

# Rock(well) of all ages

## Norman Rockwell's America

### Dulwich Picture Gallery, December 15-March 27

AS ONE of America's best-loved artists, Norman Rockwell's paintings and illustrations are unmistakable.

It's no exaggeration to say that Rockwell's art embodied America itself (or at least, America as it would like to be). What is extraordinary is that this is the first exhibition of the famous artist's original works to be

shown in the UK.

Rockwell gained widespread popular appeal through the covers he produced for the Saturday Evening Post magazine. Between 1916 and 1963, he illustrated 323 covers throughout a period of immense change to American society.

All 323 covers are on display in Dulwich Picture Gallery's exhibition, alongside many of his illustrations for advertisements, magazines and books – providing a comprehensive look at his career, and a fascinating portrayal of how the world superpower saw its ideal self.

Rockwell's art is so significant it

gave rise to the term Rockwellesque.

While some critics have used this term disparagingly as shorthand for an overly sentimental world view, it should be noted that Rockwell's output was not all patriotic war bond posters and sun-bathed nostalgia.

He also recorded political events, portrayed presidents, and on occasion painted searing images in support of the civil rights movement.

Rockwell was clearly an artist of considerable technical skill and his paintings have increased dramatically in value since his death in 1978.

Recent years have seen a critical reassessment of his work.

In 1999, The New Yorker art critic Peter Schjeldahl said: "Rockwell is terrific. It's become too tedious to pretend he isn't."

But Rockwell's belated reappraisal by the critical community scarcely

matters when it comes to securing his place in history.

His images of everyday American life remain as popular as ever with the public.

Paul Prowse

● **Dulwich Picture Gallery, Gallery Road, Dulwich SE21 7AD. £9, £8 concs. Visit [www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk](http://www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk) or call 020 8693 5254.**





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**UNMISTAKABLE:** Some of the 323 covers which will be on display at Dulwich Picture Gallery. From left, **Breakfast Table**, **Political Argument**, **Volunteer Fireman**, **Charwomen In Theatre** and **Threading The Needle**

Pictures: NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ILLUSTRATION AND THE AMERICAN ILLUSTRATORS' GALLERY

