Brooklyn Museum

Teacher Resource Packet

Norman Rockwell: Behind the Camera

November 19, 2010–April 10, 2011

Norman Rockwell: Behind the Camera

About the Artist

Norman Rockwell (American, 1894–1978) is best known for his images of everyday American life. A masterful storyteller, Rockwell painted nuanced scenes of people and events inspired by his small-town New England community. Born in New York City in 1894, he enrolled in art classes at the New York School of Art at the age of fourteen and quickly found success as a commercial illustrator, receiving his first commission before his sixteenth birthday. His illustrations were extremely popular in his lifetime and were seen across America in books, advertisements, calendars, and popular magazines. Late in his career, he turned his attention to contemporary events, creating renowned images of the struggle for civil rights, the War on Poverty, and the exploration of space. His paintings provide a window into twentieth-century American life.

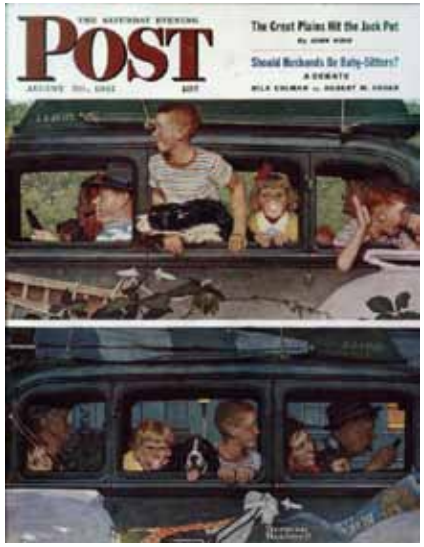
About the Exhibition

In the late 1930s, Rockwell began to employ photography as a tool to bring his illustration ideas to life, creating thousands of photographs that he used as building blocks for his images. *Norman Rockwell: Behind the Camera* explores this artistic process. Photography gave Rockwell the freedom to arrange complicated poses, play with perspective, and observe the nuances of light that quick sketching could not provide. The exhibition displays the artist's photographs alongside his paintings, drawings, and commercial illustrations to shed new light on the working process of one of America's most beloved artists.

About the Artist's Process

Rockwell began his process by sketching highly detailed narratives in charcoal. He brought these sketches to life by carefully assembling each scene in his studio, selecting costumes, props, and background and choosing and coaching his models. "Before a model even attempts to pose for me," he said, "I tell him the story I want my picture to tell because I want him to understand what I am trying to do, what I am trying to convey. Then I get into the pose myself and show him how I think it should be done."

Once his study photographs were developed, Rockwell created a composite image using elements from different photographs to create a whole. He rarely painted from his imagination, choosing to work directly from the photographs. He preferred black-and-white film because it gave him complete color choice in the painting process. Before settling on a final composition, he would create multiple color studies.



Description of *Going and Coming*

Going and Coming is composed of two horizontal registers that together create a narrative. The upper image depicts a family embarking on a trip in a station wagon with looks of excited anticipation. The bright colors and light in the painting indicate that it is daytime. The lower image includes all of the same characters, but the change in light indicates that it is night, the car faces in the opposite direction, suggesting that the family is returning from their adventure, and everyone, including the dog, looks tired.

About *Going and Coming*

Going and Coming is one of 321 cover illustrations that Rockwell created for *The Saturday Evening Post* over more than four decades. Like many of his illustrations, it combines traditional aspects of American life (in this case, a family outing) with evidence of change (here, a station wagon). Rockwell photographed several automobiles for *Going and Coming* but was most interested in the station wagon driven by his neighborhood postman. One day, when the postman was making his rounds in the car, Rockwell asked him to fetch something from his house. When the man returned, he found his station wagon missing. Rockwell had borrowed it to be photographed.

Looking at the photograph of the car, notice how Rockwell chose to structure his composition by zooming in on the three windows.

For the final image, Rockwell worked from two photographs of each of his models except the grandmother, for whom he simply reversed the same image. When *Going and Coming* was published, he received mixed reactions to the little girl blowing a bubble. Although some people regarded it as vulgar, one bubble-gum company sent him a crate of gum in appreciation.

Questions for Viewing

What is going on in this image? What do you see that makes you say that?

Rockwell often included a range of facial expressions and poses in the same image. He is known to have coached his models by acting out precisely the poses and facial expressions that he wanted them to emulate. What facial expressions and poses do you notice in the top panel? Act them out. How do you think the members of this family feel about their journey?

Compare these poses and facial expressions with those in the lower panel. How have their faces and poses changed? What does that tell you about how they feel now? Can you find the one person who remains unchanged?

