

Cover: *December Eight, 1941*, 1941, oil on canvas, 50.5" x 77.5", X1978.1.17, Gift of Sally Kent Gorton.
Frontpiece: *Vanity Fair Cover*, 1923, color offset lithograph, 12.75" x 9.75," P52000.141, Bequest of Sally Kent Gorton.

The Collection

The Rockwell Kent Collection is the most complete and balanced collection of Kent's work in the United States. The acceptance of Shirley (Sally) Johnstone (Kent) Gorton's, third wife of Rockwell Kent, initial gift to the college in 1974 began a process which culminated in the official dedication of the Plattsburgh State Art Museum in 1989. An additional gift from the Estate of Sally Kent in 2000 and gifts from other generous donors have become the cornerstone of the growing art collection of Plattsburgh State Art Museum. The collection was originally envisioned by the artist himself and the then President of the College, Dr. George Angell. Other donors to the collection include; Dan Burne Jones, George Spector, Seward W. Pulitzer, Dr. James Chingos and Tom Della Donna.

The Museum owns 34 paintings by Kent done between 1900 and 1965. The paintings as well as a large collection of prints, drawings, dinnerware, books, design art, photographs, bookplates, archives and personal items from his travels and life at Asgaard Farm near Ausable Forks, NY are on permanent display in the Rockwell Kent Gallery. Books, manuscripts, films and ephemera are available in the Feinberg Library Special Collections.

The Collection's prints and drawings span the great expanse of the artist's interests and show the evolution and interrelationship of the ideas in many different media while crossing into the arenas of both commercial and fine art. The drawings include works in pencil, pen, and ink wash. They range from on-the-spot notations to finished works for all the different forms in which he worked. Preliminary and working drawings make it possible for us to witness the often subtle compositional changes made prior to the completion of a print, illustration, painting or decorative object. Others reveal the artist's immediate reaction to visual stimulus and allow us to glimpse the seed from which all great works grow. Examples of this are splendid sets of drawings from initial sketch to final transfer for Wake Up America and Dirty Deborah. The prints and litho stone are also in the collection.

The Kent Legacies generously donated an outstanding collection of first edition books written and/or illustrated by Rockwell Kent. Perhaps the most spectacular first edition is the Lakeside Press three volume Moby Dick which is in mint condition and housed in the original shipping box. At least one copy of all of Kent's major book work is represented in the collection and the ephemera contains a fine cross section of handsome posters, bookplates, logos, letterheads, book announcements, Christmas cards, exhibition catalogs, and American-Soviet friendship material.

The Kent Gallery and the Feinberg Library afford an unusual resource to scholars of twentieth century American Art. The Rockwell Kent Collection portrays Kent's growth as an artist, as well as his varied interests of a humane and political nature.

Text by: Brohel, Edward. "Rockwell Kent: the man ... the artist."
Exhibition poster, SUNY Plattsburgh, Plattsburgh NY, 1987.

Rockwell Kent

*Art from the Permanent Collection of the
Plattsburgh State Art Museum
Text by Frederick Lewis*

Plattsburgh State Art Museum - SUNY Plattsburgh - Plattsburgh, NY



The Kent Legacy



Rockwell Kent at home, c.1970, photograph.

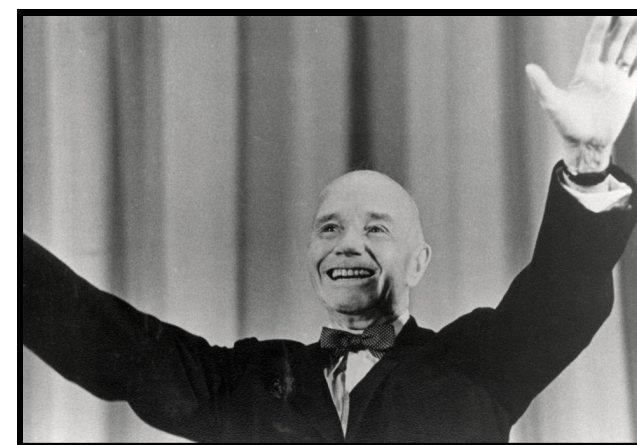
In his last years, Kent found fewer and fewer reasons to leave Asgaard, his “most real and sacred place.” But he did make several trips to the Soviet Union, the last in 1967 to receive the International Lenin Prize for Strengthening Peace Among Peoples. Granted one last appearance on the international stage, Kent, at age 85, condemned the United States’ intervention in Vietnam, calling it “the most shameful thing that has happened in our country’s history.”

On a March evening in 1971, three months before his 89th birthday, Kent was sitting in his favorite chair by the fire. “I am very tired,” he told Sally. He leaned forward, trying to pluck petals from the woven floral patterned rug at his feet, and then fell back.

Kent’s lengthy obituary appeared on the front page of the *New York Times*. It catalogued his accomplishments but did not capture his true spirit. In an earlier radio interview, Kent had provided the key in far fewer words:

“I look back on my life as from a mountaintop that I had reached walking through snow. And I might think that I had covered all of that area below me I’d see my little wandering trail coming across and all the rest is unknown. I know very little. I’ve gotten all that I could get out of life. All I want? No, I want it all. Don’t you?”

Rockwell Kent is buried at his beloved Asgaard. His resting place is marked by a block of Vermont granite that bears the title of his first autobiography, *This Is My Own*, which was in turn taken from *Native Land*, a poem by Sir Walter Scott.



Award ceremony, Lenin Peace Prize, Moscow, 1967, RK Photo 343.

Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!
Whose heart hath ne’er within him burn’d
As home his footsteps be hath turn’d
From wandering on a foreign strand!

Of Men and Mountains

In 1947 Kent’s mother died at the age of 91, leaving each of her children \$30,000. Kent invested most of his inheritance in hopes of building a hedge against his plummeting income.

With the rest, the artist returned with his wife, Sally, to Monhegan Island, Maine, the scene of his earliest triumphs and transgressions.

He reacquired the little cottage he had built back in 1907. By visiting in the fall and early spring, when the tourists were gone, Monhegan seemed little changed.

“My body has grown old. I walk now where I used to run; step carefully where once I’d leap. But still, my eyes are good. And seeing, must I not respond to nature’s beauty? I began to paint again, with undiminished love for the familiar scenes.”



Kent playing his father’s flute, which he carried on all his travels, Asgaard, c. 1950, RK Photo 228.

But fallout from Kent’s clash with U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy was immediate. Kent’s politics were never a secret to the islanders, but now the symptoms were instantly apparent avoidance on the footpaths, hurried departures from the general store whenever the Kents came in. Unable to find sanctuary even on Monhegan, Kent and Sally soon left, never to return.



The Adirondack Mountains that cradle Asgaard still inspired the aging artist, but his paintings were accumulating in his studio, most unseen by anyone except Sally.

In 1960 Kent arranged to give eighty canvases and eight hundred drawings and prints, work that covered every phase of his career, to the Soviet Union, “the one people in the world who have demonstrated their high regard for what I do.”

Kent gave Asgaard Dairy to two loyal farmhands (left) after Kent’s political views created a regional boycott, 1948, RK Photo 3594.

Contents

8	Rockwell Kent
10	New Hampshire
11	Monhegan Island
13	Newfoundland
16	Alaska
17	Hogarth, Jr.
20	Vermont
21	Tierra del Fuego
22	Ireland
25	Au Sable Farm
32	Book Illustrations
33	Bookplates
35	Greenland
37	Printmaking
39	Murals
41	Political Art
43	Commercial Work
45	Of Men and Mountains
46	The Kent Legacy



Self Portrait, 1905, oil on canvas, 25.5" x 22.375," X1978.1.9, Gift of Sally Kent Gorton

There is a woman so fastidious she has been known to spend hours dressing for a ball . . . so artistic she has furnished her home with rich treasures from the ends of the earth . . . so sagacious that she handles her own considerable financial affairs. She drives, or is driven in, a Rolls-Royce on every motoring occasion.

