

ILLUSTRATION

WINTER 2010 ISSUE 26

GRAPPLING WITH GRUFFALO: WHAT
MAKES AXEL SCHEFFLER TICK?

CHOOSE LITHO: NOEL CARRINGTON
AND THE PUFFIN PICTURE BOOKS

SEASONAL CHEER: NOSTALGIA AND
SATIRE BY RANDOLPH CALDECOTT



ROCKWELL'S AMERICA IN THE SPOTLIGHT

6 POUNDS

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Long dismissed as schmaltzy by the art establishment, the art of Norman Rockwell is at last receiving critical acknowledgment – something that will not surprise his legions of fans in the US and across the world. As an exhibition of his work, which included 323 covers for the *Saturday Evening Post*, arrives at Dulwich Picture Gallery, we find out what has made this artist the visual recorder of 20th-century American life.

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When Noel Carrington arrived at Penguin he had already experimented with commissioning auto-lithography for books such as Eric Ravilious' *High Street* and Kathleen Hale's Orlando books at Country Life. However it was his role at Penguin that enabled him to create a British version of the Russian and French lithographed children's books that inspired him. We consider the innovative and beautiful Puffin Picture Books, the artists who illustrated them, and how they evolved from their earliest days in the middle of the second world war.

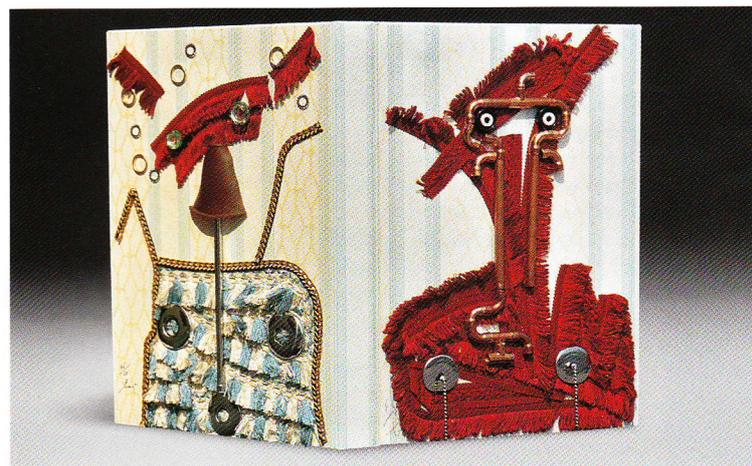
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Best known as the illustrator of *The Gruffalo* and *The Gruffalo's Child*, Scheffler has created images that have already become classics for a generation of children – *The Gruffalo* was voted even more popular than Eric Carle's *Very Hungry Caterpillar* in a recent poll. We talk to him about his continuing projects with author Julia Donaldson, his upbringing in Germany and the influences behind his picture books.

26 Randolph Caldecott
Whether you love his work for his humorous stories and caricatures, or for the toy books that he took over illustrating from his friend Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott's illustrations are instantly recognisable and have remained popular for over 100 years – no mean feat for an artist who died in his early forties and spent much of his productive life creating images that reflected his views on contemporary society. We look in particular at the way in which his pictures helped to create the classic image of a Victorian English Christmas.

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Graham Greene was an exacting customer when it came to illustrating his books, yet Paul Hogarth managed to capture the spirit and atmosphere of his novels in a way that not only pleased their author, but helped to sell his Penguin paperbacks for decades. We examine both the covers and the unpublished sketches behind them and discuss what made them so successful and enduring.

