

McMike exhibit challenges perception

By [Adam Martin-Robbins](#) | Mar 07, 2011

Prolific American artist Norman Rockwell has been rebuked by some art critics for creating idealized, overly sentimental portraits of life south of the border. A new exhibition at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection challenges that view.

In Search of Norman Rockwell's America juxtaposes a selection of Mr. Rockwell's paintings, drawings and lithographs with 35 black and white photographs by award-winning photojournalist Kevin Rivoli.

Mr. Rockwell, who died in 1978, is renowned for creating works that capture ordinary moments and celebrate regular folks enjoying life's simple pleasures.

Mischievous children, patriotic young men, dutiful boy scouts and working-class heroes figure prominently in his paintings and illustrations.

Many people first encountered his pieces on the covers of The Saturday Evening Post. His work still has mass appeal today and can be found displayed in households, offices and restaurants across North America.

Mr. Rivoli has long been a fan of Mr. Rockwell's work and wanted to refute claims that the images of American life he depicted were fabricated, in part, by showing they can still be found today, said Anna Stanisz, McMichael's assistant curator of programs and education.

An accomplished photographer, Mr. Rivoli and his wife, Michele, combed through a collection of moments — many of them spontaneous — he's captured on film over the course of more than two decades. They discovered striking similarities between some of his photographs and Mr. Rockwell's body of work.

They decided to pair a selection of his pieces with Mr. Rivoli's photographs for the book, In Search of Norman Rockwell's America, and a travelling exhibition of the same name in an attempt to prove he was depicting a way of life that did, and still does, exist.

Ms Stanisz said the show invites viewers to ask whether Mr. Rockwell's images have helped shape the way Americans and Canadians see the world around them. As with the Marilyn Monroe exhibit underway at the McMichael, it also explores the influence of American popular culture in Canada.



A bygone era. Norman Rockwell, Home from Camp, 1968.

“It will be interesting to see people’s response to that,” she said.

When viewed alongside the gallery’s George McLean exhibit, it also further examines the relationship between commercial art and fine art, she added.

In Search of Norman Rockwell’s America runs from March 12 through April 25 at the gallery, which is located at 10365 Islington Ave. in Kleinburg.

Fans of the McMichael who want to show their support by opening their wallets to enjoy fine art paired with fine food can do so later this month.

The gallery is teaming up with Toronto’s Columbus Centre for a special fundraiser, dubbed Inspired by Canada, featuring a collection of Group of Seven works and pieces by artists of Italian heritage influenced by the iconic Canadian painters.

“This spectacular event will showcase some of this country’s best artists who have channeled the spirit of the great outdoors through their beautifully painted masterpieces,” said Active Green + Ross founder Ralph Chiodo, who is helping lead the event along with Multimedia Nova Corporation president and CEO Lori Abittan and McMichael board of trustees vice-chair Patrick Gossage.

The one-night event will showcase a selection of paintings by the Group of Seven from the McMichael’s collection alongside pieces by contemporary Italian-Canadian artists including Tony Bianco, Salvatore Gallo, Sam Paonessa, Giuseppe Pivetta, Joseph Catalano, Germinio Politi, Tom Thomson’s great-grandniece Tracy Thomson Colero and the late Albert Chiarandini, who painted with Group of Seven members.

In addition to the art, Ristorante Boccaccio will be serving up epicurean delights. There will also be a fine scotch and grappa bar and a gourmet cheese station.

The fundraiser takes place Tuesday, March 29, starting at 6:30 p.m., in the Joseph D. Carrier Art Gallery at the Columbus Centre, 901 Lawrence Avenue West in Toronto.

Honorary patrons include Vaughan Mayor Maurizio Bevilacqua, MP Julian Fantino, Toronto Mayor Rob Ford, Senator Con Di Nino and retired Supreme Court Justice Frank Iacobucci.

“This year’s reception, in support of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection and the Joseph D. Carrier Art Gallery/Columbus Centre, will give back to two worthy causes ... in a big way,” Mr. Chiodo said. “The who’s who from our community is helping raise awareness and funds in support of Canadian art.”

Tickets, which are available for \$185 each or as a patron’s package of ten tickets for \$1,850, can be purchased by contacting the McMichael gallery at 905-893-1121 ext. 2207 or mschmidt@mcmichael.com.

For more information visit www.mcmichael.com