

# Norman Rockwell

1894-1978

## He's Going To Be Taller Than Dad

I chose this piece for strictly selfish reasons, primarily because of my lifelong love for Norman Rockwell's work and second, because The Upjohn Company, ( now Pfizer) who commissioned this work, has a long history in my family. My dad retired from Upjohn and many family members worked there. Growing up, I idolized three men, Walt Disney, Charles Schultz and Norman Rockwell so I happy to be reminded that the KIA had this piece in their collection. I like the fact that it ties together the names of people who are synonymous with Kalamazoo, Jim Gilmore, who was the Upjohn executive who was responsible for commissioning Rockwell and many other American artists, as part of a series called 'You Doctor Speaks.'

He was best known for his Saturday Evening Post covers, beginning with the first one he sold at the age of 21 and the 316 that were to follow in the decades after.

Apart from my sentimental attachment to Rockwell's work, this isn't a piece that invites great contemplation from the viewer. It's simplicity, wholesomeness and charm is it's greatest asset, although throughout his long career Rockwell did tackle much deeper subject matter, two world wars, segregation and even murder.

In this sketch, as in all of Rockwell's work, there is a story that invites you in, maybe just for a minute, to live in the picture. Here, a little boy is trying to measure his own growth on his bedroom wall, surrounded by his books, toys and the family dog. Do you have memories of that doing that very thing as a child, how it made you feel when you could see a noticeable difference from the last mark made on the door jamb? Do you

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feel a connection to the little boy? Perhaps he resembles someone in your own life? Whatever connections can you make with this piece?

Rockwell produced a huge body of work over a career that spanned over sixty years, and like the people he painted, he had an extremely strong work ethic, painting in his studio seven days a work for ten hour stretches at a time. His association with the Post lasted forty-seven years and hundreds of cover illustrations. At times he found it challenging to find fresh subject matter on such strict deadlines and one of my favorites is a self-portrait he painted of himself seating in front of a large and intimidated blank canvas, brush in hand.

Norman Rockwell was a great observer of everyday life and his subject matter was the ordinary, hard-working people he saw around him. When asked, he commented that he viewed the world as he would like it to be, painting a state of mind, a place that was full of hope. He had many critics who refused to classify his work as having any real artistic substance, nothing but sentimental dribble. Despite his critics, he remains an beloved icon of American art history.

This charcoal sketch became a part of Mr. Gilmore's personal collection and was eventually gifted to the KIA. The finished painting is now in the collection of Pfizer.

What kind of feelings do you have when you study this little charcoal sketch? Why do you think you feel this way? Do you think art should make you feel good?

Have you ever come away from a movie theatre feeling really upbeat and good with the world? We sometimes call these 'feel good' movies because that describes exactly how we feel afterward. If you're of a particular age, you have grown up with the Rockwell's work and are perhaps familiar with it. What do you think was the artist's intent with this piece? Even with just a few pencil drawn lines, what does the story say to you?

*Karen Osborne 6/2012*