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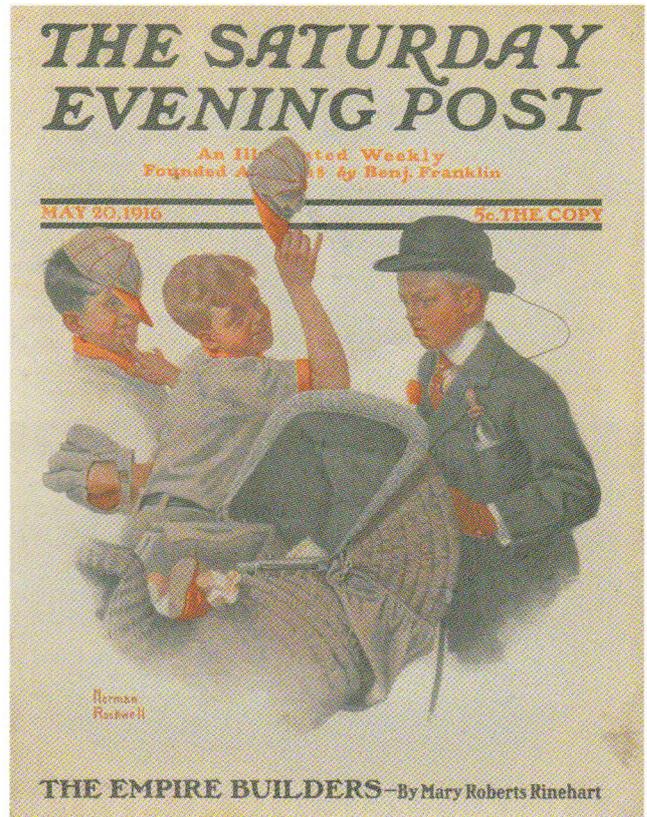
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48 Look and learn
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AMERICAN EYE

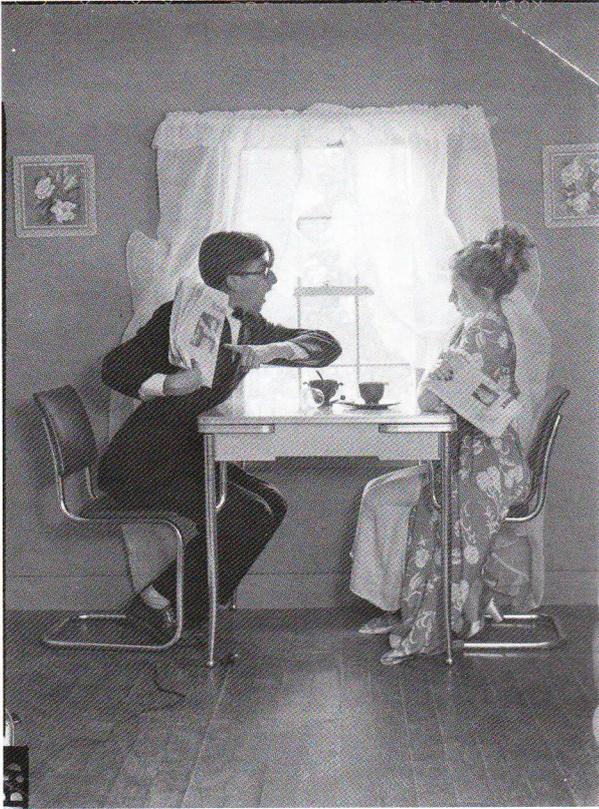
Abby Cronin explores the life and work of Norman Rockwell and discovers a visual documentary of 20th-century America

Norman Rockwell (1894-1978) was one of America's best-loved and most prolific 20th-century illustrators. His career spanned nearly 70 years and he left a legacy of over 4,000 original works. Born in New York City, he grew up in suburban Westchester Country. Drawing was an early passion and he studied art at the Chase Art School and the Art Students League in New York, before setting up his first studio in New Rochelle, New York, in 1915. Even as a young man he had a gift for observing and capturing the visual drama, humour and domestic lives of ordinary Americans.

