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## New exhibit traces arc of Norman Rockwell's career

from **The Associated Press**

Norman Rockwell's autobiography and a selection of Life, Look and Saturday Evening Post magazines are displayed at the National Museum of American Illustration in Newport, R.I., Tuesday June 3, 2009. Associated Press © 2009



Vernon Court, an 1898 French-style mansion, houses the National Museum of American Illustration in Newport, R.I., Tuesday June 3, 2009. The museum features an exhibit of the works of Norman Rockwell, which runs until Aug. 31. Associated Press © 2009

*NEWPORT, R.I.* June 5, 2009, 11:25 pm ET · Norman Rockwell's first cover for The Saturday Evening Post was of a sour-faced adolescent strolling his infant sibling in a baby carriage as two boys in baseball uniforms make mocking gestures.

But the frivolous image from May 1916 soon gave way to weightier subjects.

He marked the financial turmoil of the Great Depression with a portrait of a crowd huddled around a "Stock Exchange Quotations" sign. Images in later years of a wounded World War II veteran, President John F. Kennedy and a young black girl integrating a school showed a growing artistic interest in politics, war, civil liberties and other issues of the time.

A new exhibit at the National Museum of American Illustration traces Rockwell's career over six decades, showing how he evolved from an artist fond of painting dogs, children, seniors and other sentimental subjects into a social commentator keen on documenting the world around him.

"I think (visitors are) going to have a greater understanding and appreciation of who Norman Rockwell was in his artistic career, certainly, and then within the context of American history," said Judy Goffman Cutler, an art dealer who designed the exhibit and founded the museum in 1998 with her husband, Laurence Cutler, to house their illustration art collection.

The exhibit "Norman Rockwell: American Imagist" opens Saturday and runs through Aug. 31.

Rockwell is the most celebrated of American illustrators — 20th-century artists whose paintings were intended for reproduction in newspapers, magazines and advertisements.

The prolific artist designed more than 4,000 works before his death in 1978 and is best known for his slice-of-life American snapshots, often of ordinary subjects: a young valedictorian with a bow in her hair; an elderly man playing solitaire in bed; a choirboy combing his hair for Easter.

The Newport exhibit coincides with a growing critical appreciation for Rockwell and for the American illustration genre, which was long derided as excessively sappy and commercial.

"There has been some new critical consideration so that the art of Norman Rockwell and other illustrators has certainly made strides in the marketplace,"

said Stephanie Plunkett, deputy director and chief curator of the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Mass.

"But in addition, there are scholars and arts writers who are talking about it more. That has sort of raised the level of discourse."

The exhibit of about 60 works highlights pieces in the museum's permanent collection, including "Miss Liberty" — a September 1943 magazine cover of a patriotic woman racing forward to fill the labor void left behind by the men serving in World War II. It also offers a representative sample of the more than 320 covers he designed for The Saturday Evening Post.

The show also features little-seen pieces that are on loan and part of private collections. Among them is "The Runaway: Runaway Boy and Clown," a June 1922 Life magazine cover of a clown in a polka-dot costume wiping a tear from the cheek of a runaway boy.

Among the topical issues Rockwell confronted in his later years was the civil rights movement.

The exhibit includes multiple studies of one of Rockwell's seminal images — "The Problem We all Live With" — a 1964 Look magazine cover showing a 6-year-old black girl being escorted by four U.S. marshals into an all-white school in New Orleans. A tomato has been thrown in her direction and a racial slur is scrawled on the wall.

Beside reflecting Rockwell's social consciousness, the studies also hint at his creative process and attention to detail, showing how he grappled in different versions with where to locate the splattered tomato.

This is the museum's first Rockwell-specific exhibit because the Cutlers say they wanted to wait until they had finished restoration of a special gallery with ceiling murals from the Louis Comfort Tiffany studios.

The show started at the Naples Museum of Art in Florida and will next travel to the Nassau County Museum of Art on Long Island. Additional stops are being lined up.



The painting "Volunteer Fireman" and "Boy Graduate" are shown as part of the Norman Rockwell exhibit at the National Museum of American Illustration in Newport, R.I., Tuesday June 3, 2009. The subject of "Boy Graduate" is the artist's son Tom. Associated Press © 2009



The Saturday Evening Post cover and painting "Miss Liberty" are displayed as part of the Norman Rockwell exhibit at the National Museum of American Illustration in Newport, R.I., Tuesday June 3, 2009. Associated Press © 2009



Judy Goffman Cutler points out details in the work "The Runaway" in the Norman Rockwell exhibit at the National Museum of American Illustration in Newport, R.I., Tuesday June 3, 2009. Goffman Cutler, a New York City art dealer, created the exhibit and founded the illustration museum in 1998 with her husband Laurence Cutler. The murals in the gallery, top right, were painted by Louis Comfort Tiffany. Associated Press © 2009



Judy Goffman Cutler compares photographs and detail paintings, which were eventually used in the final painting "The problem we all live with", as part of the Norman Rockwell exhibit at the National Museum of American Illustration in Newport, R.I., Tuesday June 3, 2009. Associated Press © 2009



The painter's box, with a stencil similar to the artist's painting signature, is displayed as part of the Norman

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Museum of American Illustration in  
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