

**Norman Rockwell** (1894–1978) was a master storyteller who captured American hearts and minds for more than fifty years. He amused us with pictures of emancipated women in the Roaring Twenties; he showed us the glamour of Hollywood during the difficult years of the Great Depression; and he fueled our patriotism and pride during World War II. In hundreds of covers for the *Saturday Evening Post* and other magazines, he helped Americans adjust to social change through sympathetic, often humorous vignettes.

Rockwell accomplished all this with a movie director's eye for the telling detail, the nuance of setting, and a deep understanding of the American character. He was familiar with Hollywood and the studios, and his art often ran parallel to popular films. In turn, Rockwell's art continues to spark our imagination and inspire today's most creative moviemakers.

*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.

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*A cover should be more than just a one-line joke.*

**Norman Rockwell**

Rockwell's working process resembled that of a movie director. He "auditioned" his models, determined the pose and facial expressions of his characters, dressed them in authentic costumes or uniforms, and selected props that give important clues to the personalities and circumstances of each story. He even acted out the parts the models were to play so they would understand exactly what he expected of them. The props in *Back to Civvies* were carefully selected to reveal information about the war experiences of a young bomber pilot who has returned home and discovers that he has outgrown his civilian clothes.

Preparatory photographs for *Back to Civvies*, 1945

Photograph courtesy Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, MA

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*I tell the story through the characters.*

**Norman Rockwell**

In the late 1930s, Rockwell began using photographs to develop his compositions. Instead of asking models to pose for long hours, he used photography to capture their positions and expressions quickly and to adjust props and lighting until he had achieved the desired effect. He often used elements from as many as one hundred photographs in his color sketches and pencil drawings before painting the final canvas.

Preparatory photographs for *The Jury*, 1959

Photograph courtesy Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, MA

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## **Photomurals**

[Rockwell opening the door]

Photograph courtesy Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, MA

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[Rockwell in studio working on *First Trip*]

Photograph courtesy Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, MA

Licensed by Norman Rockwell Licensing, Niles, IL

[Rockwell painting "Jackson Pollock"]

Photograph courtesy Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, MA

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***Story illustrations shouldn't give away the plot.***

**Norman Rockwell**

*...Jo Seated on the Old Sofa . . .* from “The Most Beloved American Writer”

*Woman's Home Companion*, December 1937

oil on canvas

Collection of George Lucas

Rockwell traveled to Louisa May Alcott's home in Concord, Massachusetts, before beginning illustrations for a serialized biography of her life. Alcott's book, *Little Women*, became an immediate classic when it was published in 1868, and was a hit again in 1933 when George Cukor's film adaptation won an Oscar for Best Screenplay. Its message---that family counts more than wealth, and happiness comes to those who help the less fortunate---was an apt revival subject in Depression-era America.

*Proud Possessor*

*The American Magazine*, May 1940

charcoal on paper

Collection of George Lucas

“Proud Possessor” is a story about the love of a boy named Kiah for two puppies that his mother forbids him to keep. He strikes a deal with his friend Pomp. Pomp will care for the dogs, but exacts a prized pocketknife as payment. Rockwell illustrates the moment when Kiah, on the right, agrees to surrender his pride for the love of his animals.

*River Pilot*

*The Saturday Evening Post*, September 21, 1940

oil on canvas

Collection of George Lucas

In “River Pilot” young Jem Bates faces his first test of manhood. Newly credentialed as a river pilot, he aims to prove the worthiness of his old-time paddle wheeler by beating a new, propeller-driven vessel in a race up the flooded Connecticut River. The stakes are high---the winner will be awarded a lucrative express freight contract. Against all advice, he heads out, banking on his knowledge of the river to avoid sandbars and floating debris. It is a story of romance and duty in which tradition triumphs over technology.

*Let Nothing You Dismay*  
*Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1941  
oil on canvas  
Collection of Steven Spielberg

Rockwell's love for painting is apparent in this picture of a disappointed little girl. It is larger than most of his canvases, and the surface alternates painterly brushstrokes with smooth, carefully worked areas. Although the story weaves a host of emotional motifs about parenthood and the importance of small episodes in the lives of children, Rockwell's illustration gives no clues to the plot. He intended instead to induce magazine subscribers to read the whole story.