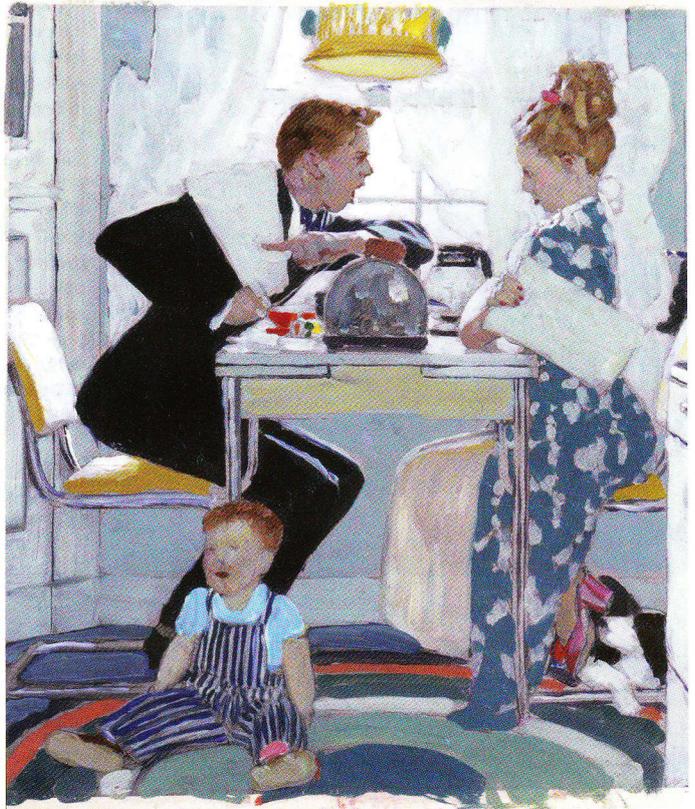


He won his first commission to illustrate Christmas cards when he was just 16 and by 1912 he was getting many more for children's books. In 1913 he became art editor for *Boys' Life*, published by the Boy Scouts of America. But the greatest showcase in America for an illustrator was the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*: "If you did a cover for the *Post* you had arrived," he said. In the 1920s and 1930s the *Post* was the most loved magazine in America – its circulation peaked at six million in 1960. It was pushed through letterboxes and tossed on to the porches of millions of households every week. Rockwell's big break came in 1916 when G H Lorimer, the *Post's* editor, commissioned him to paint a cover. He was just 22 when "Boy with baby carriage" (fig 1), a comic narrative, was published on 16 May 1916. It began Rockwell's 47-year association with the *Post* and won him national acclaim.

Rockwell's magazine covers told stories of the everyday lives of Americans in a wide array of settings. His subject matter ranged from conversations over breakfast tables to bridge games and barbershop quartets. He explored themes such as minor embarrassments; discomforts and humiliations; issues to do with youth; growing up and ageing; and people's relationships with much-loved pets. He depicted symbols of American culture, from the emblems of old-fashioned patriotism to the Boy Scouts and portraits of presidents. He painted people on national holidays and covered political statements such as Roosevelt's Four Freedoms and recorded events such as the civil rights movement. In addition to 323 *Post* covers, he illustrated more than 40 books and did covers for *Look* and



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1
Rockwell's first
cover for the
*Saturday Evening
Post*, 'Boy with
baby carriage',
20 May 1916

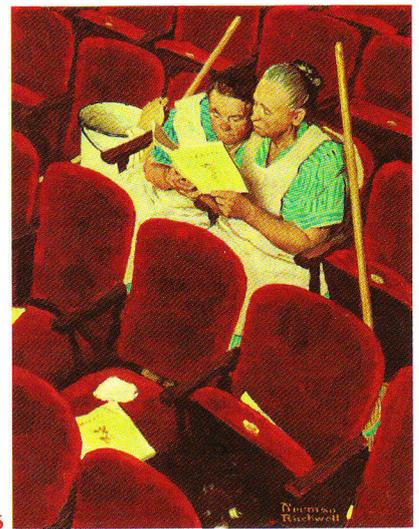
2
'Barbershop
quartet', *Post* cover,
26 September 1936

3
The original
photograph set
up and used
by Rockwell to
create image 4

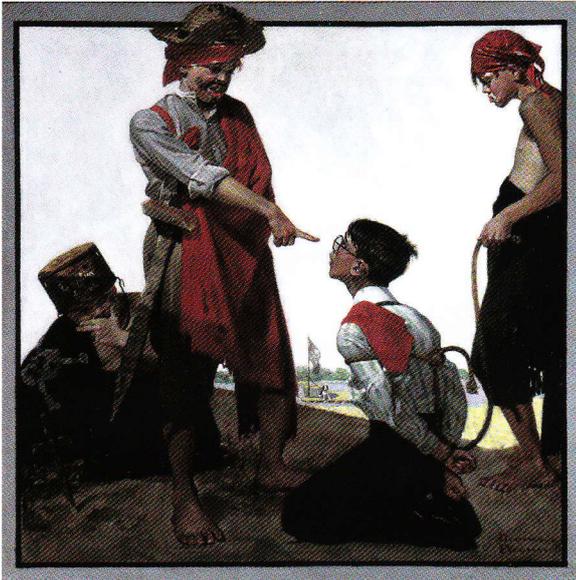
4
'Breakfast table
political argument',
signed and
inscribed 'To Herb
Herrick, sincerely,
Norman Rockwell'.
Used in the *Post*,
30 October, 1948

