

Emmy Lou Packard - WWII shipyard magazine illustrator

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The World War II Home Front demanded huge sacrifices from civilians, and the Kaiser shipyards saw people from all walks of life working side by side. My uncle was an anthropologist at UC Berkeley who spent four years as a marine steamfitter in Richmond; he also wrote for



? whose staff editorial assistant was none other than the well-known contemporary artist Emmy Lou Packard. By the mid-1940s, California native Packard (1914-1998) was already a respected artist in the San Francisco Bay Area. She had received her Bachelor of Arts at UC Berkeley in 1936, where she had been arts editor of the *Daily Californian* and the campus literary magazine *Occident*. She was also the first female editor of the *Pelican*, the humor magazine. Packard later studied sculpture and fresco painting at the San Francisco Art Institute. She had befriended renowned Mexican artists Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, and after her first husband Burton Cairns' tragic death in 1939 Packard went to Mexico where she lived and worked with the artistic couple.



Emmy Lou Packard's first Fore 'n' Aft illustration, July 28, 1944. During World War II, Emmy Lou became a draftswoman at the Ames Shipbuilding and Drydock Company office in San Francisco, and later moved across the bay to work in the Kaiser Richmond shipyards. She first appeared in the *Fore 'n' Aft* masthead on June 16, 1944. Soon, in addition to her editorial work, Packard began to contribute art to the newspaper. She created scratchboard illustrations and drawings, drew a recurring single-frame cartoon "Shirley the Whirley" about an anthropomorphic rolling-and-turning shipyard crane with attitude, and collaborated on a cartoon strip called "Supermac," which ran from September 8, 1944, through March 30, 1945.



"Emmy Lou Packard talking to an unknown man at the Richmond shipyards. circa 1941?1945. Photographer unknown. Gelatin silver print. Collection of Oakland Museum of California. The Oakland Tribune Collection. Gift of Emmy Lou Packard." Her debut as a shipyard illustrator in *Fore ?n' Aft* was July 28, 1944, with a powerful depiction of D-Day, the Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6 that year. Artillery shells bursting in a night sky blasted above the fold, accompanying a first-hand account by former Richmond shipyard worker Richard Cox.

Although she would continue to create a few more major graphics, her forte became "spot illustrations"? those sweet, tiny images that break up type-heavy pages. Often, but not always, the graphics would accompany a specific article such as tips on workplace safety or healthy eating.

The illustrations were never credited, so identifying those done by Emmy Lou is an inexact process. Her son, Donald Cairns, has helped to try and confirm the approximately 100 illustrations she created over her 15 months at *Fore ?n' Aft*.

Packard's lengthy obituary in the *San Francisco Chronicle* mentioned the approximately 100 paintings she made of shipyard scenes, but said nothing about her work on *Fore ?n' Aft*. Her son's website honoring Packard's career briefly mentions that stint without details, but until now no comprehensive survey of those illustrations has been available.

Such an omission can be explained by the unfortunate art world disinterest in something considered as lowly as labor newspaper illustrations as well as lack of access to the source material. The second limitation has now changed; this essay was made possible by a recent partnership between Kaiser Permanente Heritage Resources and the Richmond (California) Museum of History to digitize as many issues of *Fore ?n' Aft* as possible. The graphics displayed here are the fruit of that digital collaboration.

What do the illustrations reveal?

The Kaiser shipyards began making transport vessels for the British government in 1941, before the United States joined the war. Two magazines covered seven yards (*The Bos'n's Whistle* was the publication for the Portland, Ore., area Kaiser shipyards), and many of the

cartoons and illustrations in the early issues reflect what one would expect from a trade dominated by straight, white, male industrial laborers of the time ? sexist, racist, and homophobic.

But as a vastly different Home Front workforce replaced them, editorial sensibilities evolved as well. What a difference it made to have a politically progressive woman wielding a pen. Packard's work was patriotic without resorting to racist jabs or stereotypes; she portrayed workers with dignity and character. She drew women's experiences from a woman's point of view ? numerous vignettes show children (one of her regular subjects later in life), shopping, home life, and the challenges of survival and adjustment in a tempestuous time.

When Packard left *Fore ?n' Aft*, the editors wrote a testimonial on October 26, 1945 attesting to her contribution:

"Emmy Lou Packard is a fine artist. She painted the people who work in the yards with a deftness and freshness. But more, she sketched and painted how these workers feel. She pictured man in the complicated throes of the huge shipyards, with twisting pipes and rolls of cable drums, boilers and ten-ton steel plates, and plate shop presses fifteen feet high. Always man was a part of this complexity and always he controlled the huge machines and materials."

These are but a few examples of Emmy Lou Packard's previously unexamined yet important work.

Exhibition of Packard's work at the Rosie the Riveter / WWII Home Front National Park, Richmond, Calif., 9/5/2015-12/30/2015

Short link to this article: <http://bit.ly/1uB7vLC>



The wartime Kaiser shipyards offered extensive child care facilities and family health care. 1/26/1945

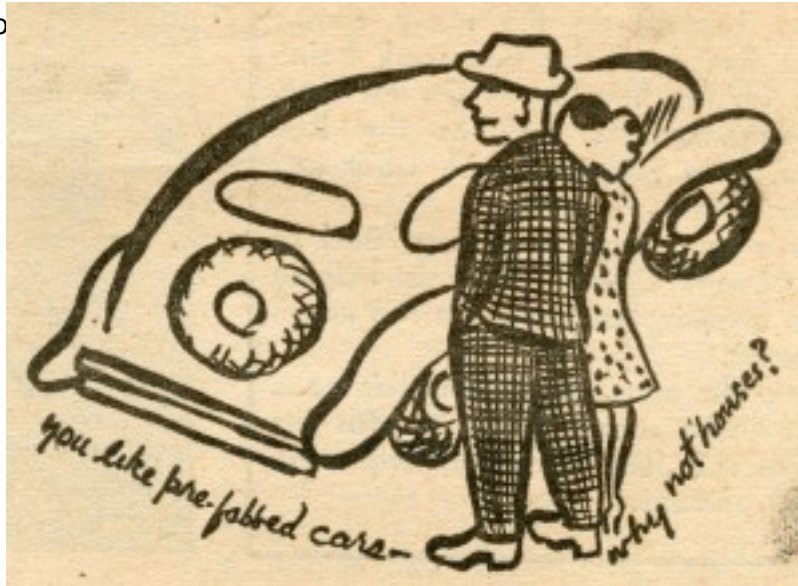


The pageant of around-the-clock workers arriving and departing from the yards was captured in this vignette. 3/9/1945



For many people, the shipyards were their first experience in working alongside people of different races; here, black-white cooperation is graphically reinforced by the positive and negative shadows

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Peacetime dreams became increasingly topical as the war neared its end; here, a couple contemplates the question that "You like pre-fabbed cars, why not houses?" Henry J. Kaiser advocated mass-produced affordable housing. 3/9/1945



This hard-hat-wearing dinner-making mother succinctly shows women's nonstop work at home and in sh



Humorous class commentary places this uncomfortable white-collar suit amidst a trolley full of shipyard overalls. 7/13/1945



Many Fore ?n' Aft articles featured the rich diversity of the labor force; this illustration about Latin American immigrant workers is beautifully rendered in a style that shows Diego Rivera's influen



Shipyard production ran around the clock; this shows night shift workers talking to each other. 3/23/1945

These images are from the digital collection of Fore ?n' Afts collaboratively produced by Kaiser Permanente Heritage Resources and the Richmond Museum of History.