N.Y. Historical Society And 90-Year-Old Renowned Illustrator Bring Back The Plaza's Favorite Resident







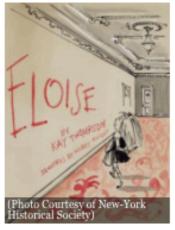








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Hilary Knight (b. 1926)
Unused cover sketch, 1954
Eloise
New York: Simon & Schuster,
1955
Graphite, pen and ink, watercolor
and gouache on paper
Collection of Hilary Knight
Copyright © by Kay Thompson

comeback.

New York Illustrator Hilary Knight is 90. He's never been married. He never had any children. "It's another reason you stay young," he said, "from lack of harassment."

What he has done-and what he says kept him young-is fill the hearts of children and adults through his illustrations of the "fawnciest little lady" who lives in the "room on the tippy-top floor" of The Plaza Hotel in New York City with her Nanny, her pug dog Weenie, and her turtle Skipperdee. And she's making a

Some of Knight's most famous work—the beginnings of the American classic, *Eloise*—debuted at the New-York Historical Society (NYHS) today. The exhibition will continue through October 9. Eloise, the ever so charming and mischievous little resident of The Plaza Hotel, continues to be a picture book superstar more than 60 years after Knight first created her image. Through the new exhibition, parents and grandparents, who enjoyed reading tales about Eloise and her antics in their own youth, will now be able to share their love for the standout character with their children and grandchildren, helping to make Eloise a truly multigenerational proposition.

Hilary was commissioned by the book's author, actress, night club performer, and godmother to Liza Minnelli, Kay Thompson (1909-1998), in 1955, to create what he thought the six-year-old might look like through a series of statements Thompson had written down in the early 1950s.



Kay Thompson, author of Eloise, and Hilary Knight, illustrator of Eloise.

"Kay had such an interesting story," Knight said. "She had worked at MGM in musicals and did a legendary club act that was super sophisticated with the Williams Brothers. Andy Williams was one of them. She came to New York, and they built a night club for her to perform it in on the East Side in the late 1940s or early 1950s. She was in Funny Face with Audrey Hepburn and Fred Astaire."

Though the question of where Eloise—the little girl who is "not yet pretty, but she is already a person"—originated is still debated, Knight said she came from the author herself. "Her sister told me that. She said Eloise was her imaginary friend as a child. She said she had many mysterious friends," he said.

As for Knight, he brought Eloise to life by considering statements like, "I comb my hair with a fork," and "I have a dog that looks like a cat." In an interview, he said that image for Eloise was based on a painting that his mother, Katherine Sturges, did in the 1930s.



Hilary Knight (b. 1926)
"I have a dog that looks like a cat," ca. 1954
Eloise
New York: Simon & Schuster, 1955
Pen and ink on paper
Collection of Hilary Knight
Copyright © by Kay Thompson



Eloise dolls.

The NYHS presentation fully immerses visitors into Eloise's world with evocations of the grand lobby of The Plaza Hotel, her bedroom—complete with a storytelling corner—and her bubbly "bawthroom," where she often made mischief in the books. A host of family activities bring the Plaza's most famous resident to life throughout the exhibition's run, inviting young visitors to explore the exhibition in creative and interactive ways.

Knight said the exhibition is just one of the things going on in his life right now. Now entering his ninth decade, he said he really isn't sure if he has enough time left to do everything he still wants to do. "I've got to hurry up. I got a lot of work to do," he said.

He isn't kidding. Knight is currently working on an off-shoot of *Eloise* with his twin nieces—an adult graphic memoire called *Olive and Oliver*, *The Odd-Ballz*. He is also hosting *Hilary Knight's Stage Struck World at Lincoln Center at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts* and working on an erotic review and fantasy show called *Tails*.

"I have to take care of myself because I have to live at least another 10 years," he said, adding that he still dreams of visiting India and being "accepted into a tribe of gypsies" who would care for him in his old age. He said most people don't know that Rajasthan—the northern Indian state bordering Pakistan—is where the gypsies originated.

He is sort of joking—about the taking care of himself part. Knight says he loathes exercise and credits his longevity primarily to loving his work and good genes.

"I am physically unfit, I guess you would say, because I live sitting down. I work sitting down. The idea of doing exercise is repellant to me. I would rather be sitting down drawing something." Nevertheless, he is trying. "I have to go work out tomorrow and I am counting down the hours."

Hilary said he loves mayonnaise and marshmellow fluff and could eat it by the spoonful if allowed. He quit smoking more than 60 years ago, though he is "pretty good at knocking down glasses of red wine." His parents always taught him to try new things, including food, so he has eaten quite healthy in his lifetime, he said.