5
'Bridge game –
the bid' used on
a *Post* cover,
15 May 1948

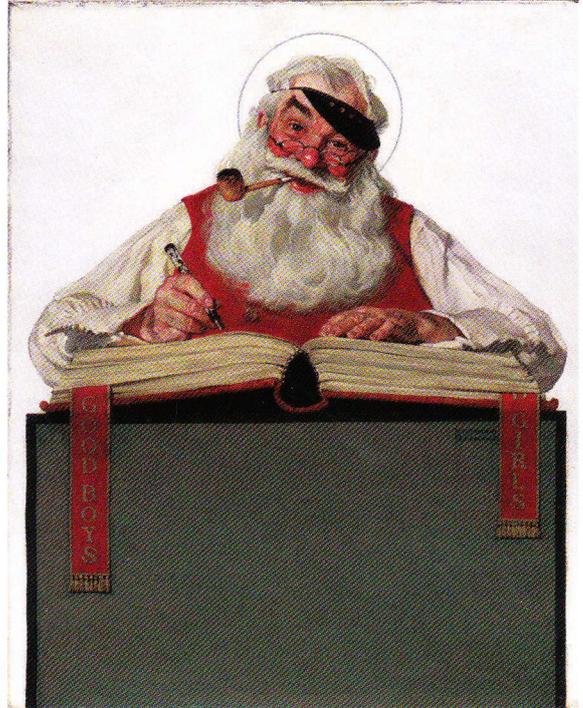
6
'Charwomen in
theater', inscribed
'To Morgan
Harding sincerely
Norman Rockwell'
(*Saturday Evening
Post*, 6 April 1946)



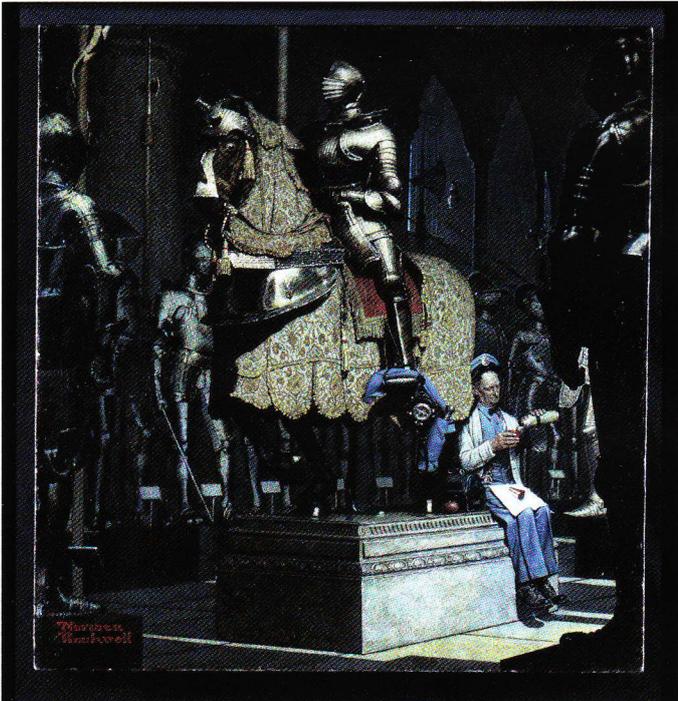
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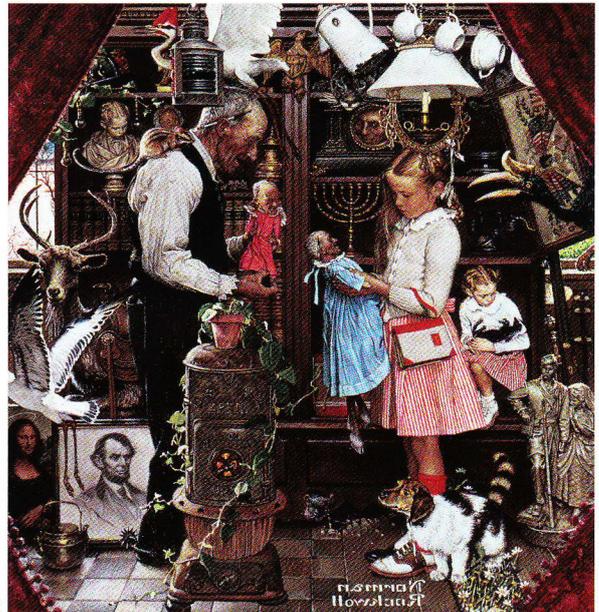
7
 'Cousin Reginald plays pirates'. Used in *Country Gentleman*, 3 November 1917
 8
 'No Christmas problem now – Santa with a Parker pen'. Used in *the Post*, 14 December 1929
 9
 'Lunch break with knight'. *Post* cover, 3 November 1962



8



7
 9



10

other magazines, Boy Scout calendars, advertisements, postage stamps, murals and greetings cards. We would have even more if a fire had not destroyed many works in his Arlington, Vermont, studio in 1943.

