

Norman Rockwell favorite sells for \$46 million

by [Maria Puente](#) in the [January 8, 2014](#) issue

Norman Rockwell, long America's favorite mass-market painter, now has auction records to match his popularity. *Saying Grace*, one of his masterpieces, sold for \$46 million at auction on December 4—a price three times higher than his previous record.

Two other iconic paintings by Rockwell, who died in 1978, also sold Wednesday, for a total of nearly \$12 million, according to the Associated Press.

It was *Grace* that drew all eyes at Sotheby's in New York. It is an affecting image of a crowded restaurant with a little boy and a woman bowed in prayer at their table as other diners look on.

It's one of the most memorable paintings by Rockwell, who produced more than 300 for the covers of the old *Saturday Evening Post* across a 40-year span. Published in 1951, the painting was voted a favorite cover by readers in 1955.

The painting had a pre-sale estimate of \$15 million to \$20 million. In 2006, Sotheby's sold Rockwell's *Breaking Home Ties* for more than \$15 million, which was then a record for the artist.

The paintings were sold by descendants of Kenneth J. Stuart Sr., Rockwell's friend and the art director at the *Saturday Evening Post*. For nearly two decades, *Grace* had been on loan at the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where Rockwell spent his last years.

The other paintings sold December 4, *The Gossips* and *Walking to Church*, went for just under \$8.5 million and a little more than \$3.2 million, respectively.

The auction followed by one day the flaring of a controversy over a new biography, *American Mirror: The Life and Art of Norman Rockwell*, by Deborah Solomon. Rockwell's descendants are angry because the author examines whether Rockwell

might have been gay (she says there's no evidence of that) and whether there is homoeroticism in a few of his paintings (she says it's possible to conclude that).

Mostly, though, the book makes a persuasive case for Rockwell's inclusion in the artistic immortality club, reflecting the higher estimation of Rockwell in the art world that has led to these record sales prices—not to mention his popularity with collectors such as Steven Spielberg and George Lucas. —*USA Today*