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ARTIFACTS: ROCKWELL AUCTION

At a Norman Rockwell Sale, It's Still Cool to Be Square

By [KATHERINE BINDLEY](#)

Norman Rockwell's America still has its fans—both at home and overseas. His first major British exhibition will open Dec. 15 at London's Dulwich Picture Gallery. On Thursday in New York, his work saw strong sales at a Sotheby's auction.



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Sotheby's

Norman Rockwell's painting 'Dreamboats' sold for \$1.09 million Thursday.

It wasn't always so: For decades, much of the art world looked down on Rockwell's idyllic portraits of ball games, Boy Scouts and freckle-faced kids. But in recent years, collectors and museums have come to embrace the artist. At auction, 87% of the Rockwell oil paintings offered for sale this year have been sold, up from 73% last year.

At Sotheby's American paintings, drawings and sculpture auction in New York, "Dreamboats," a 1938 Rockwell painting of two college-aged girls staring at a photograph of movie star Robert Taylor, sold for \$1.09 million, close to its \$1.2 million high estimate. A study for the painting "The Problem We All Live With" more than tripled its high estimate of \$250,000 selling for \$854,500. The Civil Rights era painting was created for Look magazine and shows a young black girl, Ruby Bridges, being escorted to an all-white school by four U.S. marshals.

Finally, "The Fighting Gillises (Willie Gillis' Generations; Willie Gillis)," portraits of a fictitious family of soldiers, sold for \$926,500; it was estimated to sell for \$700,000 to \$1 million.



The New York-born Rockwell died in 1978 and is best known for more than 300 cover illustrations he created for the Saturday Evening Post between 1916 and 1963—all of which will be on view at the Dulwich show. His biographer Laura Claridge points to a 1999 exhibit as the turning point. In 2006, the 1954 painting "Breaking Home Ties" set a record and sold for \$15.4 million, well over its \$6 million high estimate.

Currently, the Rockwell collections of Steven Spielberg and George Lucas (57 major works in all) are on view on at Washington's Smithsonian American Art Museum. Two Rockwell exhibits opened last month, at the Brooklyn Museum and the North Carolina Museum of Art.

—Katherine Bindley

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