Despite his popularity with the public, Rockwell's work was not taken seriously by the art establishment during his lifetime. Perhaps his illustrations were too nostalgic, too affectionate or too patriotic. His pictures moved millions who understood and identified with his subjects, but his style of portraying stories through narrative and figurative illustration was seen by critics as too simplistic. Did such "Rockwellian" small towns really exist? Was he merely portraying a naïve version of the American dream? Art historians dismissed his work as sentimental and kitsch and questioned his techniques – was it legitimate to use photography to pose people and record events, which Rockwell routinely did, before transferring them to canvas?

Rockwell described himself as "the kid with the camera eye". From the 1930s he engaged photographers to record carefully conceived scenes. In his own book, *How I Make a Picture* (1949), it is significant that he described his work as

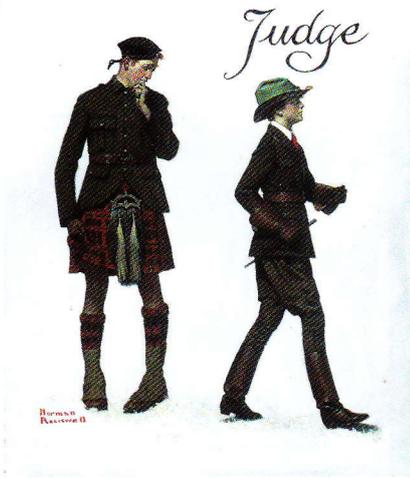
making "pictures". David Kamp, writing in *Vanity Fair* in November 2009, explained Rockwell's process:

"First came the brainstorming and a rough pencil sketch, then casting of the models and the hiring of costumes and props... coaxing the right poses out of the models... the composition of a fully detailed charcoal sketch... then a painted colour sketch... then, and only then, the final painting."

Today the pendulum has swung back in favour of Rockwell's art and illustrations. In the past 20 years his work has been studied and reassessed and he is now regarded as an accomplished painter-illustrator who sketched, drew and observed the lives and habits of people he knew. His themes recorded shifts in the mainstream culture of, and social mores in, 20th-century America. He understood, and was influenced by, the old masters. His command of composition, design and perspective and use of light demonstrate a sophisticated grasp of artistic skills. Rockwell has earned his place in the history of western art and "Rockwellian" is no longer a term of abuse.

While his pictures are familiar and tap into personal memories and experiences, they also demonstrate

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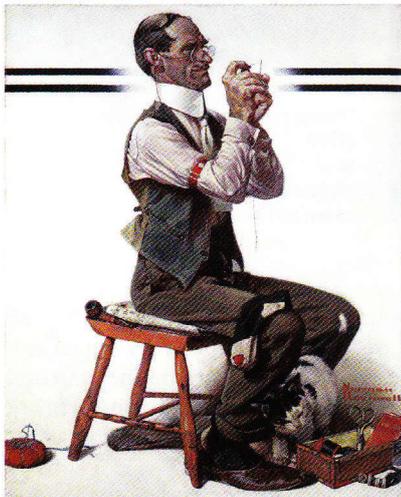


10
 'April fools – girl with shopkeeper'.
 Post cover,
 3 April 1948
 11
 'Petticoats and pants – man wearing kilt, woman wearing suit'. Cover for *Judge* magazine, 1 June 1918

12



12
 'The runaway – runaway boy and clown'.
 Cover for *Life* magazine, 1 June 1922
 13
 'Rosie the riveter'.
 Post cover, 29 May 1943