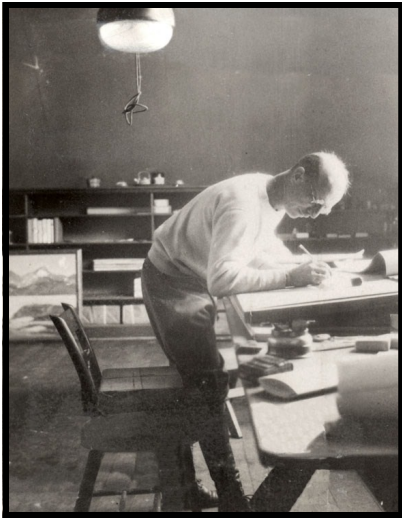
Only this best car, from every point of view, could please a nature so many-sided, so discriminating, as hers. The perfection of every last detail of her town car pays tribute to her costume and her destination. At the wheel of her roadster she delights when the silent motor whisks her over pike or country by-road

with equal comfort, equal ease. Whenever she looks at one of her Rolls-Royce cars, she finds pleasure in the clean, distinguished lines—the proud cut of the bonnet which seems to welcome the road. And, though this consideration certainly comes last, she is glad to realize that her town car, purchased six years ago, is as satisfactory in appearance and performance as the roadster she bought this spring. She is convinced that serenity, superlative comfort and safety more than compensate for high initial cost! A one-hundred-mile trial trip will be arranged at your convenience. Rolls-Royce, Fifth Avenue at 56th Street, New York. Branches in principal cities.

ROLLS-ROYCE

Rolls-Royce Ad: Road Scene, 1926, commercial print, 12" x 9", P52000.167.3, Bequest of Sally Kent Gorton.

Commercial Work



Kent working in his studio, c. 1930s, RK Photo 2933.

For an artist, Kent’s expenses were often considerable. For many years he was the sole source of support for Kathleen and their five children, as well as for his second wife, Frances and her son, Dickie. The cost of maintaining Asgaard was always an ongoing drain on his resources. Between 1910 and 1935, Kent juxtaposed a lucrative career as illustrator and commercial artist with the life of an adventurous traveler and painter.

Commercial work often kept Kent solvent. Most jobs were a financial boon, but an artistic bane:

“I support myself by turning my hand to the production of almost every lowdown job that commerce, the great prostituting patron of the arts, demands. How I hate all that.”

On occasion, fine art did combine with commerce. In 1927-1928 Kent completed three canvases for Steinway and Sons, inspired by music of the masters, including Rachmaninoff’s “Russian Mass.”

One of Kent’s last lucrative commercial clients was General Electric. His painting of a solitary farmhouse on a winter’s night was reproduced in GE’s 1946 calendar and proved so popular that he was asked to provide another for the following year.

In January of 1946, workers at GE’s plant in Schenectady, New York, went on strike. They invited Kent to join their picket line. Well aware that his appearance on the line could cost him his commission, Kent braved bitter cold and supported the strikers. GE officials looking on were not amused and tried to cancel his contract. Kent threatened a lawsuit and GE accepted his painting of a Christmas celebration on a village green.

Thinking that the “picket” fence that enclosed the common was suggestive, GE executives asked Kent to remove it. Kent stood firmly on artistic grounds and the “picket” fence stayed.



Steinway Ad: Russian Mass, 1928, commercial print, 5” x7.75”, P52000.170, Bequest of Sally Kent Gorton.

Rockwell Kent

Born: Tarrytown Heights, New York. June 21, 1882
Died: AuSable Forks, New York. March 13, 1971 (aged 88)

Rockwell Kent, artist, author, and political activist, had a long and varied career. During his lifetime, he worked as an architectural draftsman, illustrator, printmaker, painter, lobsterman, ship’s carpenter, and daily farmer. He lived in Maine, Newfoundland, New Hampshire, Alaska, Greenland, and the Adirondacks and explored the waters around Tierra del Fuego in a small boat. Kent’s paintings, lithographs, and woodcuts often portrayed the bleak and rugged aspects of nature; a reflection of his life in harsh climates.



Rockwell Kent c. 1896, photograph, RK Photo 152, Inscription: “Otto J. Frank. S.W. CON. 125st & 3 Ave.”

Rockwell Kent was born into a comfortable, upper-middle-class family in Tarrytown, New York, in 1882. His father, Rockwell Kent Sr., was a lawyer who sought prosperity through foreign mining ventures. When the elder Kent died suddenly of typhoid fever following a trip to Honduras, Kent’s mother, Sara, pregnant with her third child, was left in genteel poverty, often dependent upon the conditional kindness of her tight-fisted aunt, Josie Banker.

Sara’s sister, Josephine (Holgate), named after the miserly Aunt Josie, came to live with the family and served as the household’s disciplinarian. A talented artist herself, Josephine (Aunt Jo) decided to resume her art studies in Europe and took 13-year-old Rockwell with her to England, Holland, and Germany. Jo expressed enthusiasm for Kent’s early artistic efforts, despite her own assertion that, “You’ll never be able to support yourself as an artist; nobody can.”



‘Rockwell Kent’ c. 1905, photograph, RK Photo158.

Rockwell always attended private schools, including the Episcopal Academy in Cheshire, Connecticut, where he refused to learn Latin, outlasting his teacher in a lengthy standoff. He graduated from the Horace Mann School in New York City in 1900 and began the study of architecture at Columbia that fall.

During the summer before he started at Columbia, Kent's family vacationed at Shinnecock, on Long Island, where he attended the summer art program of painter William Merritt Chase. Kent spent three summers studying at Shinnecock with Chase, who immediately recognized Kent's talent and eventually offered him a scholarship to the New York School of Art, then also known as the Chase School. Trying to honor his family's wishes, Kent declined the offer. He continued at Columbia, but cut back on his architectural studies to attend evening art classes.



Abbott Thayer, Thayer family, and Rockwell Kent (with halo), Dublin, New Hampshire, 1903, manipulated photograph, RK Photo 162.



Save This Right Hand, 1949, color lithograph, P52004.16.1, Museum Purchase, Sally Kent Gorton Endowment.

Political Art

Kent joined the Socialist Party in 1908, but it was not until the 1930s that he became truly active in social and political causes.

When the Spanish Civil War erupted, he was one of eight artists who set up easels around New York City, trying to draw attention to the destruction of Spain's democracy.

Closest to Kent's heart was the International Workers Order (IWO), organized in 1930 as a fraternal benefit insurance company comprised of many different ethnic lodges. The IWO provided low-cost life insurance to its members, many of whom were recent immigrants to the United States. Kent was elected president of the IWO in 1944.

In 1951, New York State's Department of Insurance filed suit to have the IWO declared a Communist front and a threat to the country. Despite three days of eloquent testimony by Kent, who was one of only two IWO officers who were not members of the Communist Party, the court ordered that the organization be dissolved.

Two years later, Kent was called before U.S Senator Joseph McCarthy's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. Books written by so-called subversive authors, including Kent, were being removed from the shelves of the State Department's libraries overseas and then destroyed.

When Kent tried to read a prepared statement charging McCarthy with treason, the senator said, "I'll not hear a lecture from you, Mr. Kent." To which Kent replied, "You certainly won't. I get paid for my lectures."



