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## Ringling rediscovers Rockwell's America through exhibit

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Norman Rockwell.

His name instantly conjures up images of nostalgia, of fathers fishing with their sons, of white-haired couples embracing, of Americans saluting the flag.

Of simpler, more innocent times.

But those moments still exist today, through the camera lens of award-winning photojournalist Kevin Rivoli. See 35 of his candid, black-and-white Rockwellesque photos alongside Rockwell's iconic illustrations in the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art's latest exhibition, "In Search of Norman Rockwell's America."

Rivoli's photos show a slice of everyday American life featured in the same spirit of community, love, family, patriotism and faith that made Rockwell famous.

"Rockwell's images are really positive," Maureen Zaremba, curator of education at Ringling, said. "They remind us a lot of the really good things about life in general, about being Americans."

Rockwell's artistic career took off in 1916, when at the age of 22 the artist painted his first cover for The Saturday Evening Post. It was the magazine that he would become synonymous with. According to the Norman Rockwell Museum's Web site, Rockwell created 321 covers for the Post in 47 years. Those covers feature 1954's "Girl in a Mirror," 1957's "After the Prom" and 1960's "Triple Self-Portrait."

As Rockwell matured as an artist, he also painted less glamorous portraits of American life, focusing on such issues as injustice, war and racism. One of those more familiar works include 1963's "The Problem We All Live With," which pictured Ruby Bridges being escorted to school by federal marshals. Bridges was one of the first black students to participate in the wave of integration of white elementary schools in the South during the civil rights movement.

After decades of colorful, emotion-filled illustrations that captured a nation, Rockwell died in 1978.

In the late 1980s, Rivoli came on the scene as a photojournalist, clicking images of both the happy and tragic sides of everyday life. People called many of his photos "Rockwell moments," he stated on his Web site.

"Always a fan of Rockwell's, I took that as a great compliment," Rivoli writes. "It wasn't until I visited the Norman Rockwell Museum in the early 1990s that I learned there were some who were critical of Rockwell's work. At the same time I realized I had a body of work that disproved critics' claims that Rockwell created moments that had not existed."

The exhibit celebrates those familiar, ordinary moments.

"We all experience them," Zaremba said. "He's captured snapshots that resonate with the same ideas, same moments, same emotions in Rockwell's work. If we all look through our snapshots, we find those experiences."

In fact, as part of an educational outreach paired with "In Search of Rockwell's America," the Ringling Museum is inviting the public to share its slice of life snapshots. Snapshots chosen will be exhibited in a gallery and featured on a Flickr page set up by the museum.

"We thought it would be a really nice way for people to share their Rockwell moments," Zaremba said.

With many Americans suffering through hard times, the exhibit will be a welcome experience, Zaremba added. It will give families the opportunity to discuss how some aspects of life have stayed the same since Rockwell's time while others have changed.

"We have a scary economy and wars on two fronts," she said. "I think there are some defining moments in our life as a country. This (exhibit) is also life-affirming and reassuring that we've been through tough times before and

we've come out on the other side."

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