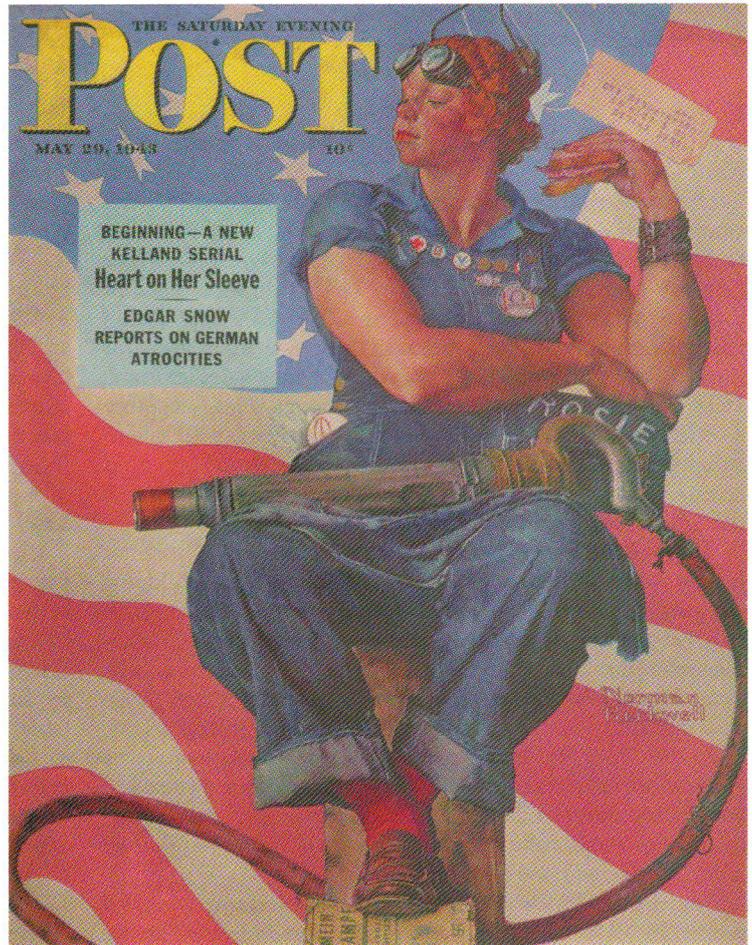


14

14
 'Threading the needle'.
 Post cover, 8 April 1922

Rockwell's ability to observe and record fraught social situations from a tolerant viewpoint. As the century progressed, he retained a neutral stance while recording changing American values. He observed normal people during the reforms of the New Deal, the second world war, the rise of national identity, the civil rights movement and the creation of the United Nations. In post-war America, Rockwell's pictures provided informative and penetrating views of political problems endemic in American society, as in "The problem we all live with", 1964 (fig 18). This remarkable image was a timely warning about the treatment of his audience's fellow citizens.

Any visual journey through Rockwell's work should begin with his first *Saturday Evening Post* cover. Small children fascinated him and were often key subjects. "Boy with baby carriage", 1916, is a humorous view of an unhappy babysitter – he is in his Sunday-best clothes pushing a sibling in a carriage while two boys going off to play baseball mock him.



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A year later Rockwell painted “Cousin Reginald plays pirates” (fig 7), his fourth cover for *The Country Gentleman* magazine. The series focused on a city boy being bested by his contemporaries from the country. Again children are shown in embarrassing situations. A *Life* magazine cover entitled “The runaway – runaway boy and clown” (1922) shows a barefoot urchin being consoled by a clown (fig 12). The unhappy child’s few belongings lie on the ground as the clown wipes away his tears. Another type of child is shown in “Young valedictorian”, 1928 (fig 15) – a girl stands on the school stage accepting a certificate. Proud parents (or perhaps teachers) watch with delight. She’s all dressed up and Rockwell’s use of light accentuates her poised demeanour. A globe sits next to her as though she has the world at her feet.

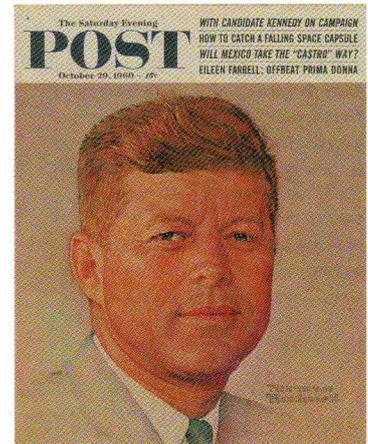
Throughout the 1910s and 1920s Rockwell’s Christmas images were sprinkled with Santas dealing with children’s requests, although “No Christmas problem now – Santa with a Parker pen” (fig 8) was associated more closely with the commercialisation of Christmas than with religious rituals. His *Saturday Evening Post* covers showed carol singers and shoppers, signalling that it was time to buy stocking fillers.

