



projo the
beat
places to go • people to see • things to do
TODAY



Catch a movie outdoors, Downcity

See cinema in the city, the Downcity Arts District of Providence. Tonight at dusk, about 8:20, you can take in an outdoor movie at the corner of Westminster and Union streets. It's the Thursday night "Movies on the Block" series. Tonight's screening is *Pirates of the Caribbean* with Johnny Depp as Captain Jack Sparrow.

Admission is free. Bring a chair, a blanket and a snack. For more, call (401) 421-0254.

Movie listings, D10. For more events, see projothebeat.com.

PEOPLE

Lambert speaks out

American Idol runner-up **Adam Lambert** has landed the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine, where he talks about sex, drugs and his *Idol* experiences.

The 27-year-old singer from San Diego acknowledges in an interview that he's gay, and says it shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone.

"I'm proud of my sexuality," he says. "I embrace it. It's just another part of me."

AMERICA ON CANVAS



A little-seen Norman Rockwell painting captures bridge players intent on their game.

2 museums host American experience through artists' eyes

NEWPORT

Never mind what the calendar says.

Thanks to some lucky timing, two Bellevue Avenue neighbors — the National Museum of

ART SCENE
Bill Van Slicen

American Illustration and the Newport Art Museum — are hosting summer

exhibits that not only showcase American art but celebrate the depth and variety of the American experience. If these shows don't make you want to break out the Fourth of July bunting a few weeks early, nothing will.

Certainly, the timing couldn't be better for "Norman Rockwell: American Imagist," a much-acclaimed traveling exhibit that opened June 6 at the illustration museum. Not only is Rockwell's artistic reputation at its highest point in decades — nowadays even highbrow critics find it hard to dismiss him as a mere "illustrator" — but his trademark blend of wry humor and gentle populism feels especially welcome in these topsy-turvy times. (One wonders, for example, what this outspoken supporter of America's civil rights struggle would have made of the election of the country's first black president.)

Organized by museum co-founders Laurence and Judy Cutler, the NMAI show features more than 60 Rockwell works, including dozens of rarely seen pieces on loan from private collections. Highlights range from Rockwell's first-ever magazine cover (a rather nondescript fishing scene

ART

For exhibit listings, go to projtothebeat.com. Click on "Visual Arts" in the "Browse Events" box.

A uniquely American perspective

Continued from Page D1

commissioned by a forerunner of Field and Stream) to later illustrations that tackle more politically sensitive topics such as civil rights, school desegregation, foreign aid and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

(If that makes "Norman Rockwell: American Imagist" sound more like a political debate than an art exhibit, don't worry. The show, which is coming off a sold-out run at the Naples (Fla.) Museum of Art, also features many of Rockwell's now-iconic scenes of small-town life.)

BY CONTRAST, "The Art of Life: Selections from the Terrence and Suzanne Murray Collection," focuses on two subjects that Rockwell mostly avoided: seascapes and city scenes.

Drawn from the collection of former Fleet Boston CEO Terry Murray and his wife, the show, which opens Saturday at the Newport Art Museum, features a wide range of American-made artworks — everything from a dramatic shipwreck scene by 19th-century painter William Bradford to a cache of lithographs by the great (though still underrated) Ashcan School artist George Bellows.

Other highlights include paintings by Bellows' fellow Ashcan School artists John Sloan (including a wonderful Impressionist-tinged view of sailboats on Gloucester Harbor) and Robert Henri (whose charming portrait of a young Irish girl is one of the stars of the exhibit.)

Even some lesser-known artists manage to make a splash — notably Leon Kroil, a turn-of-the-century artist who contributes lively, paint-speckled view of the Maine coast, and Mabel Woodward, a Rhode Island painter who more than holds her own against the show's heavyweights.

LIKE MOST collectors' shows, "The Art of Life" has some thin patches. (Though the Murrays are avid collectors of Ashcan School artists such as Bellows and Henri, their collection doesn't have the kind of thematic or even qualitative consistency you'd expect to find in a traditional museum exhibition. On the other hand, the Bellows lithographs alone are worth the price of admission — especially the iconic 1921 boxing print *The White Hope* and an equally good revival-meeting scene, *Billy Sunday*.)

