

Objects from the Collection: Miguel Covarrubias' "The Inauguration"

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As we approach Inauguration Day 2013, let us take the opportunity to examine a print in the Court's collection which depicts the same event eighty years ago, Inauguration Day 1933, as seen through the eyes of one of the most renowned illustrators of his generation, Miguel Covarrubias (1904-1957).



The editors of *Vanity Fair* magazine asked their best-known illustrator to create a special poster commemorating the inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

A largely self-taught artist, Covarrubias grew up in Mexico City and moved to New York in the 1920s. Soon after his arrival, his distinctive rounded, stylized work caught the eye of art directors for magazines such as the sophisticated *Vanity Fair*, where it began appearing regularly on the cover and for special inside illustrations. After Democratic presidential candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected in 1932, the editors of *Vanity Fair* decided to have their best-known illustrator create a special poster of the upcoming inauguration. They published it twice, both as the centerfold in the magazine's March 1933 edition and as a larger poster, which sold separately for \$1.00.

"The Inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt" depicts the moment at which Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes swears in the new president by placing a laurel wreath on Roosevelt's head, who is shown standing tall and grinning broadly. Directly above, two angels herald the event with the blowing of trumpets. On the platform with Roosevelt and Hughes are Eleanor Roosevelt, Vice-President John Nance Garner, and the outgoing President Herbert Hoover, among others.

The media crowds at the bottom of the steps below the platform, where a phalanx of microphones awaits. An all-male crowd of onlookers mingles on the right below Corinthian columns and red velvet drapery. The sole reference to the Depression is "The Forgotten Man" wearing a sandwich board. The Washington Monument and a meandering Potomac River can be seen beyond the Capitol, which may strike a modern viewer as artistic license since inaugurations are now held on the west side of the Capitol, but in 1933 they still took place on the east side and thus the perspective is accurate.

Covarrubias appears to have been fascinated by Chief Justice Hughes, who he illustrated at least three times between 1932-34, all for *Vanity Fair* (and the sole Supreme Court Justice to receive his attention). The stylized Hughes seen here is very similar to his caricature of Hughes and gangster Al Capone in one of his famous "Impossible Interviews", which were illustrations that featured fictitious conversations between two famous personalities of opposite character.

The Court's copy of this poster, once owned by Chief Justice Hughes, was donated through the Supreme Court Historical Society by his granddaughter, Antoinette Denning. Both it and a print of Covarrubias' "Impossible Interview" will be featured in an exhibit on the iconic public image of Charles Evans Hughes that will go on display in early 2013.



Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes wearing his robe, a jabot and his skull cap, proffers a laurel wreath to the President.