In the 1930s Rockwell’s work became less sentimental. He chose more subjects to do with sports, travel, movie stars and barbershop quartets. In 1935 he received an important commission to paint colour illustrations for a deluxe edition of *Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*.

And in the 1940s war, not surprisingly, became a central theme. In 1940-45 soldiers and sailors, shown as civilians in



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15
 ‘Young valedictorian’,
 c1920
 16
 ‘Volunteer fireman’. *Post*
 cover, 28 March 1931

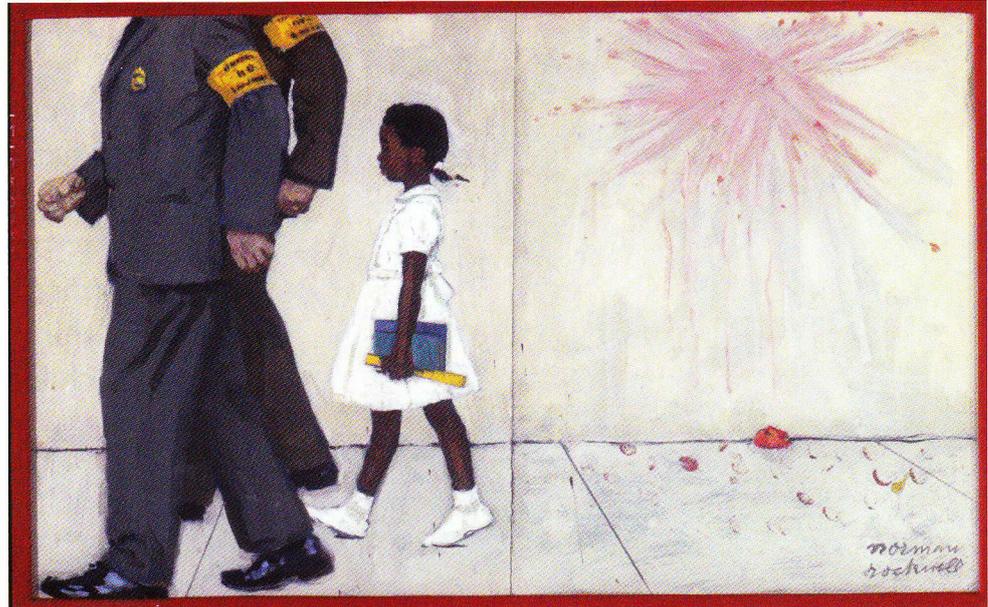
uniforms, appeared on *Post* covers and on posters selling war bonds. These paintings are full of emotion. They depict soldiers’ lives and families desperate to follow the news, letters home, and men returning home from war. His famous image of “Rosie the riveter”, 1943 (fig 13), who is depicted in a pose after Michelangelo’s Prophet Isaiah, is iconic.

Lighter subjects appeared towards the end of the decade. In “April fools – girl with shopkeeper”, 1948 (fig 10), a young girl and an old man discuss dolls in a junk store. The room is cluttered with objects confusing America’s historic symbols. A framed portrait of Lincoln shows him in a Confederate uniform. The cat has a dog’s head; a squirrel rests on the shoulders of a man with spurs on his shoes; the stove has “April Fool 1948” inscribed on it. The image overflows with detail. Peter Rockwell, the artist’s son, described the contents of this picture as all wrong, almost a comic book illustration.

Rockwell also played gently with partisan politics. In 1948 he captured popular uncertainty about the presidential election. Would Dewey or Truman win? He shows us partisanship in the context of marital political disagreements. “Breakfast table political argument”, 1948 (figs 3-4), is a humorous view of a domestic political dispute. Using the photograph as his primary source, he added domestic chaos with a neglected baby crying, a cat, dog, teddy bear plus kitchen furnishings added in stages and worked on to produce the final version.

