



# Norman Rockwell: The Underside of Innocence

*Richard Halpern*

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Norman Rockwell's scenes of everyday small-town life are among the most indelible images in all of twentieth-century art. While opinions of Rockwell vary from uncritical admiration to sneering contempt, those who love him and those who dismiss him do agree on one thing: his art embodies a distinctively American style of innocence.

In this sure-to-be controversial book, Richard Halpern argues that this sense of innocence arises from our reluctance—and also Rockwell's—to acknowledge the often disturbing dimensions of his works. Rockwell's paintings frequently teem with perverse acts of voyeurism and desire but contrive to keep these acts invisible—or rather, hidden in plain sight, available for unacknowledged pleasure but easily denied by the viewer.

Rockwell emerges in this book, then, as a deviously brilliant artist, a remorseless diagnostician of the innocence in which we bathe ourselves, and a continuing, unexpected influence on contemporary artists. Far from a banal painter of the ordinary, Halpern argues, Rockwell is someone we have not yet dared to see for the complex creature he is: a wholesome pervert, a knowing innocent, and a kitschy genius.

Provocative but judicious, witty but deeply informed, *Norman Rockwell* is a book rich in suggestive propositions and eye-opening details—one that will change forever the way we think about this American icon and his works.

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