*Good Boy (Little Orphan at the Train)*  
*Good Housekeeping*, May 1951  
oil on canvas  
Collection of Steven Spielberg

"Orphan Train" is a first-person narrative told by an old man who had been the youngest child on a foundling train. After the orphanage where he lived burned down, the nuns headed out by rail, hoping to find homes for eighty-seven children. Steven Spielberg, an adoptive parent himself, remarked on "the hesitancy of the adoptive mom, the delicacy of her body position, the distance between her and the child. That is the drama and the pathos and the passion of the story."

*Triple Self-Portrait*  
*The Saturday Evening Post*, February 13, 1960  
charcoal and pencil on board  
Collection of Steven Spielberg

*Triple Self-Portrait* appeared on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* when the first installment of Rockwell's autobiography was published. The three likenesses acknowledge multiple sides of Rockwell's personality. Rockwell also tacitly admits that the images he had created for almost fifty years were constructed realities. The image on the easel looks younger than the sixty-six-year-old painter's reflection in the mirror.

## Coming of Age, Breaking Away

### *First Trip to the Beauty Shop*

Top Value trading stamp catalogue, 1961--1972

pencil on joined paper

Collection of George Lucas

Rockwell conceived the drawing of *First Trip* in 1961, when Jackie Kennedy was America's stylish First Lady. The finished version was published in 1972, which partly explains why the child no longer holds the magazine with Jackie's picture on the cover.

### *First Trip to the Beauty Shop*

Top Value trading stamp catalogue, 1972

oil on canvas

Collection of George Lucas

*First Trip to the Beauty Shop* reprises an idea Rockwell first used in 1918. Mother and daughter are excited about the professional cut and style that symbolize the child's growth into girlhood. Rockwell tightened the focus between the almost-final drawing and the finished painting to emphasize the expression on the child's face as she regards herself in the mirror.

### *The Connoisseur*

*The Saturday Evening Post*, January 13, 1962

oil on canvas mounted on board

Collection of Steven Spielberg

By 1962, Rockwell had been working for the *Post* for more than forty years. But things weren't going well at the magazine. Television was drawing advertising away from the print media, and several companies that advertised in the *Post* thought Rockwell too old-fashioned for their modern messages. It is tempting to speculate that this painting of a well-dressed older man contemplating a Jackson Pollock-like drip painting is a metaphorical self-portrait as Rockwell faces the future. The picture reminds Steven Spielberg of Alfred Hitchcock looking at the next wave---at Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda about to make *Easy Rider*.

## *Understanding our nation by embracing our neighbor*

Steven Spielberg

*Polley Voos Fransay?*

*Life*, November 22, 1917

oil on canvas

Collection of George Lucas

“In 1917,” Rockwell remarked, “I couldn’t read a newspaper without finding an idea for a cover.” Many of his magazine covers during World War I emphasize the youth and naïveté of the many recruits drafted from America’s farms and small towns. The boy in *Polley Voos Fransay* tries out the few words of French he has learned on a puzzled little girl. The image acknowledges parents’ concerns about the psychological effects their sons would suffer fighting in the trenches.

*Pioneer of the Air (Portrait of Charles Lindbergh)*

*The Saturday Evening Post*, July 23, 1927

oil on canvas

Collection of Steven Spielberg

Rockwell dropped everything and painted for twenty-six hours straight to finish this portrait of Charles Lindbergh. The young airmail pilot from St. Louis had just landed in Paris after thirty-three-and-a-half hours in the air. The heraldic image links Lindbergh’s solo flight across the Atlantic with Christopher Columbus’s voyage to America in the *Santa Maria* and with settlers who went westward in covered wagons.

*Spirit of America*

Boy Scouts of America Calendar, 1929

oil on canvas

Collection of Steven Spielberg

When the Boy Scouts of America approached Rockwell to paint the pictures for their calendar, he accepted and donated the picture to thank them for hiring him to be their magazine’s art director when he was just eighteen. *Spirit of America*, the 1929 calendar, shows a Boy Scout surrounded by portraits of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Charles Lindbergh, and other heroic figures of the American past and present. It links Boy Scouts with brave and selfless individuals throughout American history.

*A Time for Greatness*  
*Look*, July 14, 1964  
oil on canvas  
Collection of Steven Spielberg

Rockwell parted ways with the *Post* and began working with *Look* magazine at the end of 1963. *A Time for Greatness* was the centerpiece of the issue that came out the week of the 1964 Democratic National Convention. Rockwell shows John F. Kennedy as a visionary, gazing out beyond the crowds and hats and banners. It was a memorial to Kennedy eight months after his assassination and a reminder of vision and hope. The title was a Kennedy campaign slogan.

