked on many of the sketches later in his studio, constantly making alterations to the work. For example,

note the feet of the man in *The Desert Well, Persia* which have been cut out and repasted to alter the overall composition of the piece.

James Morier (1780-1849)

The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan

Cyrus Leroy Baldridge (1889-1977), Illustrator

New York: Random House, 1937

Regenstein Library, Phi Beta Pi Collection

The original story of *Hajji Baba of Isfahan* by James Morier, published in 1823, had become a bestseller at the time. Baldridge had wanted to work on this classic tale for a decade. Eventually publishing in 1937, he took responsibility for its full design as well as its illustration. The book's textured cover, the tone of paper, the font and the layout are all part of Baldridge's vision for the work. *Hajji Baba...* was used as the Book of the Month Club dividend, which meant that it would automatically be given to all of the club's subscribers. Distributed in enormous numbers, the book is easy to find in second-hand book stores today.

Arthur Waley (1889-1966)

Translations from the Chinese

Cyrus Leroy Baldridge (1889-1977), Illustrator

New York: A.A. Knopf, 1941

Rare Books Collection, Gift of Louise Ohge

Translations from the Chinese was a book of ancient Chinese poems, translated by Arthur Wakely and published initially in 1919. A second edition was published in 1941 to include Baldridge's illustrations and design ideas. Baldridge contributed several color plates, four of which are on display here, alongside many simple ink drawings that capture the essence of the poetic text.

Baldridge's attention to details, such as the cloth used on the book cover and the texture of the paper inside, created an entire experience for the reader. This second illustrated edition of the book was made into a Book of the Month Club dividend, similar to *Hajji Baba...*, making its reception widely received at the time.

Richard John Walsh, editor

The Adventures of Marco Polo...

Cyrus Leroy Baldridge (1889-1977), Illustrator

New York: John Day Co., 1948

From the collection of Mrs. & Mr. Jay Mulberry

The classic tale *The Adventures of Marco Polo*, published in 1948, was the last of Baldridge's major books. He had wanted to illustrate the stories, originally written

in the 13th century, for some time and approached Richard Walsh and Pearl Buck, the owners of the John Day publishing house, earlier in the decade. However, rationing during World War II had made the cost of paper prohibitive and the project was put on hold. Walsh, who had lived in China, edited the book while Baldrige contributed the majority of the design and the illustrations. The work was another of Baldrige's publications to be selected as a Book of the Month Club pick, and it sold well enough that four years later Walsh and Baldrige put out a version for children.