According to Ron Schick, author of *Norman Rockwell: Behind the Camera* (Little Brown & Company, 2009): “Domestic political discord is one of the many themes

17
 Portrait of
 John F Kennedy.
 Post cover,
 29 October 1960
 18
 Study for
 'The problem
 we all live with',
 gouache on
 paper. For *Look*
 magazine,
 14 January 1964
 19
 'Triple self-
 portrait'.
 Post cover, 13
 February 1960

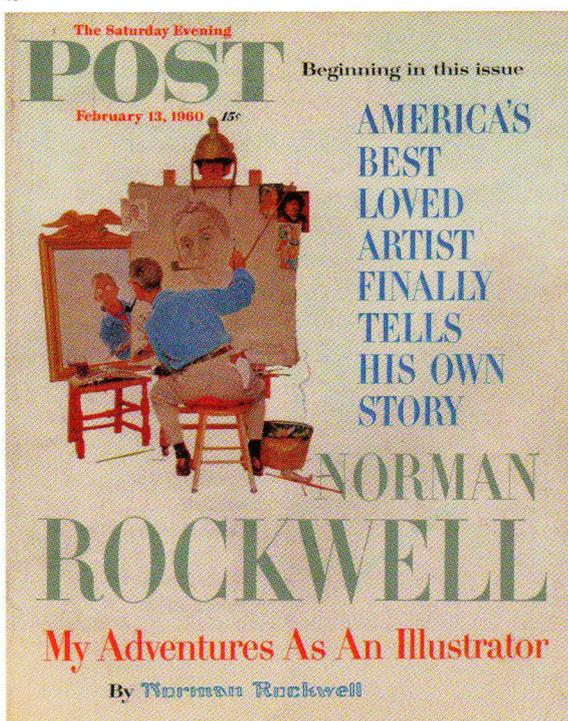


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Rockwell reprised over the years. He had interpreted it twice before, in 1920 and again in 1944. Over copies of the *New York Herald Tribune* and the *Brattleboro Reformer*, the couple argue about their preferences in the 1948 presidential election; he's filibustering for Dewey while she supports Truman."

Rockwell even left us a pictorial autobiography in his "Triple self-portrait", 1960 (fig 19). He gives us three self-portraits in one, each with a different attitude. The face on the easel is outgoing, friendly and confident; the figure on the stool is more awkward and uncertain, while the serious face in the mirror has its eyes obscured by light on his glasses. Self-portraits by Rembrandt, van Gogh, Dürer and Picasso are attached to the top-right corner of his canvas and sketches of Rockwell's face are tacked on the top left. A caricature of the American eagle perches on the mirror, a Paris fireman's helmet sits at the top of the canvas and smoke billows from the trash can. Rockwell asks the viewer to construct his personality from these images. Read carefully; this is truly an autobiographical self-portrait.

19



Rockwell is now back in vogue. *New Yorker* art critic Peter Schjeldhal sees him as "a visual storyteller of genius... a story-maker, a bard. He didn't illustrate Middle America. He invented Middle America." (*The New Yorker*, 22 November 1999). I agree. Norman Rockwell was a New England scribe with brushes. He recorded a nearly vanished idealised America. His illustrations and art are no longer viewed as portraying American culture in a populist manner. Instead, they convey an intrinsic optimism.



Abby Cronin is an independent researcher and freelance arts journalist. Illustrations © 2010 from the National Museum of American Illustration, Newport, RI, USA (www.AmericanIllustration.org). Photos courtesy of the American Illustrators Gallery, NYC (www.AmericanIllustrators.com). © 2010 *Saturday Evening Post* covers by SEPS. Curtis Publishing. Photo for Norman Rockwell's "Breakfast table political argument," Gene Pelham, 1948. Norman Rockwell Licensing, Niles, IL, USA. Part of the permanent collection of the Norman Rockwell Museum/Norman Rockwell Museum Archives (www.nrm.org).

Further information

In 1973 Norman Rockwell established a trust and placed his works in the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, the town where he lived with his family from 1953 until his death. Major retrospective exhibitions of his work have travelled across the US – most recently, filmmakers Stephen Spielberg and George Lucas lent personal collections of Rockwell's art to the Smithsonian American Art Museum, where the exhibition "Telling stories: Norman Rockwell from the collections of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg" runs until 2 January 2011.

In 2000 the National Museum of American Illustration, a new museum dedicated to the work of American illustrators, opened in Newport, Rhode Island. The creation of art collectors Judy Goffman Cutler and Laurence Cutler, its archive of major illustrators includes an important collection of Rockwell's work. They are bringing a selection of this work, including 323 vintage *Saturday Evening Post* covers, together with illustrations for advertisements, magazines and books, across the Atlantic for the first time.

Visitors to Dulwich Picture Gallery can view "Norman Rockwell's America" from 15 December to 27 March 2011. For details see page 48.