Kent, Paul Robeson, and Unknown man, c.1950, RK Photo 3593.

New Hampshire



Trees, 1906, oil on panel, 18.5" x 18", X1978.1.12, Gift of Sally Kent Gorton.

retreat. Bolstered by the sale of two paintings, Kent quit Columbia and began full – time study at the New York School of Art.

During the winter of 1907-1908, he met Abbott Thayer's niece, 17 year old Kathleen Whiting. Within weeks he had won her heart and asked for her hand.

On December 31, 1908, Kent and Kathleen were wed. Years later he wrote, "If in my boyish experience I could only have known how little the judgment and promises of the innocent are to be relied upon, what endless sorrows might have been averted."

Late Afternoon in New Hampshire Field, 1905, oil on canvas, 24.25" x 22.25", P62008.5, Museum Purchase, Sally Kent Gorton Endowment.

In the summer of 1903, Kent served as an apprentice to Abbott Thayer, an eccentric artist who lived with his family in Dublin, New Hampshire. Thayer's compound consisted of a drafty, sparsely furnished former summerhouse as well as several makeshift lean-tos where family members slept, even in winter.

Despite their curious ways, Kent enjoyed the Thayer household, calling it one of the richest cultural experiences of his life. It was here that he drew nearer to nature and first read the Icelandic sagas that inspired his northern sojourns.

Thayer quickly recognized Kent's talent and encouraged him to paint the country side that surrounded his ramshackle



Monhegan



Rockwell Kent and Robert Henri (first row, second and third from right), New York City, c.1904, photograph, from Robert Henri's Studio, RK Photo 3714

Among Kent's teachers at the New York School of Art was Robert Henri, the charismatic leader of what is now known as "The Ashcan School." Henri influenced a generation of American artists, urging them to consider grittier, seamier subject matter. Kent's classmates included George Bellows and Edward Hopper.

Robert Henri's greatest gift to Rockwell Kent was his suggestion that the young artist go to Monhegan Island, Maine, to paint. Rockwell Kent arrived on Monhegan Island, Maine, in the summer of 1905. Intended as an artistic sojourn, this visit instead marked the beginning of a long, meaningful and deeply personal relationship with the island landscape and community. Kent had unexpectedly found more than a destination for his art; he had discovered a way of life. "It was enough to start me off to such feverish activity in painting as I had never known."

He left Monhegan in 1910 a changed man, returning briefly in 1917 and again in the late 1940s to resume his ties to the island, which culminated in the early 1950s. Kent's first substantial body of work, paintings inspired by Monhegan and exhibited in New York in 1907, founded the young artist's early recognition as an American landscape painter. In the spring of 1907, Kent unveiled fourteen canvases at Clausen Galleries in New York. Fellow painter John Sloan wrote in his diary:

"These pictures are of immense rocks and sea in fair weather and in winter. Splendid big thought, some like prayers to God. I enjoyed them to the utmost and accept them as great. I'd like to buy some of them."

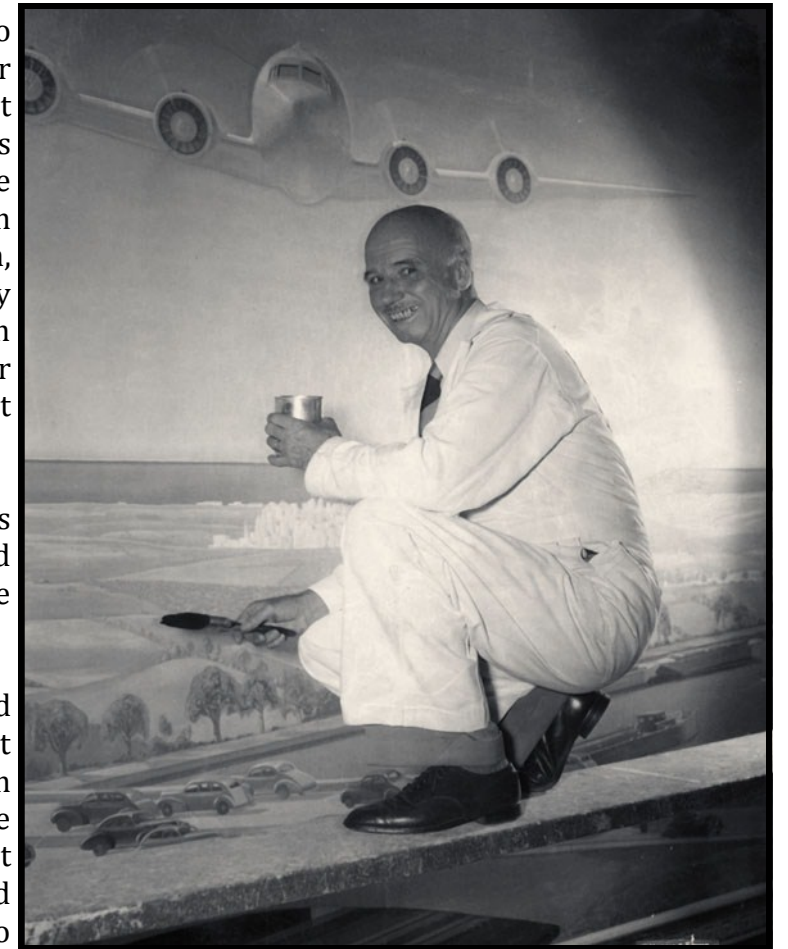
But neither Sloan, nor anyone else purchased any paintings. Kent's return to Monhegan's working class crystallized his decision:

Kent was also commissioned to create a 15-by-50 foot mural for General Electric's pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair. "Man's Libration Through Electricity" (see below) featured a representation of the dark ages of superstition, pseudoscience, and demonology on the left. To the right was an enormous turbine generator manned by a crew of jubilant modern workers.

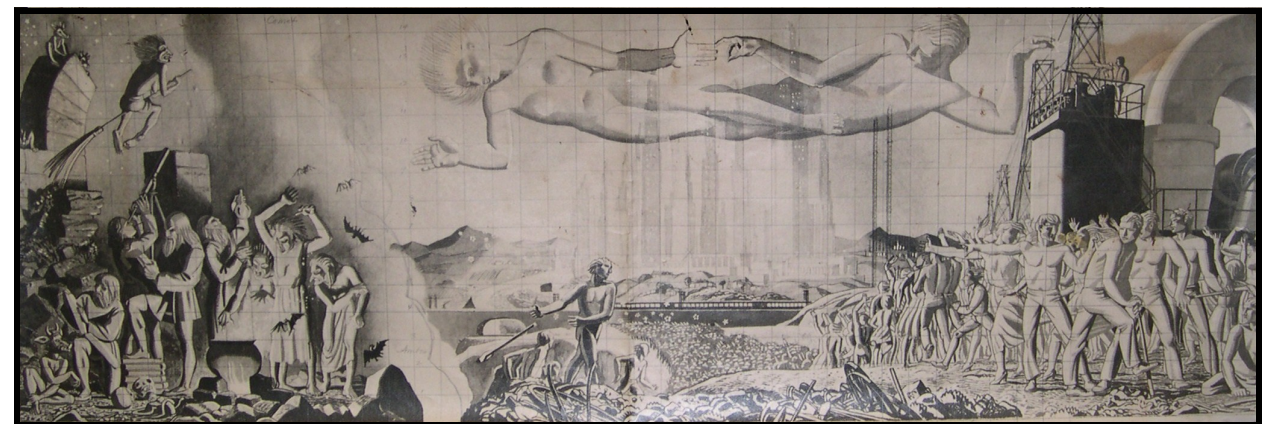
In the center were liberated toilers discarding their outworn tools and rushing, rejoicing, toward the towering city of the future.

