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On December 6, Freeman's will have the privilege of presenting for the first time at auction, **WAKE UP, AMERICA!** — an important sociopolitical canvas executed at the onset of WWII in 1941 by **ROCKWELL KENT** (1882-1971).

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OPPOSITE

**Rockwell Kent (1882-1971)**  
*Wake Up, America!*, 1941  
oil on burlap.  
34 x 44 in. (86.4 x 111.8cm)  
\$200,000-300,000

# WAKE UP AMERICA!

CONCEIVED AS A RALLYING CRY to urge the United States to partake in the global conflict, *Wake Up, America!* stands out as one of Rockwell Kent's boldest images — a visual call for action and plea against government neutrality which still resonates, even today, within the agitated political climate.

Kent involved himself in politics early on in life, joining the Socialist Party of America in 1904. A supporter of the rights of the laborers, as well as a fervent anti-militarist activist, Kent became increasingly involved as WWII approached. As expert Scott Ferris pointed out, *Wake up, America!* marks “the artist's return to the fight against fascism, after the world failed to address its rising viperous head during the Spanish Civil War — a position that required the artist to temporarily relinquish his anti-war stance in an effort to defeat the evils of fascism.”

In a ravaged landscape surrounded by flames stands an Amazon-like figure, who represents the Spirit of War. Armed with a rifle, she is ready for battle, and encour-

ages a lethargic citizen, America itself, to join her. In a 1994 letter to the then-owner of the painting, Kent's widow, Sally Kent Gorton, summarized the composition of the painting, writing, “*That the recumbent male is indifferent to what is going on in the world, specifically the ever growing menace of Hitlerism: the bombing of London; the invasion Czechoslovakia; etc. etc. etc. Norway. The USSR. To these invasions the armed female is responding with the cry: Wake Up America! And, as you know, the United States entered the war in 1941. Roosevelt having finally capitulated on his determination that we should not participate.*”

When the work first publicly appeared in the exhibition “Know and Defend America,” Kent wrote in the accompanying catalogue: “*This was painted six months ago. We've woken up now. We'll stay awake; not only to complete the job that has been forced upon us, but to take up with renewed energy the cultivation of our own garden for the realization, at long last, of the Life, Liberty and Happiness for everyone that can give meaning to our faith in democracy.*” ■

