

Editorial

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The Arkansas Arts Center presents Norman Rockwell, Kevin Rivoli exhibition

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Perhaps there is no other American artist who captured the iconic, yet normal images of life more than Norman Rockwell. The painter and illustrator from the Big Apple was also responsible for creating over 300 covers for *The Saturday Evening Post*. Rockwell was born at the end of the 19th century and a year before his death in 1978, the artist received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Gerald Ford.

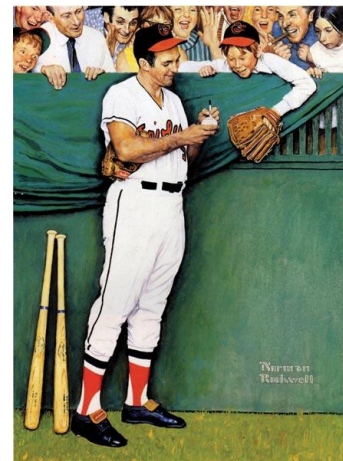
The president recognized Rockwell as an “artist, illustrator and author [whose] vivid and affectionate portraits of our country and ourselves have become a beloved part of the American tradition.” The Arkansas Arts Center is hosting *In Search of Norman Rockwell’s America*, a groundbreaking exhibition that pairs the work of Norman Rockwell with images by award-winning photojournalist Kevin Rivoli. Despite Rockwell’s role in American art history, there were several critics who

claimed his work was too idealistic, sentimental and nostalgic.

According to the related press release, one critic alleged that the artist created “an America that never was and never will be.” Rockwell disagreed, saying he showed “the America that I knew and observed to others who might not have noticed.” Rivoli’s photographs, which capture similar scenes of American life, dispel the critic’s notion that Rockwell was simply an out of touch dreamer.

Rivoli’s black and white photographs are prominently displayed next to Rockwell’s art. The placement of the pieces forms a “captivating comparison” of scenes from the 1940s and those from the new millennium. Included in the exhibition is the never-before-published painting *The Golfer*, a rare subject for Rockwell and one of his earlier works. A press preview was held on July 28 and allowed fellow members of various media outlets to visit the exhibition before it’s opened publicly. In the past, I’ve really enjoyed this opportunity to navigate the space without battling a huge crowd. And this visit was no different.

The press release stated that Rivoli began taking “slices of life” photographs about 20 years ago while working as a photojournalist. Slices included images of family, community, patriotism, milestones and people enjoying simple pleasures. The talented photographer realized that his work reflected Rockwell’s work, not only in mood and subject, but often in composition as well. *In Search of Norman Rockwell’s America* shows the patrons that “America is still alive and well.”



Norman Rockwell, *Gee, Thanks, Brooks (study)*, c. 1971. - Reprinted with permission of Brooks C. Robinson.

One of Rivol's photos shows a young woman helping her prom date with his corsage at a diner. Another spectacular shot shows a recent high school graduate flipping into a lake to join other graduates who are taking part of a school tradition. His images, much like the ones Rockwell created are relatable and instantly create a familiar feeling. The exhibit's desire in pairing these "celebrated, familiar works of art to photographs of real people reminds us to look for those moments of happiness, pride, mischief, courage and patriotism that Rockwell captured and became known as Rockwell's America."

Especially with the current pace of life and ongoing debt debates, it's nice to escape for a moment and observe a simpler way of life through the eyes of these two artists. The show began at the end of July and ends Sept. 18. Admission is free during gallery hours and guided tours will be available Tuesday through Sunday at 1:30 p.m. during the duration of the exhibition.

The exhibit is part of a national tour and organized by Kevin and Michele Rivoli in collaboration with International Arts & Artists, Washington, DC.