

Norman Rockwell  
1894-1978

Born in New York City in 1894, Norman Percevel Rockwell's greatest desire from an early age was to be an illustrator. In 1909, at the age of 15, he left high school to begin his studies at the National Academy of Design and, later, the Art Students League. There he worked under George Bridgman who taught a rigorous series of technical skills that Rockwell relied on throughout his long career. Rockwell found success early. He painted his first commission, four Christmas cards, before his sixteenth birthday. While still in his teens, Rockwell was hired as art director for *Boys' Life* magazine and began a successful freelance career working for a variety of young people's publications.

At the age of 21, Rockwell moved to New Rochelle, New York, a community that housed a sizable colony of successful illustrators including the Leyendecker brothers, Coles Phillips and Howard Chandler Christy. There, Rockwell set up a studio with cartoonist Clyde Forsythe. During this period of his career, Rockwell produced work for such well-known magazines as *Life*, *Literary Digest* and *Country Gentleman*. In 1916, at the age of 22, Rockwell's first cover for *The Saturday Evening Post* appeared, a commission then considered to be the pinnacle of achievement for an illustrator. Over the next 47 years, Rockwell produced 322 covers for the *Post*. In 1916, he married Irene O'Connor, a marriage that ended in divorce in 1930.

In 1930, he married Mary Barstow. They had three sons: Jarvis, Thomas and Peter. The family moved to Arlington, Vermont in 1939. In 1943, while still in Arlington, Rockwell created a series of paintings based on Franklin Delano Roosevelt's concept of the Four Freedoms. The paintings were reproduced in *The Saturday Evening Post* alongside essays by famous thinkers of the day. The series was enormously popular and ultimately toured the United States in an exhibition sponsored by the *Post* and the Treasury Department. At each of the sixteen cities in the tour, war bonds were sold. The exhibition raised more than \$130 million for the war effort, primarily in small denomination bonds.

The Rockwell family moved from West Arlington to Stockbridge, Massachusetts in 1953. Six years later, Mary Barstow Rockwell died. *My Adventures as an Illustrator*, a work Rockwell wrote in collaboration with his son, Tom, was published in 1960. *The Saturday Evening Post* excerpted portions of the book in a series of articles, one of which featured the famous *Triple Self-Portrait*.

Rockwell's third marriage took place in 1961 to Mary (Molly) Punderson. Two years later, Rockwell ended his long association with *The Saturday Evening Post*. In 1964, his first *Look* magazine illustrations appeared. The eight-year association with *Look* allowed Rockwell to paint pictures illustrating some of his deepest concerns, including the civil rights movement and the war on poverty. In 1973, Rockwell established a trust to preserve his artistic legacy and placed it under the custodianship of the Old Corner House in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. This trust forms the core of the permanent collection of the Norman Rockwell Museum at Stockbridge. In 1976, Rockwell placed his Stockbridge studio and all its contents in trust to the museum. The next year, Rockwell was presented with perhaps his highest

honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, for his "vivid and affectionate portraits of our country."

He died peacefully at home in Stockbridge on November 8, 1978.