With hope that the mural would become a lasting legacy, Kent urged officials at GE to install it in one of the company's office buildings. But, the mural was put into storage and never displayed again. It gradually succumbed to the ravages of time.

A mural for the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce was completed in 1944. "On Earth, Peace" (pictured right) featured fertile farmlands, bucolic villages, and thriving cities tied together by highway, waterway, railway, and air. Sally, Kent's third wife, served as the model for two of the winged figures that symbolize the four freedoms.



Kent with mural, *On Earth Peace*, 1944, located in the Hearing Room, Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, Longworth House, Washington, D.C. Landscape includes a depiction of Asgaard Farm at left edge, RK Photo 273.



Murals



Above: Postal Service to Alaska: Post Office Mural Study, 1935, oil on photo paper, 21" x 30", P52000.104.3, Bequest of Sally Kent Gorton.

During the 1930s and 1940s Kent created several major murals and his designs for the 1939 Christmas Seals campaign were used on billboards, stamps, and posters. When a woman said of his art deco angel, "That doesn't look like an angel to me," Kent replied, "Madam, have you seen one?"

Kent was also chosen by the U.S. Treasury Department to create a pair of panels for the Federal Post office in Washington, D.C. His assigned topic was "Mail Service in the Arctic and Tropic Territories of the U.S."

Sympathetic to agitators seeking to end American dominance in Puerto Rico, Kent planted a cryptic message in a letter featured in the mural depicting mail service to Puerto Rico, As though sent from the Eskimos in the arctic mural, it translated:

"To the people of Puerto Rico, our friends, go ahead, let us change chiefs. That alone can make us equal and free."

The once controversial panels are still on display in what is now the Ariel Rios Federal Building.

Left: Mural for General Electric Pavilion at 1939 World's Fair, 1939, photograph of pencil drawing, 24" x 30", P52000.155, Bequest of Sally Kent Gorton.

"I envied them their worker's human dignity. Those social and political convictions, which had hereto existed as figments in my mind and heart, began to acquire substance."

Soon Kent joined the fray. He labored first as a well driller, swinging an eight-pound sledge. He served as a substitute lighthouse keeper, then a longshoreman, and at last, a lobsterman.

Right: *Blackhead, Monhegan*, c.1950, oil on canvas, 35.625" x 41.1375", X1978.1.4, Gift of Sally Kent Gorton.

Below: *Memorial Day, Monhegan*, c.1950, oil on canvas, 41.25" x 51.25", X1978.1.11, Gift of Sally Kent Gorton.



Newfoundland

By 1912, Kent was living in Greenwich Village, which was emerging as a bohemian haven. Now the father of three children, he was doing architectural rendering for the firm of Ewing & Chappell. Miserable, he leaped at the opportunity to serve as superintendent on a construction site in Winona, Minnesota, an affluent mill town on the Mississippi.



Woman Kneeling, Newfoundland, 1915, oil on canvas, 35.5" x 29.5", P52000.183, Bequest of Sally Kent Gorton.

After what Kent called his "full-packed Minnesota year," he returned to New York City.

Increasingly, Kent's thoughts returned to the bleak, barren coast of Newfoundland, which he had first visited in 1910. After securing financial support, primarily from his mother who had inherited wealth from her Aunt Josie, Kent boarded a steamer for St. John's.

His search for solitude brought him to the village of Brigus, on Conception Bay. Kent found a dilapidated house on a narrow ledge of land far from town. He renovated this curious cottage, adding a bedroom and a small studio. His family joined him, and at first, all was idyllic.

But, soon, there were whispers about the sometimes arrogant American who lived in the strange little cottage on the cliffs. Rumors flew

that Kent was a German spy sent to make maps and charts of the Newfoundland coast.

Kent did nothing to dispel the gossip. In fact, he actively encouraged it. This response backfired and he was ordered to leave the country. The Kents left Newfoundland after a mere sixteen months.

Kent's despair permeates his oil painting, *House of Dread*

"Upon a bleak and lofty cliff's edge, land's end, stands a house. Against its corner, and facing seaward leans a man, naked. His head is bowed as though in utter dejection. And from an upper window leans a weeping woman. It is our cliff, our sea, our house, stripped bare and stark, its loneliness intensified."

"While the low cost of prints puts them within reach of everyone, it should be realized that all prints, as the term is used in art, are "originals" in the same precious sense as a unique painting or drawing; and by the variety of their processes they offer the artist adequate means for the expression of his thought."

Kent used lithography as his primary artistic means for expressing his political views, and for documenting many of his experiences in Greenland.

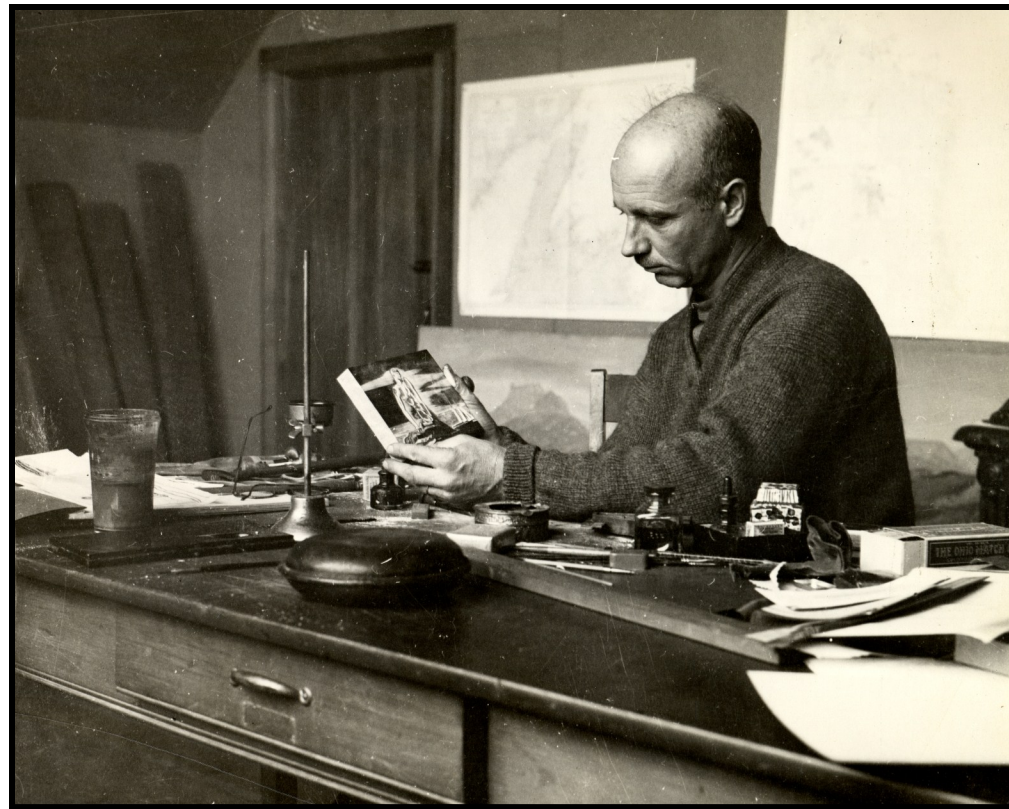
Wood engraving was reserved largely for his symbolic representations of man coming to grips with his earthbound destiny. These striking black and white images were often interpreted as "mystical," a term that caused Kent some concern. In his second autobiography, *It's Me O Lord*, he wrote;

"I believe in Man as the supreme consciousness; and in the arts as the supreme expression of his spirit... Symbolism is quite different from mysticism."



