

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**September 5, 2024**

## **Norman Rockwell Museum presents history-making women in U.S. premiere of Anita Kunz's *Original Sisters***

***Exhibition of groundbreaking portrait series opens November 9, 2024***



Anita Kunz's "Original Sisters" project (sampled above) honors amazing women throughout history. Selections from the artist's vast portrait series will be on view at Norman Rockwell Museum beginning November 9.

**Stockbridge, MA—September 5, 2024—**Norman Rockwell Museum is excited to announce [Anita Kunz: Original Sisters, Portraits of Tenacity and Courage](#), a forthcoming exhibition of artworks by internationally acclaimed Canadian illustrator Anita Kunz. On view from **November 9, 2024, through May 26, 2025**, *Anita Kunz: Original Sisters* presents selections from the artist's groundbreaking series of portraits of diverse and extraordinary women from ancient times to today, many unknown or underrecognized. This exhibition uncovers, amplifies, and celebrates the achievements of changemaking women worldwide, while also weaving together a "lost history" of women's distinctive contributions within every possible field of endeavor.

Norman Rockwell Museum is the first American museum, and just the third venue worldwide, to present original portraits from Kunz's Original Sister series. Approximately 240 Sister portraits will be on view at the Museum, accompanied by brief written profiles compiled by the artist. Featured portraits reflect a wide diversity of women, cultures, time periods, and fields of achievement, including powerful female pharaoh **Hatshepsut**, engineer, physician, and NASA astronaut **Mae Jemison**, anthropologist **Margaret Mead**, dancer **Josephine Baker**, ballerina **Maria Tallchief**, singer-songwriter **Nina Simone**, environmentalist **Rachel Carson**, poet **bell hooks**, painter and photographer **Dora Maar**, artist **Alice Neel**, environmental activist **Greta Thunberg**, primatologist **Jane Goodall**, politician and activist **Shirley Chisholm**, current vice president and Democratic presidential candidate **Kamala Harris**, and many more. The works on display are drawn from Kunz's collection of 450 portraits she has created since early 2020. (See details in the Background section below.) Importantly, the Original Sisters project is ongoing and open-ended—as expansive and inclusive as the lives and stories of women themselves.

"Norman Rockwell Museum is thrilled to partner with Anita to bring these essential and inspiring portraits to the public. The vision and spirit of Original Sisters and the care with which Anita has evoked these women is truly remarkable," said Norman Rockwell Museum Curator of Exhibitions Jane Dini. "*Anita Kunz: Original Sisters* is an example of a politically and socially significant project that is artistically deft, beautiful, and moving."

As a special dimension of the exhibition for the local community, **Norman Rockwell Museum has commissioned the creation of three “Berkshire Sisters”**—significant women tied to our region whose portraits will be featured in the exhibition and, thanks to Kunz’s generous donation, will enter the Museum’s permanent collection. Two of the three portraits depict historical figures, while one renders a contemporary woman. The portrait subjects are: **Elizabeth Freeman**, the first African American woman to successfully file a lawsuit for freedom in the state of Massachusetts, initiating a group of “freedom suits” that ultimately led Massachusetts to outlaw slavery; novelist, interior designer, and landscape architect **Edith Wharton**, the first woman to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize; and **Shannon Holsey**, President of the Stockbridge Munsie Band of Mohican Indians and a leading voice for Tribal stewardship of economic, environmental, cultural, and intellectual resources.

“Our Museum is honored to present Anita’s artistically striking portraits of women, often missing from history, who have changed the world—and are still changing and advancing our culture and society. These portraits reflect a breathtakingly rich diversity of women, including pivotal women connected to our Berkshire community. At the cusp of a new political and cultural moment, Anita’s celebration of women’s strength, perseverance, and undeniable impact has a particularly powerful resonance and meaning,” said Norman Rockwell Museum Director/CEO Laurie Norton Moffatt.

The exhibition will also serve to introduce audiences to artist Anita Kunz and her distinguished 45-year career as an illustrator for virtually every top national and international publication, including *The New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Vanity Fair*, *GQ*, *The Nation*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Ms. Magazine*. Canada-based Kunz excels at conveying complex social and political commentary with visual ingenuity and economy using arresting imagery. She is also widely known for her vivid and richly colored portraiture that evokes the context, emotional presence, and wider significance of the subjects she depicts. Thirty-nine of Kunz’s original illustrations from different aspects of her career have been donated by the artist to Norman Rockwell Museum’s permanent collection. See a full bio of Kunz below.

“It is such an honor to have these portraits of extraordinary women presented by Norman Rockwell Museum,” said Anita Kunz. “One of the most exciting aspects of this project has been uncovering the hidden lineages and linkages that connect women across culture and time. Bringing so many of these portraits together in a beautiful museum space will give audiences a chance to make new connections and celebrate women’s history as our collective history.”

Kunz continued, “One of the lessons I learned early on is that art has the power to move people. Every one of the Original Sisters has inspired and sustained me as an artist, and I hope audiences feel excited and energized by these women and their stories.”

Museum visitors will be invited to engage with *Anita Kunz: Original Sisters* in personal and timely ways. The exhibition opens during a groundbreaking election season, with Kamala Harris making history as America’s first woman of color presidential nominee from a major political party. On display through the spring, the exhibition will continue to highlight and amplify women’s essential contributions to politics, science, activism, the arts, education, and other fields through programming during Women’s History Month in March. Throughout the exhibition’s seven-month run, audiences will have the opportunity to contribute their suggestions for Original Sisters portraits and to reflect on women of influence and significance in their own lives.

