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Arts, Briefly; Legal Battle Moves Norman Rockwell Art Toward Sale

By ALISON LEIGH COWAN; COMPILED BY LAWRENCE VAN GELDER

Six Norman Rockwell paintings whose ownership has been hotly contested, including "Saying Grace," right, one of his most popular covers for The Saturday Evening Post, may yet be sold. Curtis Publishing, which owned the magazine, abandoned its legal battle on Monday to regain title to the paintings from the family of Kenneth J. Stuart Sr., its former art director, who is deceased. And by Tuesday the oldest of Mr. Stuart's three sons, Kenneth J. Stuart Jr., petitioned the Connecticut probate court that is handling his father's will to order the sale of six paintings that he and his brothers own to take advantage of favorable "market conditions" and to "facilitate the resolution of other litigation." The artworks are at the heart of a fraternal dispute that has spanned 14 years. In 2004 a Superior Court judge in Stamford ordered the eldest brother to pay the estate \$2.3 million for mishandling his brothers' inheritance and committing acts of statutory theft while executor of the estate. Kenneth J. Stuart Jr. then filed for bankruptcy protection, which froze much of the litigation. Sandra Akoury, a lawyer for the younger brothers, said she was shocked by the filing in probate court in light of the injunction that bars Mr. Stuart from disposing of assets unilaterally. But Peter L. Truebner, a court-appointed special master in the Stamford case, suggested that selling the paintings was an obvious way to let the brothers "go their separate ways." ALISON LEIGH COWAN

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