
The Life of Norman Rockwell, an American Painter and Illustrator, and His Work The Problem We All Live With

Norman Perceval Rockwell, born in New York City 1894, has always been fascinated with art although it was disliked by his mother. His family included his mother, father, brother named Jarvis, and of course himself. Growing up, Rockwell was a pale skinny child with thick glasses. He envied Jarvis and the other boys because of their physical grace and was determined to do something with his scrawny body. After a month of exercising with no results, Rockwell decided to focus on his talent; art.

He started painting in 1912 at just 18-years-old and retired in 1976, two years before he died in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. The artist completed roughly 4,000 drawings and paintings and over 520 magazine covers. At age fourteen, he enrolled at the New York School for art and later quit high school after his sophomore year, when he was only fifteen-years-old. Then on the next year he earned commission for four Christmas card paintings. He moved to Rachele, Massachusetts in 1916 and managed to sell his first Saturday Evening Post cover called Boy with Baby Carriage. During the years of WWI, his enlistment was refused since he was a skinny kid who was 81 pounds underweight. However, Rockwell was later employed as a military artist. Later in his life, he called his lack of education "a badge of honor" because he had accomplished so much without it.

Painting to please his audience, Norman Rockwell likes to put happiness in his work along with a bit of humor. His creations are realistic and almost photographic and consist in themes of patriotism, holidays, diligence, family, courtship and etc. He says he painted "life as I would like it be". The artist is very interested in people and always uses models for his work. In his pictures, he showed the distinctive ways people looked, acted and dressed. At that time, he thought that using photographs was plagiarism but later changed his mind when he noticed all of his paintings were done from the same angle. Even though he used a lot of charcoal and pencil, I think that the main media he used was oil on canvas.

By 1923, Norman Rockwell became one of the worlds most popular cover artist in the US. Evening Post Magazine was his showcase for over 40 years and that gave him the widest audience in the history of art. During WWII, a few of his best creations, the Four Freedoms, helped sell more than 132 million dollars in war bonds. These paintings include: Freedom of Worship, Freedom of Speech, Freedom from Fear, and Freedom from Want. Besides Rockwell, there were other popular artists as well. To name a few, there were Frank Leyendecker, Howard Chandler Christy, and Joseph Christian Leyendecker. Unfortunately, in 1943, a fire destroyed his Arlington studio as well as numerous paintings and collection of historical costumes and props. Nevertheless, the disaster never slowed him down.

In 1977, President Ford awarded Norman Rockwell with a Presidential Medal of Freedom and even to this day, his paintings are still greatly admired. They are shown in galleries such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, Corcoran Gallery and the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. His work is also admired in many other ways. Rockwell's clients include: Coca-Cola, Hallmark, Ford, boy-scouts, Maxwell house coffee and many others. Jim Dine, Joe Zucker, Eileen Agar are the few artists that are using a similar style

of his today.

I haven't known who Norman Rockwell was until a few weeks ago but I was soon drawn into his art. Although I have not seen very many of his creations, my favorite piece is *The Problem We All Live With*, painted in 1964. My English teacher showed this picture to the class last year but I didn't really pay attention towards it until now. I think it is very clever how he put everything together. The scene showed Ruby Bridges, an eight-year-old black girl with pigtails being escorted to a New Orleans school by four federal marshals, two in front and two behind her. He painted Ruby with a white dress and the US marshals in colors similar to the wall so that your eyes would go directly to her. Also, you can only see the marshals' bodies so that the painting focuses on Ruby. The men are protecting her from the shouts and taunts of an unseen angry crowd around the school. In the background, there's a tomato someone has thrown against a wall showing how angry the mob was. On the wall, you can also see huge letters forming the word "nigger" and on the upper left-hand corner, "kkk" which stands for Ku Klux Klan.

I'm not very fond of abstract paintings therefore I really like how Norman Rockwell makes all of his paintings look incredibly realistic. Additionally, the humor he adds to most of his works makes it even more intriguing. I think all the hard work he put into his paintings to accomplish what he has today has inspired many young artists to continue with their dreams. Undoubtedly, he has very much inspired me.