



*Abril Lamarque*

*August 28, 1904 - January 26, 1999*

Eduardo Abril Lamarque, a longtime resident of New York City, was an art director whose career spanned over 60 years. An innovative and versatile leader in the graphic arts, mentor and inspiring teacher to many, he was also a popular amateur magician, and the quintessential New Yorker. He knew and loved every corner of the city and was well known in places frequented by the press and publishing community.

Born in Cuba, at the age of 12 he was brought by his father to live with an American family in Brooklyn, to study English and business administration. A career in business never materialized as his talent as a cartoonist and caricaturist became evident. To distinguish himself from his uncle, Eduardo Abril Amores, publisher of the then major Cuban newspaper, *El Diario de Cuba*, he did not use his given name, Eduardo, in his professional life.

Abril Lamarque's career began at the age of 19 when he created "Bla-Bla," a comic strip published regularly in the *New York Daily News*. As a staff cartoonist and caricaturist for *The New York World-Telegram and Evening Mail*, he devised a technique of engaging radio listeners to draw their own caricatures of well-known people, with the help of a special grid, as he talked them through the process. Called "Radio-Cature," this early audio version of "painting-by-numbers" was listed daily on the front page of *The New York World-Telegram*.

While in his twenties, he created the first Spanish-language comic strip that was not merely a translation of an English strip. His title character, Monguito, was a hapless soul, always fully dressed with business suit and hat, who kept getting into sticky situations. Lamarque produced hundreds of these strips, which ran daily for years in the 1920's in newspapers throughout Latin America.

He was hired by George Delacorte, Jr., owner and publisher of the Dell Publishing magazine empire as its first art director at the age of 23. From 1927 to 1940, he was responsible for all aspects of the design of more than 20 magazines, including such classics as *Ballyhoo*, *Film Fun*, *Modern Screen* and *Modern Romances*. In addition to overseeing a group of artists and staging the photos, he drew the majority of the illustrations.

While at Dell, in 1934 he had booked the return from a visit to family in Cuba on a sleek luxury liner, *Morro Castle* (a step up from the banana boat he and his bride had to take when first coming to

New York in 1926). When he realized that this would cause his daughter to miss a week of school, he rescheduled the trip and returned one week earlier. On its very next Havana-to-New York voyage, the one the Lamarques originally were to have taken, on September 7th the *Morro Castle* burned and sank off the coast of New Jersey with heavy loss of life, one of the major disasters in maritime history.

Early in World War II, he designed a number of "Abril Lamarque Creations," elegant functional objects and jewelry in the modernist tradition. His signature piece was the Pallettray, a replication of an artist's palette hand-finished in exotic wood.

Under the legendary Lester Markel, Sunday editor of *The New York Times* from 1923 to 1965, Lamarque, as the first Sunday art director of the *Times*, redesigned *The New York Times Magazine*, changing its original tabloid format to that of a national magazine that became the forerunner of today's *Magazine*. He also restyled *The New York Times Book Review*. When he left five years later in 1946, to design a new publication, *World Report* (which later merged with *U. S. News*), Markel wrote: "I cannot forget that the Lamarque touch still is visible, and will be and should be in the *Sunday Times*."

His New York City graphic design studio, established in 1948, provided a full spectrum of publication design services, including annual reports, product labeling, house publications and print advertising for major corporations such as Monsanto, Lipton, Bacardi, Metropolitan Life, Socony-Mobil, Con Edison, among many others. He was also a mentor to many young artists, often supporting them by giving them freelance assignments.

A popular lecturer on publication layout and the use of typography in design for New York University School of Continuing Education, and at conferences of editors and art directors in the U.S. and Canada, he focused on the application of design principles that make editorial material more forceful and direct. His impact on several generations of publication editors and designers is still visible in house and trade publications and package design.

In 1962, Lamarque discovered an untutored Polish-American folk artist, Karol Kozlowski, and brought his paintings to the attention of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center in

Williamsburg, Virginia, where many of his works are now in the permanent collection, as well as at the Museum of American Folk Art in New York City, and at the New York State Historical Association in Cooperstown.

Among many other publications, Lamarque redesigned *Popular Science*, *American Weekly*, and *New York News Coloroto Magazine*, and co-authored two books, *Brooklyn, U.S.A.* and *Man the Maker*. His papers, slides and original designs are now in a resource archive at the Oklahoma State University School of Journalism.

He was also an “artist” at deadpan humor and a skilled amateur magician, inspired at age 12 after seeing Houdini perform (including his famous milk-can escape) at the Bushwick Theater in Brooklyn. Rarely without a pocket full of sleight-of-hand tricks—sponges, playing cards, and “silks”—he often devised and created his own effects. Audiences particularly enjoyed his trademark response to applause: a challenging deadpan glare, aided and abetted by his handlebar mustache, then a wide flourish to open his morning coat to expose the lining covered with “wall-to-wall” medals.

Quite the showman, Lamarque was dubbed “the professional amateur.” During World War II, under the auspices of the USO he performed for American troops on board aircraft carriers, in hospitals, and at the Stage Door Canteen. His “Abrilcadabra” act was a feature of the Society of Illustrators Annual Artists and Models Show for 18 consecutive years. In a 1962 review, *Variety* described him as “the urbane necromancer with a sense of humor.” For his many contributions to the Society and to the field of magic, the Society of American Magicians awarded him honorary lifetime membership. For over six decades he was an active member of the S.A.M. Parent Assembly in New York City, having joined in 1937.

A member of the Dutch Treat Club, Abril Lamarque was a Life Member of the Society of Illustrators and the Art Directors Club in New York.

His wife of almost 70 years, Milagros, died in 1996. He is survived by his daughters, Martha Sarno and Lita Elvers, and grand-daughters Lauren Collins, Susan LeBlanc, and Christina Sarno.