

Jarvis Rockwell: *Us* At MASS MoCA, on view November 2018



Toys from Jarvis Rockwell's collection
 Courtesy of the artist
 Photo: Monika Sosnowski

NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS — Artist **Jarvis Rockwell's** massive 2002 installation *Maya* introduced MASS MoCA visitors to Rockwell, whose detailed wall-drawing continues to delight museum-goers and concert audiences just outside of the museum's Club B-10. Rockwell returns to MASS MoCA with a new large-scale installation, *Us*, on view beginning **November 10**. In *Us*, figures from Rockwell's massive collection of toys and figurines interact and organize themselves on glass panels, soaring over visitors' heads in the historic light well of the newly renovated B6: Robert W. Wilson Building.

Rockwell began assembling his ever-expanding collection of toys and figurines in 1979. Numbering in the hundreds of thousands, his toys run the gamut from classic action figures to Japanese monsters, bobble-head dolls of politicians and artists, Yodas, Betty Boops, Troll dolls, Pez dispensers, Tin Tins, toy soldiers, and endless amounts of plastic furniture ("for the occasional elderly toy to sit on"). In his thoughtful arrangements, groups of figures gather as

though in conversation with one another, approaching and drifting apart in a bewildering array of organic interactions. In his 1985 exhibition *Toys* at the New Museum, NY, eight identical figures wearing suits and panama hats anxiously adjusted their ties in unison, a coiffed doll with bright blue eyeshadow enthusiastically greeted an approaching Viking, and James Brown relaxed, feet up, on a blue ottoman.

As the exhibition's title suggests, for Rockwell these figures stand in as avatars for ourselves — "alternatives to us whom we can interact with" — which act out the fantasies, beliefs, and values that shape our understanding of the world. In his own words, "We build what we are, what we think, and what we live." Rockwell uses the term *Maya*, adopted from Hindu Sanskrit, to understand the way we attach illusions to the visible world. On a notecard that he carries in his wallet, Rockwell defines the term in relation to his practice as:

“The power of a god or demon to transform a concept into an element of the sensible world; the transitory manifold appearance of the sensible world, which obscures the undifferentiated spiritual reality from which it originates; the illusory appearance of the sensible world.”

The stepped structure of *Us* also points to Rockwell’s fascination with the spiritual realm. Spanning the length of the light well, ten glass planks hang from the ceiling in an ascending, curving line. The upward motion of the floating glass shelves conjures a feeling of ascension, and perhaps even reincarnation. As Rockwell sees it, “[The toys] are going on to glory.” Imbued with a physical and spiritual depth, Rockwell’s figures evoke a multiplicity of narratives that are at once whimsical and distressing, capturing the complexities and outlandishness of our own existence.

Rockwell approaches each installation of toys organically, responding to both the site and the needs of the various toys. Though most of the figures “socialize” in groups, the artist explains, “There’s always the lonely person that doesn’t talk well with other people, and he’ll be walking by himself.” By listening seriously to the stories that toys have to tell, Rockwell is able to create worlds that feel at once monumental and microscopic in scope, playing out both the quotidian and epic dramas of our lives.

About the Artist

For almost forty years, Jarvis Rockwell (b. 1932, New Rochelle, NY) has built his always-growing collection of toys and figures. The son of Norman and Mary Barstow Rockwell, Jarvis Rockwell began his artistic career drawing portraits of his neighbors and friends and taking classes at New York’s Art Students League and the National Academy of Design. Following his service in the Korean War, Rockwell attended the Boston Museum School and Los Angeles County Art Institute. Since its beginning in 1979, Rockwell’s collection of toys has grown to include hundreds of thousands of pieces which range from classic action figures to carved wooden animals, mythical monsters, Happy Meal prizes, Troll dolls, Looney Tunes characters, and figurines of politicians, celebrities, and artists. After a decade of collecting, Rockwell began to create scenes that explore the relationships between figures and the narratives that these interactions produce. Rockwell’s work has been included in exhibitions at MASS MoCA; the New Museum, New York, NY; Scottsdale Public Art, Scottsdale, AZ; Batman Gallery, San Francisco, CA; Images Gallery, Stockbridge, MA; Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, MA; DownStreet Art, North Adams, MA; and the Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, MA. He lives and works in North Adams.

Sponsorship

Major exhibition support is provided by the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, the Barr Foundation, and the Mass Cultural Council.

Images

High-resolution images are available through this link: bit.ly/RockwellMM

About MASS MoCA

MASS MoCA is one of the world’s liveliest (and largest) centers for making, displaying, and enjoying today’s most important art, music, dance, theater, film, and video. MASS MoCA’s 250,000 sq. ft. of gallery space includes partnerships with Laurie Anderson, the Louise Bourgeois Trust, Jenny Holzer, Anselm Kiefer with the Hall Art Foundation, Sol LeWitt, and James Turrell.

Gallery admission is \$20 for adults, \$18 for veterans and seniors, \$12 for students, \$8 for children 6 to 16, and free for children 5 and under. Members are admitted free year-round. The Hall Art Foundation's Anselm Kiefer exhibition is seasonal and currently on view. For additional information: 413.662.2111 x1 or visit massmoca.org.

Hours

MASS MoCA is open from 11am to 5pm, closed Tuesdays, through late June. From late June through Labor Day 2019, MASS MoCA's galleries will be open seven days a week — from 10am to 6pm Sundays through Wednesdays and from 10am to 7pm Thursdays through Saturdays.

About ArtCountry

ArtCountry is nestled in the Berkshire hills of western Massachusetts and at the foot of the Green Mountains of southern Vermont, with art and music all year round from four incredible museums — MASS MoCA, The Clark Art Institute, Williams College Museum of Art, and Bennington Museum — and the unparalleled Williamstown Theatre Festival, all less than three hours from New York and Boston.