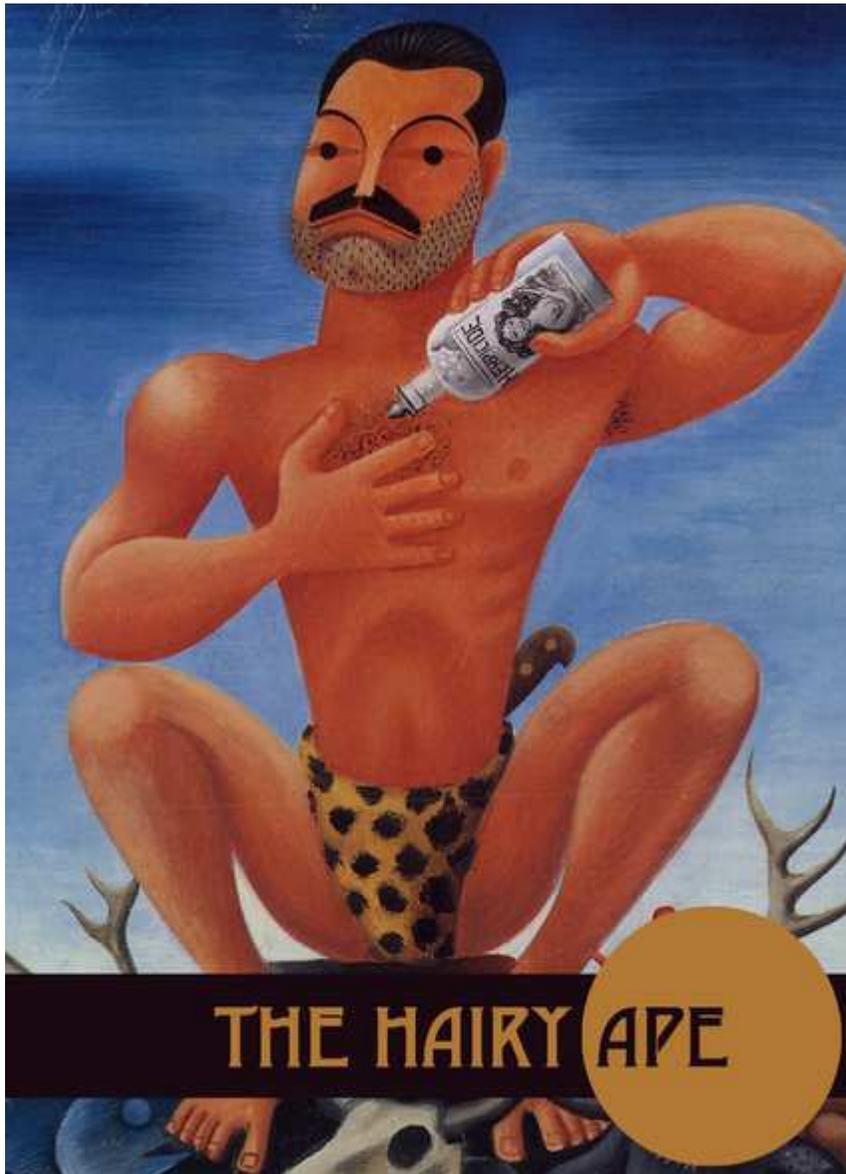


The New York Times

Making Manhood in ‘The Hairy Ape’

[Behind the Poster](#)

By [ERIK PIEPENBURG](#) SEPT. 23, 2016



An illustration by Miguel Covarrubias is featured in artwork for a production of Eugene O’Neill’s play “The Hairy Ape” at the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival. Credit Miguel Covarrubias Estate

If the play is called “The Hairy Ape,” why is this guy so smooth? And what’s in the bottle?

Those are just two questions at play in artwork for the [EgoPo Classic Theater](#)’s revival of Eugene O’Neill’s 1922 drama “The Hairy Ape,” now at the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival in Massachusetts. The art features a bearded and muscled man crouched atop an animal skull with horns, naked except for a loincloth that conceals a knife behind his back. From a bottle he pours something on his chest in what looks like an attempt to grow more hair.

The figure is Ernest Hemingway, as drawn by the Mexican artist [Miguel Covarrubias](#) (1904-57), who is best known for his magazine illustrations. (The show’s title is rendered in gold and black, a treatment chosen by the festival’s executive director, Jef Hall-Flavin.) Images by Covarrubias are used to promote several plays in the festival, which this season explores the ties between Williams and O’Neill; David Kaplan, its curator, said this artwork dovetails well with the questions about masculinity in “The Hairy Ape,” an expressionistic look at the relationship between a brutish laborer and a young society woman.

“I like the manufacturing of masculinity, which is theatrical to me,” said Mr. Kaplan, who spoke recently about the elements that went into the design. Following are edited excerpts from that conversation.

The design over all looks current, but there’s still a distinct period quality to it.

I wanted something that you would look at, and without having it hit you heavily, you would understand it came from the ’20s and ’30s. We wanted to show a certain modernity that had style. The Covarrubias drawings and pen-and-ink work stood out because they had that period quality, and yet were timeless. They were Art Moderne — streamlined, with this smooth and polished surface, which I liked.

Tell me more about Covarrubias and how you got the rights to use his work.

He was known for illustrations from the ’20s and ’30s for Vogue and Vanity Fair. We wrote to his niece in Mexico, and she gave us permission to use it in this way. We explained to her that these images were timeless. Covarrubias was friends with O’Neill. He also was part of this world in New York that was constructing new art in the ’20s. There’s something witty about them, which fits the plays that we are doing this season, all of which are critiques on capitalism, on American society.

Are we seeing the entire image? It looks like there’s more going on behind the figure of Hemingway.

They’ve been cropped to focus on what’s related most directly to the show. There is a pile of masculine things that he’s sitting on: a pile of fish and the skulls of bulls and stag horns, like his kill. What the crop did was focus on the gesture.

What does the artwork say about this production of O’Neill’s play?

You smile when you see it. He's finished killing the elk and deer and he stuck his knife behind him, and now he's going to make his chest hairy. It's not a savage. It's the pose of savagery. That's theatrical.