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AMERICAN
CHRONICLES | **The Art of
Norman Rockwell**

March 8-May 31, 2009

Revel in Rockwell at Detroit Institute of Arts
***American Chronicles: The Art of Norman Rockwell* Opens March 8**

February 10, 2009 (Detroit)—Family ... innocence ... heroism. These are the core themes interwoven throughout the work of Norman Rockwell, one of America's most recognized and beloved artists. *American Chronicles: The Art of Norman Rockwell*, on view at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) March 8–May 31, 2009, explores Rockwell the artist, his images, and their impact and influence on American culture.

From idyllic childhood scenes to commentaries on the post-war era and segregation, many paintings in Rockwell's six decades of work have become American icons. A number of Rockwell's signature works are among the 44 paintings and 323 original *Saturday Evening Post* covers in the exhibition: *No Swimming* (1921); *Four Freedoms* (1942); *Christmas Homecoming* (1948); *Triple Self Portrait* (1959) and the famous *The Problem We All Live With* (1963), dealing with school desegregation, and was painted to mark the 10th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

“Rockwell's pictures grow in meaning and significance because of his profound impact on American culture,” said Graham W. J. Beal, DIA director. “As part of the mass media for decades, Rockwell's images have come to be seen as defining the core American experience. To our 21st-century eyes, they present complex questions about who and what is American. We invite you to take another look at one of America's most well-known artists.”

American Chronicles explores the themes of family, innocence and heroism that

permeate Rockwell's work. His paintings of families include storylines filled with love, affection and humor, and are free of difficulties such as disease, loneliness, and death. Rockwell knew that uplifting sentiments appealed to people's emotions, and he used them effectively in his commercial and advertising work during his 47 years with the *Saturday Evening Post*.

When Rockwell wanted to express innocence, he painted children, portraying American childhood as carefree and charming. His cheerful pictures of happy kids untouched by hard realities prompted viewers to recall similar feelings—if not similar scenes—from their own childhoods. These desirable, happy scenes were ones people wanted to associate themselves with, and the images were advertising gold for products like cereal and magazines. However, some of Rockwell's most poignant and affecting images portray innocence lost, where the idealization of childhood is contrasted against the far more complicated world of adults. *Girl at Mirror* (1954) shows a young girl tentatively applying make-up with a celebrity magazine on her lap. Another moment of lost innocence is seen in *The Discovery* (1956), which shows a little boy with a shocked expression who has just found a Santa suit in his father's dresser drawer.

When depicting heroism, Rockwell focused on reassuring images of leaders, such as President Dwight D. Eisenhower or John F. Kennedy, but he also cast everyday Americans as heroes, focusing on their personal sacrifice and duty to the nation. Some of his most powerful images are those made in support of America's involvement in World War II. Rockwell's heroes are rarely shown on the front-line; he preferred to portray the quiet heroism of those who waited for loved ones left behind, such as the miner with two sons in the military featured in the poster *Mine America's Coal* (1945). When Rockwell created images for the extremely successful war bond posters *Four Freedoms*, he shows citizens at home enjoying the liberties that America fought to preserve.

At the height of his fame and recognition, Rockwell sought out difficult themes of the day in what he referred to as “big pictures.” Up until the early 1960s, Rockwell’s illustrations served the needs of the conservative *Saturday Evening Post*, which during the early- and mid-20th century celebrated white, middle class, small hometown values to the exclusion of many other kinds of American experience. Rockwell left *The Post* for *Look* magazine in 1964, where he was able to take on issues of social consciousness, such as war, racism, poverty and injustice. He used his illustrative and storytelling skills to make injustice visible. His image of Ruby Bridges in *The Problem We All Live With* (1963) or three civil rights workers in *Murder in Mississippi* (1965) are still powerful reminders of America’s struggle for civil rights for all.

The exhibition will also display photo murals of one of Rockwell’s studios and his working process. He often posed for his own paintings and viewers will get a glimpse into his technique of preparing to create a painting.

A fully illustrated catalog is available in the Museum Shop: soft cover, \$30; hard cover, \$45.

Tickets are \$15 for adults, \$14 for seniors age 62+, \$8 for ages 6-17, and free for DIA members. Tickets include museum admission and audio tours for adults and youth. Tickets for the public go on sale Feb. 23, available at the DIA Box Office, at dia.org, or by phone at 1-866-342-8497. A \$3.50 handling charge applies to tickets purchases on line or by phone.

American Chronicles: The Art of Norman Rockwell has been organized by the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. *American Chronicles* has been made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, American Masterpieces Program. Publication support has been provided by the Henry Luce Foundation. Media sponsorship has been provided by the Curtis Publishing Company and by the Norman Rockwell Estate Licensing Company.

Hours and Admissions

Museum hours are 10 a.m.–4 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays, 10 a.m.–10 p.m. Fridays, and 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Admission is \$8 for adults, \$4 for ages 6-17, and DIA members are admitted free. For membership information call 313-833-7971.

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The Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA), one of the premier art museums in the United States, is home to more than 60,000 works that comprise a multicultural survey of human creativity from ancient times through the 21st century. From the first van Gogh painting to enter a U.S. museum (*Self Portrait*, 1887), to Diego Rivera's world-renowned *Detroit Industry* murals (1932–33), the DIA's collection is known for its quality, range, and depth. Programs are made possible with support from the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs and the City of Detroit.