*Freedom of Speech* (preliminary version)  
*The Saturday Evening Post*, February 20, 1943  
oil on posterboard  
Collection of Steven Spielberg

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Rockwell wanted to do something to help the war effort. Sleepless one night, he had an idea. A neighbor had spoken out in town meeting and although everyone else disagreed, Rockwell said, "They let him have his say. No one shouted him down. My gosh, I thought, that's it. There it is. Freedom of Speech. I'll illustrate [President Roosevelt's] Four Freedoms and use my Vermont neighbors as models. I'll express the ideas in simple, everyday scenes. Freedom of Speech---a New England town meeting. Freedom from Want---a Thanksgiving dinner. I'll put them in terms everybody can understand."

In 1943, the U.S. Treasury Department and the *Saturday Evening Post* sent Rockwell's "Four Freedoms" paintings on tour as part of a war bond drive. People all over the country came to see the show and to buy bonds. In just a year, the drive raised more than \$132 million.

*Little Girl Observing Lovers on a Train*  
*The Saturday Evening Post*, August 12, 1944  
charcoal on paper  
Collection of George Lucas

While his photographer snapped pictures, Rockwell's models adjusted poses in a train car that the Rutland Railroad parked on a siding near his studio in Arlington, Vermont. Rockwell combined elements from the photographs to make this drawing. Once it was finished, he wanted to change the lower left corner, so he added a fresh piece of paper and redrew the area that runs from the airman's right shoulder to the left edge of the drawing.

*Back to Civvies*

*The Saturday Evening Post*, December 15, 1945

oil on canvas

Collection of Steven Spielberg

*Back to Civvies* shows a World War II Flying Fortress pilot in the bedroom where he grew up. Rockwell chose props that say a lot about the flyer's life both before and after he went to war. Even his name--Lt. A. H. Becktoft--is on the duffel bag on the floor. The insignia on the uniform jacket reveals that he served with distinction. The blue and yellow ribbon with the tiny oak leaf cluster indicates that he received the Air Medal twice.

***A picture just has to touch the emotional side of a human being.***

**George Lucas**

*Charwomen in Theater*

*The Saturday Evening Post*, April 6, 1946

charcoal on paper

Collection of George Lucas

*Charwomen* shows a moment of shared intimacy between two older women who work after hours in a place they are otherwise not apt to frequent. George Lucas observed, "It's more to them than just a job. They're interested in the place they work. You can imagine them sneaking up and watching shows, watching rehearsals. You can imagine them being proud that they work in the theater."

*Going and Coming*

*The Saturday Evening Post*, August 30, 1947

charcoal and pencil on paper

Collection of George Lucas

After World War II, Americans headed for the seashore, lakes, and mountains on vacations long deferred due to gasoline rationing. Magazines and newspapers recommended ideal vacation spots and offered advice on what to do with pets while families were away. Travel agencies also reported that people were taking longer vacations because some 35 million Americans received the relatively new benefit of paid vacation time.

*Forsaken*

*New York Times*, December 7, 1952

charcoal on paper

Collection of George Lucas

Rockwell donated *Forsaken* to the *New York Times* for its “New York’s One Hundred Neediest Cases” appeal in December 1952. The program, which continues to the present day, generates support for charitable organizations that address poverty and illness. Rockwell began contributing drawings to support the cause in the 1930s. The poignant drawing may reflect the emotional distress in his own family after his second wife, Mary, began treatment for depression.

***Little bits of our culture, captured like snapshots***

**George Lucas**

*“Merry Christmas, Grandma... We Came in Our New Plymouth!”*

Plymouth advertisement, *Life*, December 25, 1950

charcoal and crayon on paper

Collection of George Lucas

Rockwell’s skill at depicting warmth and friendliness made him the ideal candidate for a lifestyle ad that connects Plymouth automobiles with home, holidays, and family. “*Merry Christmas, Grandma*” says nothing about the car; the picture could have been an ad for some other product. After the success of the “Four Freedoms” wartime paintings, Rockwell was in demand by companies hoping to associate their products with wholesome, quintessential American values.