Kent and Carl Zigrosser, c. 1935, RK Photo 3158.

Printmaking



Kent working on wood block at his home in the Adirondacks, c.1931, , RK Photo 268.

At the urging of a young admirer named Carl Zigrosser, who would become an authority on printmaking, Kent began to pursue the art of wood engraving, a passion that would rival his great love for oil painting.

Kent's engravings began as rough, reverse images he drew and then traced onto blocks of maple. He would then cut all of the fine detail into the wood.

"Engraving, in my hands, became wonderfully consistent with the eccentricities of my own nature with my inability to distinguish what are termed the 'finer shades'; my preference for fair over foggy days; for clean sharp lines; for clear perception versus mystical imaginings; for stark, uncompromising realism versus unreality. You've got to know your mind to work with steel on wood."

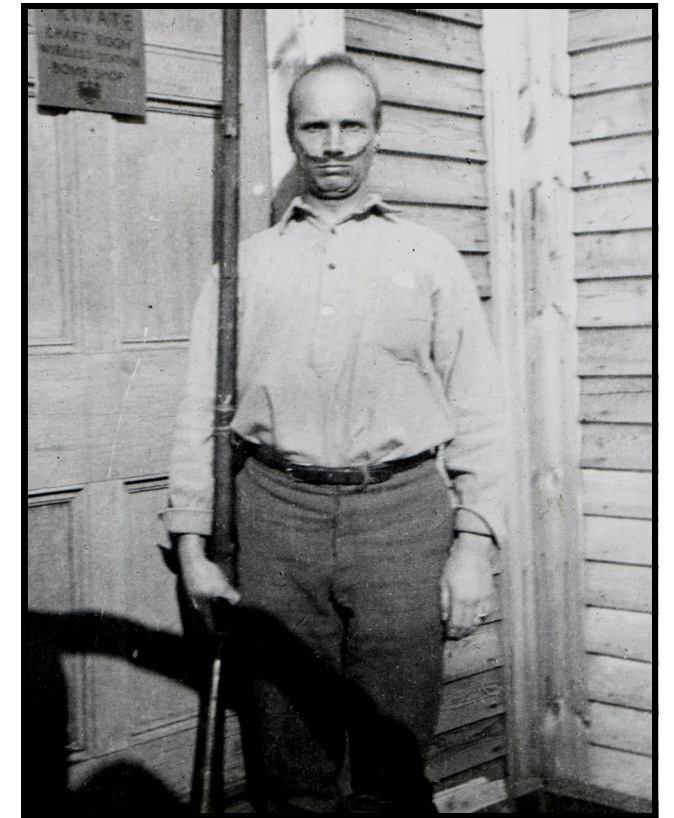
Kent was equally adept at lithographs. Printmaking, he felt, was a "democratic art." In 1927, in his introduction to *Fifty Prints*, he wrote:



Above: Rockwell Kent. *Kent's "House of Dread," Brigus, Newfoundland, c. 1914-15*, glass plate, RK Photo 5892.

Right: Unknown, *Kent posing as German spy, Newfoundland, 1915*, photograph, RK Photo 206.

Below: *House of Dread. Newfoundland, c. 1914-1915*, oil on canvas, 35.25" x 45.75", X1978.1.8, Gift of Sally Kent Gorton.





Killer Whales in Resurrection Bay, Alaska, c.1939, oil on canvas, 30.5" x 46.625", P62008.1, Bequest of Dorothy Schumn Dayton.



Above: *Cabin Window, Alaska*, 1918-1919, oil on wood, 17.375" x 21.375", P52000.178, Bequest of Sally Kent Gorton.

Left Top: *Rockwell Kent III*, Known as Rocky, outside Kent's Alaskan cabin, c.1918-1919, RK Photo 67, Inscription: "Log Cabin in Alaska, my son Rockwell, age nine, in the foreground."

Left Bottom: *Interior, Alaskan Cabin*, Resurrection Bay, Alaska, 1918-19, RK Photo 68, Inscription: "Interior of the log cabin of the Kents, father and eight year old son, in which was written Rockwell Kent's first book: 'Wilderness: A story of Quiet Adventure in Alaska.'"



In July of 1931, Rockwell Kent returned to the polar landscapes he loved.

"My short visit to Greenland had filled me with a longing to spend a winter there, to see and experience the far north at its spectacular worst, to know the people and share their way of life."

Kent traveled to Ubekendt Island off the western coast of Greenland, 225 miles above the Arctic Circle. Here he settled in Igdlorssuit, a village of less than 200 sturdy souls.

"As I look out over the settlement from my window, Igdlorssuit is like a stage upon which the epic drama of the lives of the people deploys unendingly. There, seen in sunlight and shadow, rain and snow, wind and calm, the people come out of their houses and perform their parts."

Kent recounted his time amongst the peace-loving, communal Greenlanders, in *Salamina*, a memoir dedicated to his wife, Frances, but named in honor of his housekeeper and mistress.



Dogs Resting, Highways (Greenland), c.1933-1937, oil on canvas mounted on panel, 33.5" x 43.5", X1980.1.130, Gift of Sally Kent Gorton in Memory of John Gorton.

Greenland



Kent painting en plein air (in open air), Greenland, c.1933, RK Photo 680.

At a house warming party at Asgaard, businessman Arthur Allen mentioned that his 22-year-old son was planning a three-month cruise to Greenland. “God,” said Kent. “May I go with him?”

On June 17, 1929, four days before Kent’s forty-seventh birthday, *Direction*, Arthur Allen Jr’s 33-foot, 13-tone cutter, set sail for the settlement of Godthaab, a nine-day, 600-mile journey.

After catching their first glimpse of Greenland, the voyagers sought shelter for the night in a small fjord. But as they slept, a fierce williwaw struck, and what seemed like a protective corridor became a raging wind tunnel. The shipmates escaped, but could not save *Direction* from being battered and broken on the rocks.

N by E, Kent’s written account of this ill-fated cruise was called by one critic, “one of the finest books of adventure written in our time.”



Left: Salamina inside Kent’s home, Igdlorssuit, Greenland, c. 1932, photograph, RK Photo 5858.
Right: Rockwell and Frances Kent in Greenland, c.1930, RK Photo .

Alaska

After their expulsion from Newfoundland, Kent and his family returned to New York. Money woes were mounting (Kathleen had given birth to their fourth child). Despite his financial straits, he began laying plans for a lengthy escape to Alaska, a last-ditch effort to salvage his career as a painter.

When art collector Ferdinand Howald agreed to advance him the funds to support his family, Kent’s Alaskan odyssey drew near. Though eager to enter the wild, he did not look forward to the loneliness.

Kathleen refused to leave the children with her parents and accompany him, but she agreed to let 9-year-old Rocky join his father on the journey.