Rockwell provides a lot of clues in these images to suggest what might have taken place between the start and conclusion of the family's adventure. Look closely. Where do you think the family went and what do you think they did? What evidence can you find?

What details did Rockwell include that help bring these images to life? Look for evidence of the season, time of day, weather, and setting.

Rockwell loved to make his viewers laugh. What evidence of humor can you find in this image?

Compare and contrast the final image with the preparatory photograph. How did the artist use the photograph to construct the image? What did the artist add or leave out?

Activities

Play "Guess Who"

Find a partner. Choose one of the characters in this image, but don't tell your partner which one. Imitate the pose and facial expression of your character and invite your partner to guess who you are. Switch roles and guess which character your partner is imitating. Rockwell often asked his models to hold their poses for several minutes. How long can you freeze in position? Now imagine what your character would say if he or she could talk.

Be an Illustrator or a Writer

Using your imagination as well as clues from the image, write a story or draw a picture of what you imagine happened to the family between going and coming.

Paint a Sequential Narrative

Think about a trip that you took with your family. Who came with you? How did you travel? Where did you go? What did you take with you? How did you feel on your way there? On the way back? Paint two images, a "before" and an "after." What clues did you include to indicate where you went? What changes did you make to share the difference in time of day, weather, and setting?

Create a Tableau Vivant

Working in small groups, choose a painting to bring to life. Create a tableau vivant (a silent, motionless representation of a scene by a person or group) of the painting. Use the image as a guide to replicate its composition. Pay close attention to pose, facial expression, and, if possible, props and costumes. Now create a second tableau to capture what might happen next. Perform your two tableaux for others. Take a photograph of each tableau. How do they compare to the original painting?

Description of *The Problem We All Live With*

The main character in this image is a young African American girl dressed all in white, clutching school supplies, and walking past a wall defaced by the initials "KKK," the epithet "nigger," and the juice of a just thrown tomato. She is surrounded by four men in business suits identified by their armbands as deputy U.S. Marshals. Their heads are not visible because the painting is cropped at shoulder height.

About *The Problem We All Live With*

This image was Norman Rockwell's first illustration for *Look* magazine, in which it appeared as a two-page, interior spread with no accompanying text. It was a radical departure from his previous illustrations for *The Saturday Evening Post*, where policy dictated that African Americans could only be shown in service jobs, and represented a shift in his work from idealized images of American life to more socially engaged subjects.

The Problem We All Live With was inspired by the story of Ruby Bridges, who in 1960 became the first African American child to attend an all-white elementary school in New Orleans. The public, accustomed to seeing Rockwell's work for the *Post*, reacted strongly to the image. *Look* received letters both from readers who were deeply moved by the image and from those who were infuriated by it.

Although documentary photographs of Bridges integrating the New Orleans school exist, Rockwell chose to interpret the event using models in his studio. He used three models for the girl, creating a composite figure. The preparatory photographs for the illustration include images of men's feet and hands, graffiti, and a smashed tomato.

Questions for Viewing

Where is your eye drawn to in this image? How has Rockwell used color to draw the viewer's attention to different areas of the image?

This image was inspired by the story of Ruby Bridges, the first African American child to attend an all-white elementary school in New Orleans. What details did the artist include to give the viewer context for this image?

Look closely at the young girl's facial expression. How do you think she is feeling? How do you think the U.S. Marshals (federal law enforcement officers) feel? What evidence can you find to support your answer?

Why do you think Rockwell chose to crop the four U.S. Marshals at shoulder height?

Where does Rockwell position the viewer in this image? Why do you think he made this choice?

How do you think the artist intended the viewers to feel when looking at this image? What do you see that makes you say that?

This image is titled *The Problem We All Live With*. Why do you think Rockwell chose this title?

Activities

Through Ruby's Eyes

Ruby Bridges was six years old when the scene depicted in *The Problem We All Live With* took place. As an adult, Bridges shared her story in her autobiography, *Through Ruby's Eyes*. Read the excerpt from her book (available at *www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/history/spotlight_september.html*) that focuses on her first day of school. Was her experience similar to or different from the scene depicted in Rockwell's painting? Imagine what the same scene looked like through Ruby's eyes. If you were to create a painting from Ruby's perspective, what details would you include? How would you communicate her point of view?

Illustrate a Magazine Cover

Rockwell's illustration *The Problem We All Live With* challenged perspectives on school desegregation. Choose an issue or recent event that is important to you. How can you design an image that will have the power to make people stop and think? Create a quick sketch. Now, be a director. Think of what setting, props, and costumes you will need. Use people in your community as your models. Coach them into the poses and facial expressions you want to include. Take photographs and use them to create a photomontage (an image made from bits of different preexisting photographs that are cut out, arranged, and pasted down to form a composition). Try out different arrangements before settling on a composition. Create your final image by drawing or painting, using your photomontage as a source. As a class, compile your illustrations to create a magazine. Vote on a title and cover for your magazine. Make copies of your magazine and distribute it. Note: This activity may be completed either individually or by a group (with each member contributing a different component).