He said he doesn't really have religion though he believes "whoever created the creatures in the depths of the sea that are so beautiful and intricately formed must be a genius and very clever."

In fact when he joined the U.S. Navy in 1942, he had to go get his dad out of the bar where he was hanging out with other artists of the day to ask him which box he should check for religion. Hilary's mom was raised Baptist. His dad Presbyterian. He chose the latter.

Hilary said he thinks people grow old because they hate their jobs and they fail to keep using their minds. "There are a lot of reasons people get very old. Most people have really boring jobs, mostly because of circumstances they can't control. They can't wait to retire so they can go play golf somewhere. I can't imagine anything more boring. I'm really lucky that way. I am interested in almost everything."

And while Knight is mesmerized by a tool he didn't have growing up, he considers its successor to be dangerous. "I must confess something. I hate the idea of the computer, but I am obsessed by the idea of it. It has changed my life. I find it very rewarding to work on a computer and write things on email and look things up. But I think the tragedy of the world is going to be the cell phone. It's very disturbing to see children on their phones all of the time. When I am out

walking or looking at the world, I can get away from [the desk top computer]. I want people to look up from their phones and look at the world. It's much bigger and much more fascinating."

Knight grew up in a world where people looked up information in books. Born November 1, 1926 in Roslyn, New York, on the North Shore of Long Island, Knight and his family moved to New York City when he was five. He grew up in Greenwich Village, a New York neighborhood on the west side of lower Manhattan referred to by locals as "The Village." He had an older brother who died at the age of 39 from lung cancer.

His parents were both artists. "All of my inspiration came from watching them. They were illustrators for magazines and children's books." A New Yorker by birth, his father, Clayton Knight, was an aviator in WWI. His mother did fashion drawings for *Harper's Bazaar* and many florals that today would be called art deco paintings, he said. She came from Chicago and had studied art in Japan.

There was someone else besides his parents who influenced his work, however. "I was extremely influenced by British artists and by having Winnie the Pooh read to me as a child," Hilary Knight said. "Those pen and ink drawings were incredibly simple, but so full of life. I owe everything to watching Piglet run across the page."



An employee of Bonham's auction house examines 'Kids on Guns' by Banksy during a press preview in London on June 27, 2014, ahead of the Post-War and Contemporary Art Sale on July 2, 2014. Banksy's 'Kids on Guns' and 'Winnie the Pooh' have a collective value estimated to be in excess of £ 100,000 GBP (125,000 Euros, \$ 170,000 USD). (NIKLAS HALLE'N/AFP/Getty Images)

After a stint in the U.S. Navy during WWII, Hilary attended The Art Students League of New York, a 142-year-old independent art school still located on West 57th Street in Manhattan, New York City, New York today. He studied under Reginald Marsh, an American painter, born in Paris, and noted for his depictions of life in New York City in the 1920s and 1930s. Marsh painted Coney Island beach scenes, as well as popular entertainments of the era such as vaudeville and burlesque. He also painted women and jobless men on the Bowery. "He was obsessed with anatomy and movement," Hilary said. "He was famous for his lithographs and paintings of burlesque houses, Harlem and 14th Street."

Hilary's first job was an illustration of a frizzy-haired child with her glamorous mother and her makeup table that he did for Mademoiselle. He said he drew on that image in creating Eloise.

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Robin Seaton Jefferson, CONTRIBUTOR FULL BIO ✓

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Hilary met Thompson by chance because of his neighbor, D. D. Dixon Ryan who lived in the same walk-up apartment building as him, the same one he lives in today. According to the New York Times, Ryan was "a fashion presence who was an editor at Harper's Bazaar, an associate of Halston and a regular on best-dressed lists, but whose most widely appreciated achievement was helping to give birth to Eloise, the fictional little girl who lives at the Plaza Hotel."



YOTTOY's merchandise at the New-York Historical Society for the "Eloise at the Museum" exhibition.

portrayed to amuse her friends. He also said Thompson's sister told him that Eloise was Thompson, or at least who she wanted to be. She lived at the Plaza while she was performing in the Persian Room. It was Ryan who urged Thompson to write a book. It was also Ryan who hooked her up with Hilary. She took him to The Plaza Hotel to see Thompson perform in the Persian Room nightclub there. It would be Thompson's last engagement. That night, Ryan proposed that the two collaborate on *Eloise*. Within a year, the book, with Thomson's words and Hilary's pictures, was complete. The result was *Eloise*. The book was published in 1955 and a best seller by the next year. Ryan died in 2007.