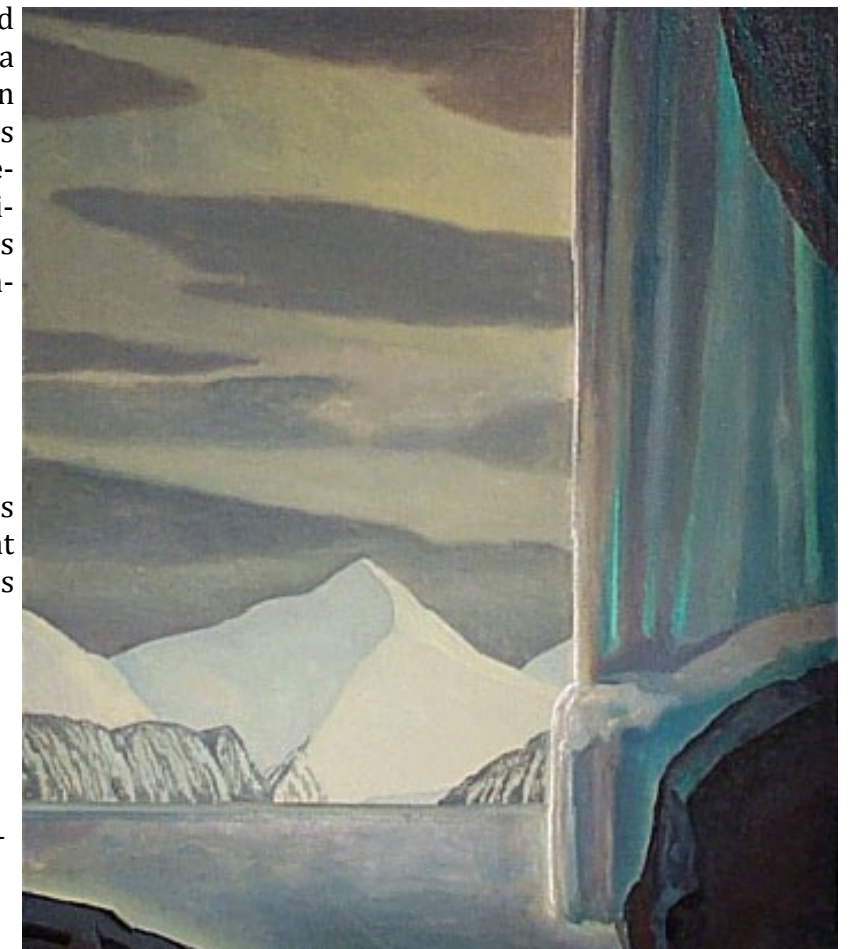
While exploring Resurrection Bay in a borrowed rowboat, Kent and young Rocky hailed an old man in a motor-driven dory. “Come with me,” said 71 – year- old Lars Olsen, the sole human inhabitant of Fox Island. “ I show you the place to live.”

Kent renovated an abandoned goat shed, turning it into a comfortable home. For seven months he reveled in this world of isolation and creativity. Homesick for his family, however, and fearing his marriage would finally crumble, he left in March of 1919.

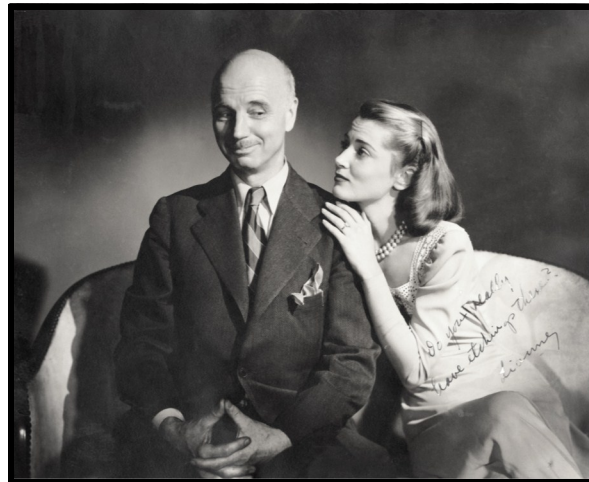
“Ah, god, and not the world again.”

The exhibitions of his paintings and drawings that followed re-launched Kent’s career as an artist.

Frozen Fall, Alaska, 1919, oil on canvas, 41.75” x 35.75”, X1978.1.5, Gift of Sally Kent Gorton.



Hogarth Jr.



Rockwell Kent with unidentified woman, c.1920s, RK Photo 2841.

While in Newfoundland, Kent had provided illustrations for the light verse of George Chappell, his boss at the architectural firm of Ewing & Chappell. Unhappily returned to the drafting room, Kent started making the rounds of editorial offices with his portfolio, having some small success selling whimsical drawings to *Vanity Fair*, *Puck*, and other humor magazines.

Of these fanciful efforts Kent wrote:

“Oh, god, that a man at 35, with all the wisdom and brains that I have, be making these fool things.”

“All my time is spent looking for work or doing things that I hope to sell.”

But Kent continued to chronicle the follies and foibles of the upper crust, hiding behind the pseudonym Hogarth Jr., in honor of William Hogarth, a painter, social satirist, and editorial cartoonist of eighteenth century England. In later years, as his own celebrity grew, Kent became a full fledged member of the circles he satirized.

Casting about for other ways to support his family, Kent taught himself the almost forgotten art of reverse painting on glass, often incorporating his designs into “Hogarth mirrors.”

His muse and model for many of these creations was his latest paramour. Hildegard Hirsch was a German-born, golden-haired, blue-eyed show-girl, a dancer with the Ziegfeld Follies. (Of this latest transgression, Kent wrote to his wife that an artist “needed to experience all of life.”)

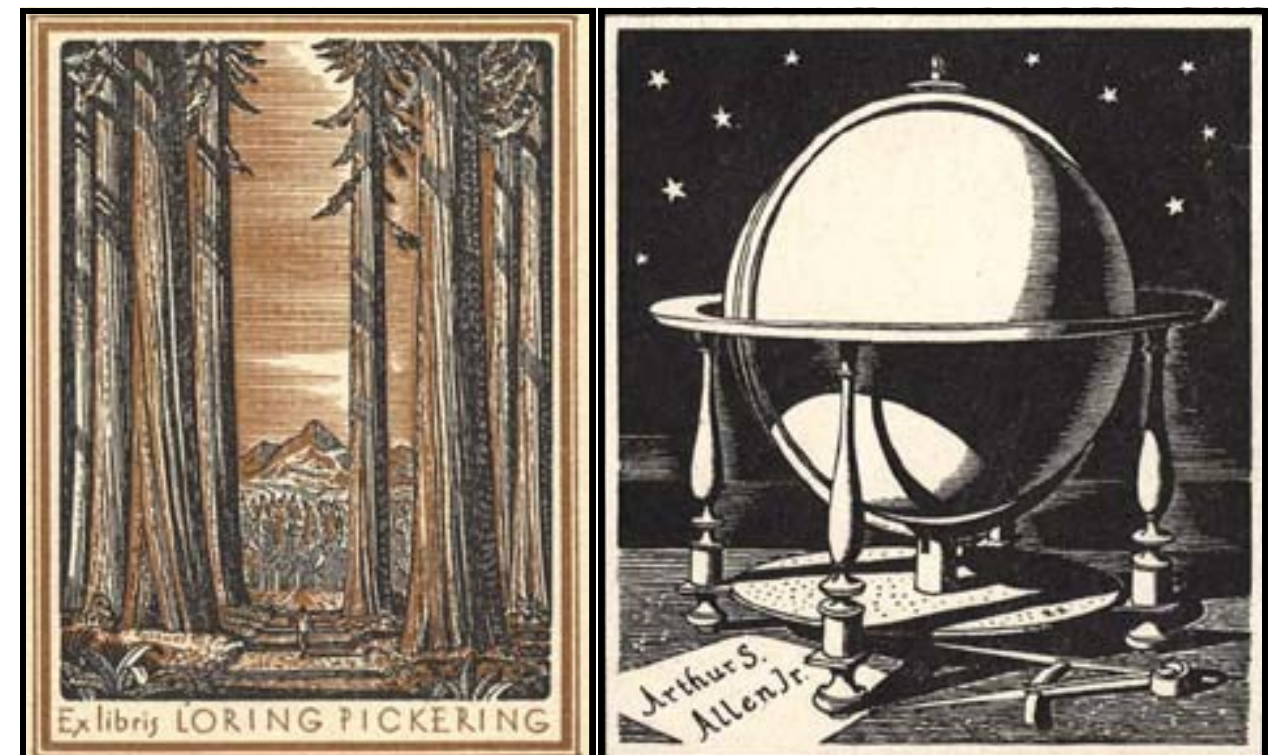
Right: *Vanity Fair* Cover, 1923, color offset lithograph, 12.75” x 9.75,” P52000.141, Bequest of Sally Kent Gorton.



