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# 'Icons of Americana' Rockwell and Wyeth are featured at the Polk Museum of Art

WUSF | By **Cathy Carter**

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*National Museum Of American Illustration, Newport, RI, And The American Illustrators Gallery, New York, NY.*

A prolific artist, Norman Rockwell created more than 300 covers for The Saturday Evening Post, in addition to illustrating advertisements and books.

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Norman Rockwell and N.C. Wyeth were two of the biggest names in American art of the 20th century.

Rockwell is synonymous with The Saturday Evening Post.

Wyeth – the father of Andrew Wyeth – was best known as a prolific book illustrator. Generations of readers grew up with stories he illustrated such as "Treasure Island" and "Robin Hood."

Despite their celebrated status today – Rockwell and N.C. Wyeth were not held in as high regard as other fine artists of their time, mainly because of the commercial nature of their work.

But not many have seen the work that preceded each artist's famous images.

Alexander Rich, the Polk Museum's executive director and chief curator, says each artist created large scale paintings first. And those are the centerpieces of this new exhibit.



*National Museum Of American Illustration, Newport, RI, And The American Illustrators Gallery, New York, NY.*

Norman Rockwell, 'The Doughboy and His Admirers,' 1919, Oil on canvas.

"So what people are seeing are these beautiful works of fine art that were made purely to be reproduced and never really to be seen as paintings," he said. "So, I think there's something exciting about taking the familiar and putting it in the space of a museum."

The show features 40 paintings along with the complete set of the 321 covers Rockwell illustrated for The Saturday Evening Post.

It was curated in partnership with the National Museum of Illustration in Newport, Rhode Island, and the American Illustrators Gallery in New York City.

"So many of our shared visions of a seemingly simpler, not-too-distant American past – however idealized they might be – have been shaped through the prism of Rockwell and Wyeth's illustrations," Rich said.



*National Museum Of American Illustration, Newport, RI, And The American Illustrators Gallery, New York, NY*

Book illustrator N.C. Wyeth invigorated the pages of Scribner Classics like “Treasure Island” and “Robin Hood.”

The blockbuster show follows recent exhibitions featuring the works of other big names like Auguste Rodin and Edward Hopper.

“We really have tried to elevate the types of exhibitions we're doing,” said Rich. “A lot of bigger name exhibitions to draw people through the doors then also discover other artwork of other parts of the world, or other lesser-known artists along the way.”

The Polk Museum of Art is undergoing a major expansion and renovation project, which will add more than 14,000 square feet of education and exhibition space.

The expansion is expected to be complete in the fall.

“Rockwell/Wyeth: Icons of Americana” is on view through May 26 at the Polk Museum of Art at Florida Southern College in Lakeland.

As an affiliate of the Smithsonian, admission to the museum is always free.

**Tags**

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### Cathy Carter

As a reporter, my goal is to tell a story that moves you in some way. To me, the best way to do that begins with listening. Talking to people about their lives and the issues they care about is my favorite part of the job.

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