

Norman Rockwell 'Saying Grace' Painting Sets Auction Record

Norman Rockwell's *Saying Grace* sold on Wednesday for more than \$46 million, double its high pre-sale estimate, setting a new auction record for an American painting, Sotheby's said.

Saying Grace, which shows a Mennonite family praying at a restaurant, was voted the favorite cover by readers of the American magazine *The Saturday Evening Post* when it was published in 1951.

The previous auction record for an American painting was for *Polo Crowd* by George Bellows, which sold for \$27.7 million in 1999.

"This is just a wonderful result for American art and for Rockwell," Elizabeth Goldberg, the head of Sotheby's American Art department, said in an interview.

"It is largely considered one of his great masterpieces," she added.

Two telephone bidders, who have not been identified, battled for more than nine minutes to buy the prized work.

Wednesday's auction is the latest in a series of record-breaking sales this year which art experts say is fueled by the ultra rich with surplus capital, low interest rates and confidence in the art market.

Francis Bacon's 1969 triptych, *Three Studies of Lucian Freud*, fetched \$142.4 million last month in New York to become the most expensive work of art ever sold at auction.

Goldberg said it was fitting that Rockwell, who died in 1978

at age 84 and painted nostalgic and amusing scenes of everyday American life over the course of some 65 years, should hold the American record.

“When people, not only in this country but around the world, think of American art, they think of Norman Rockwell,” she said. “I think it really speaks to the desire for masterworks by well recognized American artists.”

Saying Grace was one of seven works by the American painter and illustrator in the sale from the family of Kenneth J. Stuart Sr., the art editor of *The Saturday Evening Post* who was Rockwell’s longtime friend. The paintings sold for a total of \$60 million.

The previous auction record for Rockwell was \$15.4 million for *Breaking Home Ties*, which sold in 2006.

The total from Sotheby’s American Art auction was \$84 million.

Reporting by Patricia Reaney; editing by Mary Milliken and Cynthia Osterman

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