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First Major Exhibition to Explore In-Depth Norman Rockwell’s Connections to Hollywood and the Movies Opens July 2

“Telling Stories: Norman Rockwell from the Collections of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg” will be on view at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., from July 2 through Jan. 2, 2011. The museum is the only venue for the exhibition.

“Telling Stories” is the first major exhibition to explore in-depth the connections between Norman Rockwell’s iconic images of American life and the movies. Two of America’s best-known modern filmmakers—George Lucas and Steven Spielberg—recognized a kindred spirit in Rockwell and formed significant collections of his work. The exhibition showcases 57 major Rockwell paintings and drawings from these private collections.

“Norman Rockwell is an artist and a storyteller who captured universal truths about Americans that tell us a lot about who we are as a people,” said Elizabeth Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. “Like Rockwell, both George Lucas and Steven Spielberg embrace the idea that ordinary people can become unlikely heroes. I am delighted that the Smithsonian American Art Museum is organizing the first exhibition to explore these new connections between Rockwell’s art and the movies.”

Booz Allen Hamilton, a global strategy and technology consulting firm, is supporting the exhibition.

“In Norman Rockwell’s art, we see ourselves, our families and our neighbors—the heart and spirit of America,” said Ralph W. Shrader, chairman and CEO of Booz Allen Hamilton. “We are delighted to support the Smithsonian American Art Museum on this major project, including an exciting series of public programs.”

Rockwell was a masterful storyteller who could distill a narrative into a single frame. His pictures tell stories about the adventure of growing up, of individuals rising up to face personal challenges, the glamour of Hollywood and the importance of tolerance in American life. He created his pictures with techniques used by filmmakers—he auditioned models for the “cast,” arranged props

and lighted sets and, like a movie director, demonstrated poses and facial expressions.

“Lucas, Spielberg and Rockwell perpetuate ideas about love of country, personal honor and the value of family in their work,” said Virginia M. Mecklenburg, senior curator and organizer of the exhibition. “With humor and pathos, they have transformed everyday experiences into stories revealing the aspirations and values that have sustained Americans through good times and bad.”

The exhibition is based on new research into Rockwell, his work and the relationships between the artist and the movies. There is a clear basis in Rockwell’s biography for the idea that he was looking and thinking about movies. In 1930, he married Mary Barstow, who was a native of Alhambra, Calif., near Los Angeles. During frequent visits to Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s, Rockwell designed posters for several studios and became immersed in the culture of the movie industry.

Rockwell’s exposure to the business of Hollywood and movie productions affected the process that he used to construct his images. Rockwell once said, “If I hadn’t become a painter, I would have liked to have been a movie director.” He went to great lengths to stage his pictures, laboring over costumes for each figure and the individual props that added to the story he wanted the viewer to understand at a glance. He typically drafted multiple preparatory sketches to get the composition and details exactly right.

The exhibition and its catalog also present Rockwell as a careful observer of topical social issues and the popular culture of his day. Rockwell chose to paint particular subjects with particular points of view. The complex images he created often contained messages that correspond to movies, popular fiction and current events. For example, during World War II, Rockwell created “The Four Freedoms” in response to President Roosevelt’s famous 1941 state of the union speech. Parallel themes are apparent also in a series of films *Why We Fight*, directed by Frank Capra between 1942 and 1945.

A 12-minute film, coproduced by the museum and filmmaker Laurent Bouzereau, will be shown continuously in the exhibition galleries. It features interviews with Lucas and Spielberg that reveal their insights into Rockwell’s art and why certain works appealed to them.

Publication

A catalog, co-published by the museum and Abrams, is written by Mecklenburg with a contribution by Todd McCarthy, film critic for *Variety*. It will be available for \$65 hardcover (\$45 softcover) in the museum store, online and at book stores nationwide.

Free Public Programs

Several free public programs are planned in conjunction with the exhibition, including Airmen of Note performing big band favorites from the 1940s Saturday, July 3, and Sunday, July 4, from 1 to 3 p.m. in the museum's Kogod Courtyard; a concert by Washington Symphonic Brass featuring music by composer John Williams and scores from Spielberg and Lucas films Sunday, July 18, 4 p.m. in the museum's Kogod Courtyard; a family day Saturday, July 24, from 11:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., celebrates the Boy Scouts of America's 100th anniversary with activities that honor the values encouraged by the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts; and a talk and book signing by Ron Schick, author of *Norman Rockwell: Behind the Camera* Thursday, Aug. 5, at 6:30 p.m.

The museum will present a series of classic films as well as movies by Lucas and Spielberg during the run of the exhibition. Featured films for the summer include *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1935), directed by Frank Capra, Thursday, July 8, at 6:30 p.m.; *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), directed by Spielberg, Thursday, July 22, at 6:30 p.m.; and *State of the Union* (1948), directed by Capra, Thursday, Aug. 12, at 6:30 p.m.

Complete program descriptions are available online at americanart.si.edu. Additional programs will be scheduled for the fall. Details will be available on the museum's Web site.

Credit

"Telling Stories: Norman Rockwell from the Collections of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg" is organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Booz Allen Hamilton has provided generous support as the corporate sponsor of the exhibition. The museum also gratefully acknowledges the contributions of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg.

About the Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Smithsonian American Art Museum celebrates the vision and creativity of Americans with approximately 42,000 artworks in all media spanning more than three centuries. Its National Historic Landmark building is located at Eighth and F streets N.W., above the Gallery Place/Chinatown Metrorail station. Museum hours are 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Follow the museum on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, ArtBabble, iTunes and YouTube. Museum information (recorded): (202) 633-7970. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Web site: americanart.si.edu.

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