

# Sumter County Gallery of Art in Sumter, SC, Offers Major Norman Rockwell Exhibition



Norman Rockwell, "The Problem We All Live With" 1964, Norman Rockwell Museum Collection

The Sumter County Gallery of Art in Sumter, SC, will present *Norman Rockwell: American Chronicles*, organized by the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, MA, on view from Sept. 3 through Dec. 3, 2021. An opening reception will be held on Sept. 3, from 5:30-7:30pm. Masks are required for those who have not been vaccinated, and strongly recommended for those who have been.

The exhibition will include fifteen original paintings and 19 prints, magazine tearsheets, and posters. Norman Rockwell was the quintessential American artist - his themes reflecting American life in the decades of the 30s through the 60s. Even people who don't know a lot about art recognize the work of Norman Rockwell. From WWII War Bond Posters to his idyllic Saturday Evening Post covers to capturing the Civil Rights era - all will be included in the Sumter exhibition. This is the most exciting, ambitious exhibition SCGA has presented in its 50-year history.

Karen Watson, Director of the Gallery observed that Sumter has strong professional and personal connections to the art of Norman Rockwell and the exhibition was designed with this in mind. "The professional connection comes by way of Shaw AFB, a major Air Force and Army installation. The base is an important part of our community, economically and psychologically. Fort Jackson in Columbia is the main Army Combat Training Center in the United States. Sumter is a patriotic city which is reflected in our motto - Uncommon Patriotism - and the perfect place to present the patriotic art of Norman Rockwell."



Norman Rockwell, "Girl at Mirror", 1954, © 1954 SEPS: Curtis Licensing, Indianapolis, IN, All rights reserved

"The personal connection to Sumter is James T. McCain Jr., Chairman of Sumter County Council. He is the son of notable Civil Rights activist and educator James T. "Nooker" McCain, Sr. One of the paintings coming is *Southern Justice, Murder in Mississippi* depicting the murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner in Mississippi while the three were there working to register voters in the summer of 1964. Jim recounted that his father, working in Mississippi as the Field Secretary for CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) at the time of the murders was supposed to be with Chaney, Good-

man and Schwerner on that fateful night. Jim remembers his father telling him it was the saddest day of his life. Murder in Mississippi was not originally on the checklist but after Stephanie Plunkett, Deputy Director and Chief Curator of the Norman Rockwell Museum heard the story of the connection that Jim McCain had to this historic moment, she added it."

*Norman Rockwell: American Chronicles* includes Rockwell's *The Four Freedoms* war bond posters which were inspired by Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech. In January 1941, on the eve of the United States entering WWII, Roosevelt urged Congress to fund the production of more armaments citing four essential human freedoms: the first was freedom of speech, the second was the freedom for every person to worship God in their own way, the third was freedom from want and the fourth was freedom from fear. Rockwell was eager to lend his talents to the cause, and to help people envision the meaning of the Four Freedoms ideals. He also wanted to use his artistic talents to support the war effort, as evidenced in *Let's Give Him Enough and On Time*, Rockwell's 1941 United States Army poster, which portrays a soldier in combat, firing a heavy machine gun. Posters with this image, which is included in the Sumter exhibition, were distributed to munitions factories throughout the country to encourage production. In 1942, with the blessing of his *Saturday Evening Post* editor, Rockwell began work on the *Four Freedoms* series, which he completed in 1943. The *Four Freedoms* comprise some of his most iconic and stirring images.

*Norman Rockwell: American Chronicles* includes three powerful Rockwell works that address the subject of civil rights in our nation. The iconic, *The Problem We All Live With*, painted in 1964, portrays a small but determined six-year-old African American girl being escorted into her New Orleans elementary school by Federal agents, an image that was inspired by Ruby Bridges's school integration story. The original painting, *Southern Justice, Murder in Mississippi*, will also be on view along with Rockwell's reference photographs and other materials related to this 1965 work. *New Kids in the Neighborhood*, published by *Look* in 1967 to highlight the subject of suburban integration, portrays a family of white children and a family of Black children - and their pets - sizing each other up against the backdrop of a moving van on a neighborhood street.

In addition to Rockwell's patriotic and civil rights paintings, the exhibition will also include many well-known paintings in Rockwell's familiar nostalgic style dating from 1919 (*The Fishing Trip, The Catch*), the 1920s and 30s (*A Scout is Helpful, Good Friends*) and the 1940s and 50s (*Girl at Mirror, The Runaway*) that portray the joy, challenges and tribulations of childhood, young adulthood and parenthood.

Watson notes that Norman Rockwell:  
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"*American Chronicles* at the Sumter County Gallery of Art is a labor of love - the culmination of almost 3 years of planning and a testament to our close relationship with the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, MA, which began in 2015 when our then curator wrote a successful proposal to the Rockwell Museum for a loan of the painting *The Rookie* (a young football player in gear) to include in the group exhibition *Serious Fun*. Sumterites who saw the exhibition were in awe of an original Norman Rockwell painting in our space. Martin Mahoney, Director of Collections and Operations, accompanied the painting to supervise the unpacking and installation. Mahoney was impressed with our gallery space and our professionalism, and the seed for this exhibition was planted, and flourished.

Several related events are planned during the 3-month run of the exhibition. On Thursday, Oct. 1, The Queen City Jazz Quartet featuring Nicci Canada will bring their Big Band and Bebop sound of Rockwell's America to the Gallery. On Thursday, Oct. 21, Jim McCain will be in conversation with Dr. Bobby Donaldson, professor of History at USC in Columbia and Director of the Center for Civil Rights History and Research, and Dr. Cleveland Sellars who worked closely with James McCain Sr. A Shaw/Military night is also planned.

*Norman Rockwell: American Chronicles* is a gift to Sumter and to South Carolina, a historic event. The Sumter County Gallery of Art could not have made this a reality without the support of so many organizations, businesses, industry and individuals. Many thanks to our Presenting Sponsor, Sumter Community Foundation, a subsidiary of Central Carolina



Norman Rockwell, "The Runaway", Cover illustration for *The Saturday Evening Post*, September 20, 1958 © 1958 SEPS: Curtis Licensing, Indianapolis, IN, All rights reserved

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For further information check our SC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Gallery at 803/775-0543 or visit (<http://www.sumtergallery.com>).

So you're the Marketing Director of a visual arts organization, art museum, arts center, arts council or artist guild and you're wondering why you never see the exhibits presented at your facility included here. Maybe you're the owner of a commercial art gallery and you've never seen your exhibits included with others presented in your area. You might even be an individual artist who is having an exhibit in a non-profit space or commercial space and you don't see your exhibits included.

My question to you is - How long will you put up with that before you ask someone, "Why that is the case?" If you're not included - it's your fault.