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Illustrating the American experience

Museum sends book of Rockwell works to 150 heads of state around the world

By Joe Baker
Staff writer

NEWPORT — In an act of diplomacy that they hope will foster better understanding of America and its people, the operators of the National Museum of American Illustration have sent copies of a book cataloging many of Norman Rockwell's works to 150 international heads of state.

Laurence and Judy Cutler prepared the 255-page catalog to dovetail with their 2012 American Illustration exhibition at the Birmingham Museum of Art in Birmingham, Ala. That show followed one at London's Dulwich Picture Gallery in 2011 that received positive reviews. Laurence Cutler said Tuesday during an interview at the Bellevue Avenue museum, surrounded by original Rockwell paintings.

Those positive foreign reviews of Rockwell's work, which frequently offers an idealized look at American culture, prompted the Cutlers to analyze its impact. What they decided, they said, was that Rockwell depicted not just the American experience, but the human experience. Exposing other cultures to the body of Rockwell's work could open their eyes to a side of America that they might not see often, Laurence Cutler said.

"There's so much terrible stuff in the world now," he said. "We thought what we should do is gift the book to heads of states. It just might change the way they look at our country."

As part of this year's celebration of the museum's 15th year of operation, the Cutlers contacted the office of Samantha Power, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, to get feedback on their idea of sending copies of "Norman Rockwell's America" to foreign leaders. After some discussion with officials from Power's office, they developed a list of about 150 nations that would receive smartly presented copies of the book, each accompanied by individually personalized letters to both the nation's U.N. ambassador and its head of state.

"On behalf of the National Museum of American Illustration we are pleased to present this book entitled 'Norman Rockwell's America,' as a gift to you and to the people of your country," reads the letter to Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. "An



Dave Hansen | Staff photographer

Laurence and Judy Cutler of the National Museum of American Illustration in Newport discuss their donation of books cataloging many of Norman Rockwell's works to 150 foreign heads of state and ambassadors. The project was organized as part of the museum's 15th anniversary celebration. Below is the cover of the book.

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LAURENCE CUTLER

of the National Museum of American Illustration in Newport

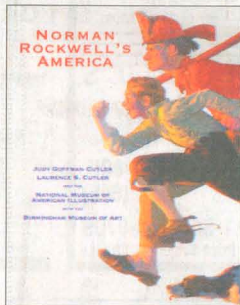
unprecedented gift, it is meant to permit world leaders such as yourself to glimpse at American lifestyles through images created by Norman Rockwell. The hope is this book will create in you a better future understanding of the American people and our government, and that it will encourage greater harmony in a world increasingly beset by war, disease, crime and misunderstandings."

"This was a way to get American art in the direct hands of heads of states," said Jim Rugh, director of special projects for the illustration museum.

"This went to presidents, prime ministers, sultans and kings," Judy Cutler said.

The books were sent to the respective U.N. ambassadors on May 15.

ILLUSTRATING A7





This image by Norman Rockwell was included with books donated by the National Museum of American Illustration to heads of state from around the world.

Illustrating

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Although it's been less than three weeks, responses already are beginning to arrive, the Cutlers said. Replies have come in from Monaco, the Dominican Republic, Thailand and Bahrain.

"With reference to your letter dated 15 May 2015 enclosing a gift for His Excellency General Prayut Chan-o-cha (Ret.) Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, I am pleased to inform you that the said gift has been transmitted to its high destination," wrote Thailand's U.N. Ambassador Virachai Plasai. "I avail myself of this opportunity to express to you my sincere appreciation for the kind invitation to visit the National Museum of American Illustration in Newport, Rhode Island, as your guest and look forward to having an opportunity to visit the museum during my tenure."

A highlight of the museum's 15th anniversary gala on July 30 will be an auction that will include a valuable Rockwell painting of the late President John F. Kennedy, the Cutlers said. The



Dave Hansen | Staff photographer

National Museum of American Illustration Founder and Chairman Laurence Cutler reads one of the letters he has received from world leaders in response to his gift of a book of American illustration.

painting appeared on the April 6, 1963, cover of the Saturday Evening Post, for which Rockwell created 323 cover images. It shows a pen-sive and concerned Kennedy, hand on chin, with his brow deeply furrowed. The text on

the cover declares: "A Worried President: The Crisis in his Foreign Policy."

The auction also will include artworks by American illustrators Maxfield Parrish and Howard Chandler Christy.

That same night, the

museum will award three "American Civilization Awards" to NBC Today host Matt Lauer, actress and author Evangeline Lilly and editorial cartoonist Paul Szep.

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