Above: *Kent in studio at Asgaard*, c.1938, RK Photo 266.

Bottom Left: *Ex Libris Loring Pickering*, 1946, ink on paper, 2.5” x 2”, P52000.6.94.5, Bequest of Sally Kent Gorton.

Bottom Right: *Arthur S. Allen, Jr. Bookplate*, 1927, linocut on paper, P52000.6.247, Bequest of Sally Kent Gorton.



Bookplates



Kent in studio at Asgaard, c.1930, RK Photo 269.

From 1912 to 1968, Kent practiced the time-honored art of the bookplate, creating more than 185 designs. His bookplate designs are among the top ten on any listing compiled of American bookplate designers. Kent's various background and training in many branches of the arts, as well as his travels to Alaska, South America, Europe and Greenland, and exposure to the arts and crafts of different cultures, were important factors in his designs.

Rockwell Kent's architectural background is particularly obvious in the bookplate designs because of the arrangement, balance, decorative motifs and the sculpture like qualities of the designs. Everything is thoughtfully arranged into unified designs and all of them have excellent compositional elements. Kent was very serious and would mull over his designs for a number of days. In most cases he never met the individuals he created them for, but he still sought to learn about them via correspondence, asking each client for "the story of your life, your likes, your aspirations."

Kent's own library contained thousands of volumes. Books were a sacred matter to the artist:

"The theft of a book is more nearly homicide than larceny. Books are not things, they're people multiplied; their friendships are as inexhaustible as Shelley's love."

"... the possession of books is both the promise of a richer life and, in degree, the sign of its fulfillment. Ah, there is much, thank God, to be desired in life! And books stand high."



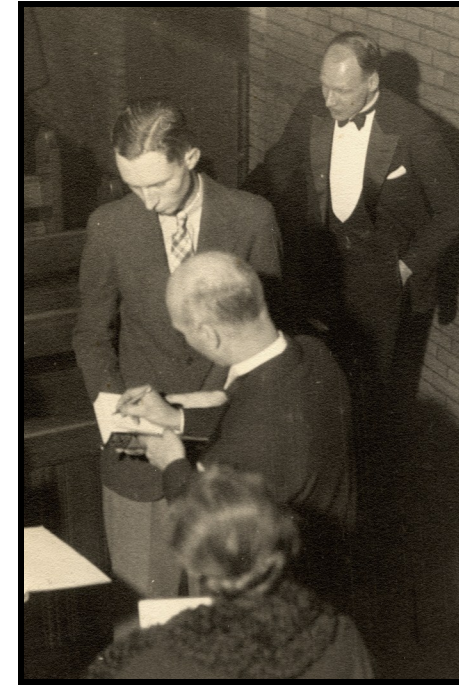
But few of these decorative pieces were purchased.

“Nothing important, financially, has developed yet. Will it ever? I am seriously considering not painting any more or drawing for a long time-but getting a job somewhere at some other work.”



Hogarth, Jr. (Rockwell Kent), *Girl Running*, n.d., gouache, 12" x 10.5", P102011.1, Museum Purchase 2011.

Book Illustrations



Kent at book signing party for Random House trade edition of *Moby Dick*, c.1930, RK Photo 2140.

In addition to his own profusely illustrated accounts of his adventures in Alaska, Tierra del Fuego, and Greenland, Kent took on the titans of literature, enhancing their timeless tales with his own enduring images, seemingly creating a new style for each classic volume to which he turned his hand.

Kent's output was prodigious during this period. A young studio assistant noted in her journal;

“Mr. Kent is a bit of a Prussian when it comes to making people work. He never gets tired. His energy wears everyone out.”

A project befitting Kent's unlimited energy came from R.R. Donnelly & Sons Company, a major printing firm in Chicago. Asked to illustrate William Henry Dana's *Two Years Before The Mast*, Kent countered with this proposal to illustrate another tale of the sea, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*.

When Kent submitted samples to Donnelly & Sons, they replied:

“These drawings exceed our highest expectations. As works of art reflecting the spirit of Melville's book, they could not be finer.”



Moby Dick Rises: Volume I, page 273, 1930, linocut on paper, 11.25" x 7.125", P52000.4.127, Bequest of Sally Kent Gorton.

Vermont



Rockwell, Kathleen, and their five children, Egypt farm, Arlington, Vermont, 1921, RK Photo 112.

In 1919, after returning from his Alaskan adventure, Kent decided to move his family out of New York City. Searching for a farm they could afford, Kent and his wife, Kathleen, found an isolated property high on the southern spur of Mt. Equinox, near Arlington, Vermont. It was called Egypt Farm.

Now the father of five, seeking ways to sustain both his growing family and his creative spirit, Kent became the world's first incorporated artist. He designed a certificate and issued \$4,000 worth of stock in himself at \$100 per share.

The newfound success he enjoyed as a painter and writer allowed him to soon reward his investors with a 20 percent dividend and dissolve Kent Incorporated.

But the peripatetic artist became disenchanted with rural domesticity. Vermont was not the Eden-like existence he had envisioned. Though he often cursed city life, he began making longer, more frequent trips back to New York City.



Vermont Mountains, Summer, 1927 (reworked c. 1950), oil on canvas, 41.5" x 51.5", X1978.1.16, Gift of Sally Kent Gorton.

Tierra del Fuego



Kent's boat, The Kathleen, Tierra del Fuego, 1922. RK Photo 5763.

Kent's increasing fame was his passport to New York's high society, where he met a woman who bewitched him with her beauty and rebellious nature. The stormy affair that followed left him dazed and distraught. "If there's a worse place than New York City," he declared, "I will go there."

The artist signed on as a clerk on a freighter bound for Chile and developed a vague scheme to brave the legendary hazards of Cape Horn. After transforming an old lifeboat into a sailing vessel and then abandoning it in Admiralty Sound, Kent and a colleague crossed through a mountain range on foot to Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world.

There, he rented a small sloop and somehow convinced a Swedish settler named Christopherson to guide him through the intricate, uncharted waterways of the Wollastons, the most exposed islands of the archipelago.

From *Voyaging*, Kent's written account of his journey;

"It was a restless, tossing sea, not windblown but more terrible in that it seemed to lift and fall by some energy within itself. Christopherson turned to me, "I think," he said, softly, 'we must turn back.' Did I cry out in strong defiance, 'Hell, keep her south?' No. We were wet and cold and miserable, and I was afraid. And the voyage of 6000 miles was ended, and the Horn was lost. "





29 *December Eight, 1941*, 1941, oil on canvas, 50.5" x 77.5", X1978.1.17, Gift of Sally Kent Gorton.

Ireland



Cottage Kent renovated, Ireland, c. 1926, glass plate. RK Photo 5704.