In fact, both shows have some quirky aspects.

"The Art of Life," for example, freely mixes works from the Ashcan School, a movement that celebrated the grit and glamour of Jazz Age New York, with paintings of ships (Bradford), sailors (Sloan) and sun-bathers (Woodward). It's an unusual approach — call it an artistic version of surf and turf — although NAM curator Nancy Grinnell does her best to make sure everyone gets along.

The NMAI show, meanwhile, is missing some of Rockwell's most famous works — notably the great World War II-era paintings known as *The Four*

Freedoms and the equally famous *Triple Self-Portrait*. (Fortunately, all five paintings — and, yes, all of Rockwell's cover illustrations started out as oil paintings — are on view at the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Mass.)

Following the show's convoluted layout can also be a problem. Things start off well, with roughly a dozen paintings and other works installed in the museum's newly restored Tiffany Loggia (so-called because Tiffany & Co. designed the nature-themed ceiling murals). But keeping track of the rest of the show, which wends through a series of upstairs rooms before ending in a basement gallery, requires some advanced orienteering skills. Prepare to backtrack more than once.

Still, these are minor complaints.

AT NMAI, the Cutlers have put together an exhibit that spans nearly the entirety of Rockwell's five-decade career. True, America's greatest illustrator could be hopelessly sentimental at times — witness *The Runaway*, a 1922 painting showing a teary-eyed boy being comforted by a circus clown and his faithful dog. Though beautifully painted — the clown's polka-dot suit, for example, practically pops off the canvas — the scene is as cloyingly sweet (and about as nourishing) as a gumdrop.

Yet the show, which is sponsored by Newport's William Vareika Fine Arts gallery, also features more ambitious works. A case in

point is *Bridge Game — The Bid*, an aerial view of four bridge players that's a marvel of technical skill and sly sophistication. Created in 1948 for Rockwell's longtime employer, *The Saturday Evening Post*, it's the kind of image — at once mundane and magical — that Rockwell excelled at.

EVEN THE SHOW'S Where's Waldo layout turns out to be a plus. While tracking down individual Rockwell paintings can be a chore, it's also helps showcase works by other illustrators such as J.C. Leyendecker, Howard Pyle and Maxfield Parrish, all of whom Rockwell admired.

"The Art of Life," meanwhile, probably could have used some extra editing, especially the beach scenes. Still, there are some wonderful pieces scattered around NAM's Cushing Memorial galleries: Bradford's dramatic, Rembrandt-esque *The Wreck of an Emigrant Ship*; a lovely nude study by William Glackens, in which he seems to be channeling the work of French artist Pierre Bonnard; a small gouache and pencil study by Winslow Homer; and of course anything by Bellows.

So, yes, both shows probably could have been better. But if you love art — and especially if you love American art — you'll put "Norman Rockwell: American Imagist" and "The Art of Life: Selections from the Terrence and Suzanne Murray Collection" on your summer to-do list.



Works by Ashcan School artist Robert Henri — such as *Portrait of Catherine Omalley* — are included in the Newport Art Museum's "The Art of Life" exhibit.

"Norman Rockwell: American Imagist" runs through Aug. 31 at the National Museum of American Illustration, 492 Bellevue Ave., Newport. Hours: the museum is open Saturday 10-4 and Sunday 11-4 for general admission and for a 2 p.m. guided tour on Friday; all other times are by reservation only. Admission: \$18 adults, \$16 seniors, \$12 students with L.D. and \$8 ages 5-12. Contact: (401) 851-8949, ext. 18 or www.americanillustration.org.

"The Art of Life: Selections from the Terrence and Suzanne Murray Collection" runs through Oct. 12 at the Newport Art Museum, 76 Bellevue Ave. Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 10-5 and Sunday noon-5. Admission: \$10 adults, \$8 seniors, \$6 students and military with L.D., 5 and under admitted free. Contact: (401) 848-8200 or www.newportartmuseum.org. bvansicl@projo.com / (401) 277-7421