*The Rookie (Red Sox Locker Room)*

*The Saturday Evening Post*, March 2, 1957

charcoal on joined paper

Collection of George Lucas

Several members of the Boston Red Sox starting line-up traveled to Stockbridge to pose for *The Rookie*. Pitcher Frank Sullivan sits tying his shoes, right fielder Jackie Jensen wears number 8, catcher Sammy White relaxes at left, and second baseman Billy Goodman stands to the right. Star hitter Ted Williams, who declined to make the trip, takes center stage as he stares down a newcomer. It was a topical subject in 1957. The controversial Williams hit his 400<sup>th</sup> home run the previous summer, but his confrontations with fans and sports writers were constantly in the news. Rarely had Rockwell portrayed a well known figure in such equivocal terms.

### *The Jury*

*The Saturday Evening Post*, February 14, 1959

oil on canvas

Collection of Steven Spielberg

*The Jury* prompted readers to chuckle at an attractive young woman being pressured by her male peers. But in 1959, three states continued to prohibit women from serving on juries, and more than a dozen others imposed restrictions on their service. The idea of a jury holdout is also the theme of the 1957 movie *12 Angry Men*, starring Henry Fonda, in which Fonda's character questions the evidence at a murder trial and holds out against the eleven other jurors.

## Calendar

### *Tender Years: New Calendar*

Four Seasons Calendar, 1957

oil on canvas

Collection of Steven Spielberg

In a rare explanation, Rockwell talked about the idea behind *New Calendar*: "My picture shows two people who, after living together for many years, have reached the stage of sympathy and compatibility for which all of us strive. They know their weaknesses and their strengths. They are comfortable and secure in their relationships with each other. And while Mother presumably takes Father's strong points for granted, she's still trying tolerantly to keep him on the straight and narrow when signs of frailty appear. Paintings like these are fun to do. While they are humorous, they are also human, and the subtle touch of forbearance evident in each of them is something all of us can learn."

## Miscellaneous

### *The Apple Peeler*

Duchess Trousers advertisement, 1927

oil on canvas

Collection of George Lucas

The tan palette, concentrated facial expression, and loosely brushed background of *The Apple Peeler* resemble Thomas Eakins's painting *The Thinker*, which Rockwell would have seen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The solitary figure may also reflect Rockwell's own sense of isolation as his first marriage was beginning to fail.

*The Gossips*  
*The Saturday Evening Post*, January 12, 1929  
oil on canvas  
Collection of Steven Spielberg

Rockwell recalled the day he met the man who posed for *The Gossips*:

“I remember it was June and terribly hot. . . . Suddenly the downstairs door banged and I heard someone come up the stairs, treading on each step with a loud, deliberate thump. . . . A tiny old man with a knobby nose, an immense, drooping mustache, and round, heavy-lidded eyes stamped . . .into the studio.”

Rockwell wanted to do a painting of three women gossiping but could not find models who were sufficiently funny looking. James Van Brunt was perfect. He agreed to shave off his mustache and posed for all three figures. Rockwell said he laughed himself silly at the way Van Brunt pranced around the studio in the long skirts and little hats.

*Peach Crop*  
*The American Magazine*, April 1935  
oil on canvas  
Collection of George Lucas

*Peach Crop* illustrates a Depression-era story extolling the virtues of true love over wealth. An impoverished medical student is engaged to a beautiful, but selfish socialite. He falls instead for a pretty but poor young woman who is injured at work. When he learns she wants to go to nursing school to help people, he reconsiders his marriage plans.

## **Awakening the Imagination**

*Pardon Me*  
*The Saturday Evening Post*, January 26, 1918  
oil on canvas  
Collection of Steven Spielberg

*Pardon Me* is a classic narrative of adolescent embarrassment. Apart from the clothing, the incident might well have taken place anywhere or any time. As Steven Spielberg remarked, “It is a scene of innocent humor---something we’ve all done when we were younger. . . . Rockwell was extolling the virtues of simple values and simple moments.”

*Shadow Artist*

*The Country Gentleman*, February 7, 1920

oil on canvas

Collection of George Lucas

*Shadow Artist* is reminiscent of the pantomime shows that appeared in vaudeville programs during Rockwell's youth. The scene is presented from the point of view of the children who watch the shadow maker in awe. George Lucas noted, "Just by the tilt of the heads, just by their body language, you can tell they are completely fascinated by what they're watching, and you can see the pride . . . on the part of the shadow maker."

*The Toy Maker*

*The Literary Digest*, November 20, 1920

oil on canvas

Collection of George Lucas

*The Toy Maker* is a nostalgic reminder of old-time toy making, which almost disappeared when industrial manufacturing began replacing hand-work in the early years of the twentieth century. By 1920, a revival of toy making by New England woodworkers reflected a desire for simple toys that encouraged children to invent and imagine. The red, white, and blue whirligig in Rockwell's picture suggests that its creator was one of these American woodcrafters.