By 1926, Kent was divorced from Kathleen and married to Frances Lee, whom he had met at a Long Island soiree. He was now the sole source of support for his new bride and young stepson, as well as for Kathleen and their five children.

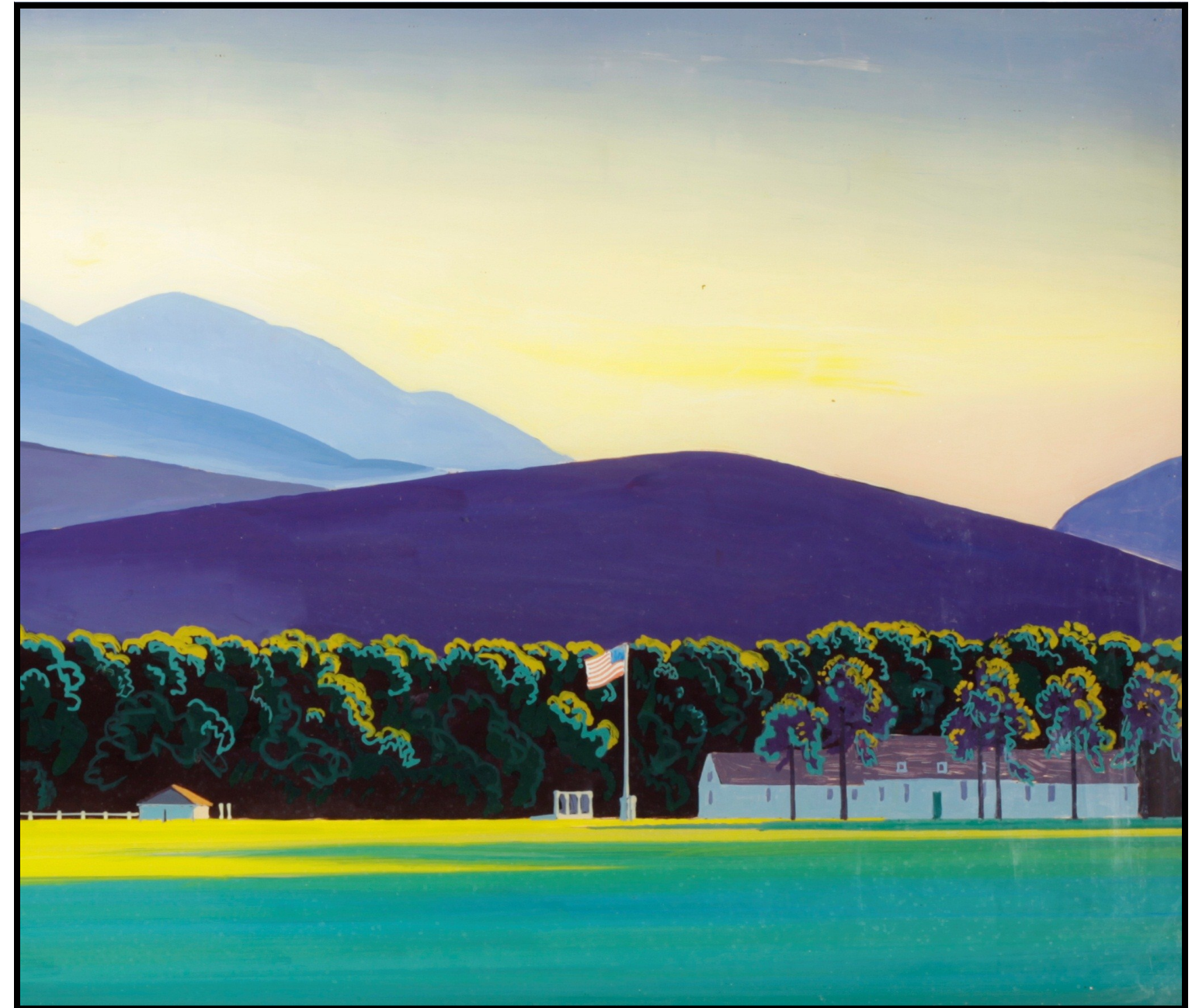
The means for a summer respite in Ireland came in part from the sale of several paintings to Duncan Phillips, the wealthy Washingtonian who was turning his Dupont Circle mansion into a museum. Further support came from Rex Stout, author of the Nero Wolfe detective novels. Stout provided a stipend in exchange for first pick of whatever Kent painted in Ireland.

On the coast of County Donegal, Kent and Frances found their way to the isolated valley of Glenlough. There they met Dan and Rose Ward, who lived in splendid isolation, presiding over one thousand acres of peat and bog.

The Wards owned a small cottage that was in deep disrepair and was being used as a cow shed. Rockwell rented the one room ruin, evicted the cow, and once again transformed a hovel into a home. Though he longed to extend his stay, the pressures of providing for his large family would not allow it.



Admiralty Sound, Tierra del Fuego, c.1922-23, oil on panel, 26.25" x 30.5", X1978.1.7, Gift of Sally Kent Gorton.



Asgard Landscape Mirror (detail), 1935, reverse painting on glass, P62008.2, Museum Purchase, Sally Kent Gorton Endowment.

After fourteen years of marriage, Frances and Rockwell divorced. Sally Johnstone, hired as Kent's assistant, became his wife in 1940. Asgaard, the center of their life and work, would serve as their retreat and refuge for the rest of their lives.



Irish Sun, 1926, watercolor on paper, 16" x 20", X1978.1.18, Gift of Sally Kent Gorton.

A new house, modest but sturdily built, rose quickly along with a studio tucked away in a grove of pine trees. The farm became a meeting place for Kent's friends, artists and intelligentsia who often gathered there on weekends. Among them were poet Louis Untermeyer, Hollywood screenwriter Donald Ogden Stewart, and Academy Award-winning director Lewis Milestone, who was married to Frances Kent's sister.

Au Sable Farm



Kent (Seated, second from right) with family at daughter's wedding, Asgaard, c. 1937, RK Photo 2815.

By the spring of 1928, just outside the village of Au Sable Forks, Kent found a farm with more than 250 acres of pasture and pine forests, with vast blue vistas. Most of the structures on the property were beyond restoration.

No stranger to starting anew, Kent had them razed. Within six weeks of purchase he had contractors building a brand-new barn with a huge hayloft. Inspired by his love for ancient Norse legend, Kent named his new home Asgaard, meaning "home of the gods." Asgaard was to become his home for the rest of his life, a place where he found tranquility and escape from New York City, and solace when times were difficult. But Kent's Valhalla was plagued by poor soil. In order to make the pastures profitable again, he spent thousands of dollars on fertilizer. Too busy to be anything more than a gentleman farmer, he employed a succession of managers who handled his herd and tended to his fields, rarely turning a profit.



And This My Child Is Where Your Mother Was Born, 1930 (reworked 1950), oil on canvas, 41.75" x 51.5", X1978.1.6, Gift of Sally Kent Gorton.

Rockwell Kent discovered the Adirondacks in 1927 when he was 45 years old. They made their escape from New York City. He and his second wife Frances actually drove into the area in the evening, so the next day seeing the area in the sunlight, he said it was like the wide-eyed wonder of children on Christmas morning as they gaze upon the tree with the heaped-up presents under it. The large sums he earned from advertising, fine art, and illustrations provided the means for a move upstate to the Adirondack Mountains. It was their Adirondack wonderland, with the mountain ranges displayed in all their grandeur. He saw the region as "The Promised Land," his Adirondack "Camelot", and it represented a new beginning as he and Frances embarked on finding their paradise on earth and settling there.



Rockwell and Sally Kent at Asgaard, c.1945, RK Photo 2920.