Hilary said Eloise started out as a character that Thompson

Hilary said *Eloise* was meant to be an adult book, but it looked like a child's book. He said the Double Day bookstore in Manhattan didn't know what to do with it. "Kay would go to Double Day and move it from the children's section to the adults' section, much to the amusement of the staff," he said. "She was insistent to her death that it was an adult book and not a children's book. It looked like no other kind of book. Kay was a musician. She could write in a kind of rhythm which is what the book had."

Hilary and Thompson went on to be life-long friends. They traveled to Paris together, where they wrote and illustrated *Eloise Goes to Paris* and Moscow where they wrote *Eloise in Moscow*. In Paris, the illustrations are dotted with the celebrities they knew there: Richard Avedon takes Eloise's passport photograph; Christian Dior prods her tummy, while his young assistant, Yves Saint Laurent, looks on; Lena Horne sits at an outdoor café. The effect is "rawther extraordinaire."

Eloise in Paris was first published in 1957, the second of the Eloise quartet, and an immediate bestseller. All four Eloise books by Thompson and Hilary include: Eloise: A Book for Precocious Grown-ups (1955), Eloise in Paris (1957), Eloise at Christmastime (1958), Eloise in Moscow (1959)

"We were always together," Hilary said. "We were like a childless married couple."

Hilary also published *The 365 Days of Eloise* two years ago on the sixtieth anniversary of *Eloise*.



YOTTOY Eloise merchandise at the New-York Historical Society.

Walt Disney



Eloise dolls.

Television, in 2003, produced two

made-for-TV movies based on the first two books, titled Eloise at the Plaza and Eloise at Christmastime, starring Sofia Vassilieva as Eloise and Julie Andrews as Nanny. In 2006, an animated television series based on the characters of the books, premiered on Starz! Kids & Family, featuring Mary Matilyn Mouser as Eloise and Lynn Redgrave as Nanny.

To help make an even stronger connection for young museum goers, the NYHS is stocking its gift shop with an assortment of Eloise dolls and other toys from NYC-based YOTTOY ("toy" spelled backward and forward). The company prides itself on top-quality toys inspired by some of the most beloved classic children's picture books of all time – from Eloise and Curious George to Babar, Paddington and many, many more. The Eloise exhibition marks the latest collaboration between YOTTOY and the NYHS. Previous collaborations between which have also helped to bridge the generation gap between existing and new/young fans of these enduring characters include Madeline and Mo Willems (Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus).

"We are absolutely delighted to reintroduce Eloise toys to a wider retail market," said Kate Karcher Clark, founder and president of YOTTOY. "Through the sensational exhibition at the New-York Historical Society and our newly-designed Eloise dolls and accessories, parents and grandparents who enjoyed Eloise and her adventures in their own youth, will be able to share their love for this precocious character with their children and grandchildren."

Clark said since Eloise is a character with quite an imagination, YOTTOY designed the Eloise toy line to inspire creative play. "Through all of our product lines, YOTTOY encourages interaction between adults and children, and our new Eloise offerings provide opportunities for many meaningful moments to be shared between generations."





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'Star Wars' And 'Avengers' Will Dominate The Toy Stores As Well As Box Office

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As some of you know, last weekend saw the American International Toy Fair in New York City, which is basically exactly like it sounds. While the general intention of the Toy Fair is for companies to show off the would-be "hot" toys for the 2015 year, the secondary purposes has become, at least from a news perspective, a chance to get a peak at the year's biggest movies by virtue of potentially spoiler-ific toys. Now sometimes the toys can be a red herring, such as the "Iron Man goes into space" toy from Iron Man 3 and the Red Skull action figure for Captain America: The Winter Soldier, but just as often the toys (which often come out well before the feature film) blatantly give away closely-held plot details.

But for my part I spoke with Marty Brochstein, who works as SVP of Industry Relations and Information for the International Licensing Industry Merchandisers Association (LIMA). We discussed what may-well be a record year for toy sales, following last year's superb year. We spoke specifically about licensed characters and what will be a murderer's row of toy-friendly franchises (Avengers: Age of Ultron, Star Wars: The Force Awakens, Jurassic World, Minions, Goosebumps, etc.) and how some smaller hits that are especially toy-friendly (such as Paddington) can make their mark as well. I was asked to speak with Mr. Brochstein and agreed because I need to bone up on my interview skills and because the world of toy sales and licensing is one I frankly don't know all that much about beyond the obvious "Gee, my kids saw this movie and now they want the toys" aspects of it. So hopefully this will be educational for both myself and my readers.



Photo courtesy of YOTTOY Productions, Inc.