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## **Exhibition Opening: “Anita Kunz: The Art of Collaboration” Saturday, Saturday, November 9, 5 – 7 pm**

Celebrate the U.S. premiere of Anita Kunz’s exhibition with the artist and a panel of her creative collaborators, including Writer/Designer **Chip Kidd**, and NRM Curator **Jane Dini** for a conversation entitled “Anita Kunz: The Art of Collaboration.” The discussion will explore Kunz’s motivations for embarking upon her the project during the pandemic and how it was shaped by her friendship and collaboration with other artists. The conversation will be followed by a reception; signed books will be available in the Museum Store. Tickets are \$35 (free for NRM Members).

### **Background on Original Sisters as artistic and cultural project**

Original Sisters has its roots in Kunz’s long-standing engagement with women’s issues and her interest in women’s often unacknowledged contributions and experiences. Yet Kunz’s work as a top illustrator in a deadline-driven field left her with limited time to pursue a personal artistic project of this scope. That changed with the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. Under stay-at-home orders in her Toronto studio, Kunz began researching historical and contemporary women whose stories inspired her, and creating evocative portraits based on available images. Working in pencil, pen, and watercolor in a standard page-size format, Kunz created a portrait a day for months. Each image depicted a woman’s distinctive appearance, clothing (including period dress), and occasionally objects relevant to her life, along with her name, sometimes as a reproduction of the woman’s actual signature, rendered above the portrait. Kunz’s criteria for her portrait selections focused on women whose social, political, cultural, or scientific contributions have been underrecognized and who have shown determination and personal bravery in pursuing their work, often against steep odds. Subjectively, Kunz described feeling a visceral sense that the woman in question “should be known.”

When Kunz had created about 150 portraits through her daily practice, she showed them to her friend Chip Kidd, a Pantheon graphic editor, who encouraged her to gather them in a book. Kunz did, and her 2021 book, [\*Original Sisters: Portraits of Tenacity and Courage\*](#), published by Pantheon, presents the “first 150” of her ongoing portrait series, many of which are included as original artworks in Norman Rockwell Museum’s 2024-25 exhibition, along with subsequently created works. The book’s title is meant to evoke the shared experiences across women’s lives, as well as to pay respect to the lineages that link women’s contributions and achievements through time. The book is introduced by writer and social commentator Roxane Gay, who highlights the project’s cultural and historical importance. Gay notes that Kunz’s portraits offer “possibility and promise . . . . You will be introduced to many of these women for the first time, because history is rarely kind to women until it is forced to be.”

In the three years since the book’s publication, the project has continued to engage and inspire Kunz. Researching potential subjects and creating portraits of changemaking women, often at a rate of one portrait per day, has become an ongoing aspect of Kunz’s artistic practice. As noted earlier, the artist has amassed an oeuvre that numbers approximately 450 portraits to-date. Kunz believes that the universe of subjects for her portraits is “potentially infinite”—given the vastness and variety of women’s contributions across history and world-culture. She plans to continue creating portraits into the foreseeable future, and hopes other artists may be inspired to “pick up” the project so as to expand the “pantheon of extraordinary women” available to the public imagination.

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## Background on Anita Kunz

Anita Kunz was born in 1956 in Toronto, Canada. She was influenced by the illustration work of her uncle, Robert Kunz, who showed her that illustration had the potential to convey powerful social messages. Kunz graduated from the Ontario College of Art in 1978. Throughout her distinguished career, Kunz has contributed her work to magazines, design firms, book publishers, and advertising agencies in Germany, Japan, Sweden, Norway, Canada, South Africa, Holland, Portugal, France and England. Her clients include *Time*, *Rolling Stone*, *Vanity Fair*, *The New Yorker*, *GQ*, *The New York Times*, Sony Music, Random House Publishing, and many others. Kunz's paintings and sculptures have been displayed in museums and galleries in the US, England, Italy, Japan, and other venues worldwide. In 2003, Kunz was the first woman and the first Canadian to have a solo show at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Kunz has received numerous awards and honors, including being appointed Officer of the Order of Canada, Canada's highest civilian honor, in 2009, and being inducted into the Hall of Fame by the Society of Illustrators' Museum of National Illustration in 2017. She is the author of three books, including her most recent, *Original Sisters: Portraits of Tenacity and Courage* (2021).

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## About Norman Rockwell Museum

Norman Rockwell Museum illuminates the power of American illustration art to reflect and shape society, and advances the enduring values of kindness, respect, and social equity portrayed by Norman Rockwell. A comprehensive resource relating to Norman Rockwell and the art of illustration, American visual culture, and the role of published imagery in society, the Museum holds the world's largest and most significant collection of art and archival materials relating to Rockwell's life and work, while also preserving, interpreting, and exhibiting a growing collection of art by other American illustrators throughout history. The Museum engages diverse audiences through onsite and traveling exhibitions, as well as publications, arts, and humanities programs, including the Rockwell Center for American Visual Studies, and comprehensive online resources.

*NRM is open year-round, six days a week; closed Wednesdays. Admission is charged, Free for Kids & Teens. For details, visit the Museum online at [www.NRM.org](http://www.NRM.org).*

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Images and interviews available upon request.

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