*The Stuff of Which Memories Are Made*

Edison Mazda Lampworks advertisement, 1922

oil on canvas

Collection of George Lucas

In 1920 Rockwell received a commission from General Electric's Edison Mazda Lamp division to paint images for an advertising campaign. It demonstrates Rockwell's growing skill at using light to create an emotional tone. Over a seven-year period, Rockwell painted at least twenty ads for Edison Mazda that appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Good Housekeeping* magazines.

*Boy Reading Adventure Story*

*The Saturday Evening Post*, November 10, 1923

oil on canvas

Collection of George Lucas

*Boy Reading Adventure Story* is about the power of the written word to transport a child to a distant land and time. George Lucas commented, "It's a painting celebrating literature, the magic that happens when you read a story, and the story comes alive for you." When working on *Star Wars*, he said, "I realized that you could still sit and dream about exotic lands and strange creatures."

*Graduation*

*The Saturday Evening Post*, June 26, 1926

oil on canvas

Collection of George Lucas

The round glasses and parted hair of the boy in *Graduation* resemble caricatures Rockwell drew of himself as an adolescent. Rockwell had mixed feelings about formal education. He loved learning but never excelled at academics and left high school after two years to study art full time.

***When I wanted a model I just walked around Hollywood.***

**Norman Rockwell**

*Gary Cooper as the Texan*

*The Saturday Evening Post*, May 24, 1930

oil on canvas

Collection of Steven Spielberg

In 1930 Rockwell had a chance to visit Hollywood. He was thrilled. He wanted to do a picture of a “rawboned, glamorous cowboy.” The publicity director at Paramount Pictures suggested Gary Cooper, who was about to begin shooting *The Texan*. Although now mostly forgotten, the movie was a hit when it was released. Westerns like *The Texan* that were billed as “expressing the spirit of America” provided escape from the downward-spiraling economy during the early months of the Depression.

*Woman at Vanity*

*The Saturday Evening Post*, October 21, 1933

oil on canvas

Collection of George Lucas

The young woman sitting at the frilly dressing table is a home-town version of the stock Hollywood blonde favored by movie studios in the 1930s. She is dressed in a copy of a gown worn by Joan Crawford in the 1932 film *Letty Lynton*. It was probably the most famous fashion item of the day. Macy’s department store capitalized on the popular style by selling some 500,000 replicas in its Cinema Shop.

*Movie Starlet and Reporters*  
*The Saturday Evening Post*, March 7, 1936  
oil on canvas  
Collection of Steven Spielberg

*Movie Starlet and Reporters* was once described as a picture of Jean Harlow being interviewed, but the model was probably Mardee Hoff, the daughter of another *Post* cover artist. Hoff hoped to break into the movies, and her face was familiar from magazines and newspaper ads. The day Rockwell's cover hit the newsstands, three movie companies wired the *Post* for her name, and within two weeks she was off to California under contract to Twentieth Century-Fox.

*The Flirts*  
*The Saturday Evening Post*, July 26, 1941  
oil on canvas  
Collection of Steven Spielberg

*The Flirts* emphasizes the pretensions of the glamour-girl type as she sits in her convertible pointedly ignoring two men in an adjacent truck. The encounter is brief and their social differences are obvious, but, as Steven Spielberg remarked, the men's glances are "totally innocent, completely moral," and "at the same time, just naughty enough" that you know the guys aren't "total squares."

*The Convention*  
*The Saturday Evening Post*, May 3, 1941  
oil on canvas  
Collection of George Lucas

Rockwell was sympathetic to young people who went to Hollywood hoping to break into the movies, but ended up working in drugstores and waiting tables and were too proud to return home. The young hat check girl may have been an aspiring actress trying to make ends meet while waiting for a chance at stardom.

*Mermaid*  
*The Saturday Evening Post*, August 20, 1955  
oil on canvas  
Collection of Steven Spielberg

Rockwell had a special genius for turning thoughts and worries that everyone experiences into humorous vignettes. *Mermaid* was the first (and last) nude he ever did for a magazine cover. He said that the idea came from a trip he once took to Provincetown, Massachusetts. Steven Spielberg suggests that he might have loved the 1948 William Powell film *Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid*, a romantic comedy that starred a middle-aged Powell and nineteen-year-old Ann Blythe.