Resources

Bridges, Ruby. *Through My Eyes*. New York: Scholastic Press, 1999.
Ruby Bridges' memoir, written from the perspective of herself as a six-year-old. Appropriate for readers nine to twelve years old.

Buechner, Thomas *S. Norman Rockwell, Artist and Illustrator*. New York: Abrams, 1970.
A study of the artist and illustrator written by the former director of the Brooklyn Museum. Includes reproductions of six hundred of Rockwell's best illustrations, providing a panorama of nearly sixty years of American social history.

Coles, Robert. *The Story of Ruby Bridges*. New York: Scholastic Press, 1995.
This book tells the story of Ruby Bridges' first year of school through words and watercolor illustrations. Appropriate for ages four to eight.

Rockwell, Norman. *My Adventures as an Illustrator: An Autobiography*. Indianapolis: Curtis, 1979.
Rockwell describes his early struggles to become an artist and his career as a popular illustrator of magazines and advertisements. As told to Tom Rockwell, the artist's son.

Schick, Ron. *Norman Rockwell: Behind the Camera*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009.
The companion book to the exhibition.

www.nrm.org/
Norman Rockwell Museum website. Includes images, information, teacher resources, and a family guide.

www.rubybridges.com/home.htm
The official website of Ruby Bridges. Includes information on the Ruby Bridges Foundation, which she formed in 1999 to promote "the values of tolerance, respect, and appreciation of all differences."

www.npr.org/blogs/pictureshow/2009/11/rockwell.html
This website highlights an episode of National Public Radio's *The Picture Show* focusing on the exhibition *Norman Rockwell: Behind the Camera*. Includes photo gallery and interactives such as Weekend Edition Sunday story by NPR's Jacki Lyden.

www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/history/spotlight_september.html
African American World: The PBS Guide to African American History and Culture.
Includes excerpts from Ruby Bridges' autobiography.

www.adl.org/education/brown_2004/default.asp
The Anti-Defamation League's lessons for teaching about Brown vs. Board of Education.

This resource was written by Senior Museum Educator Nicola Giardina, with assistance from Alexa Fairchild, School Programs Manager; and Sharon Matt Atkins, Managing Curator of Exhibitions.

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Page 1 (detail); pages 4 and 9 (overall): Norman Rockwell (American, 1894–1978). *The Problem We All Live With*, 1964. Tear sheet, *Look*, January 14, 1964. 13¼ x 20¾ in. (33.7 x 52.7 cm). Norman Rockwell Museum Archival Collections. Norman Rockwell Licensing, Niles, Ill.

Page 2: Gene Pelham (American, 1909–2004). Photograph for *The Bartender's Birthday* (detail), 1941. Study for *American Magazine*, February 1941. 12 x 13⅜ in. (30.5 x 34.5 cm). Norman Rockwell Museum Archival Collections. Norman Rockwell Licensing, Niles, Ill.

Pages 3 and 7: Norman Rockwell (American, 1894–1978). *Going and Coming*, 1947. Tear sheet, *The Saturday Evening Post*, August 30, 1947. 13¾ x 10⅞ in. (34.5 x 27.0 cm). Norman Rockwell Museum Archival Collections. ©1947SEPS: Curtis Publishing, Indianapolis

Pages 3 and 8: Gene Pelham (American, 1909–2004). Photograph for *Going and Coming*, 1947. Study for *The Saturday Evening Post*, August 30, 1947. 11⅝ x 15⅝ in. (28.6 x 39.7 cm). Norman Rockwell Museum Archival Collections. Norman Rockwell Licensing, Niles, Ill.

Pages 4 and 10: Norman Rockwell (American, 1894–1978). Photograph for *The Problem We All Live With*, 1964. Study for *Look*, January 14, 1964. 12 x 6⅝ in. (30.5 x 16.8 cm). Norman Rockwell Museum Archival Collections. Norman Rockwell Licensing, Niles, Ill.

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THE SATURDAY EVENING
POST
AUGUST 30, 1947 10¢

The Great Plains Hit the Jack Pot
By JOHN BIRD

Should Husbands Be Baby-Sitters?
A DEBATE
HILA COLMAN vs. ROBERT M. YODER

DEPUTY U.S. MARSHAL
DEPUTY U.S. MARSHAL
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