

## Paper Mache for 6-13-25 by David Read

With baseball again top of mind in Marysville thanks to the arrival of the new team, the Yuba-Sutter High Wheelers, I thought it would be fun to consider some of the famous works of art inspired by the great American pastime. My earliest introduction was, not surprisingly, that iconic 1888 poem by Ernest Thayer, "Casey at the Bat," in which the overconfident Casey fails to deliver when his team needed him the most. "But there is not joy in Mudville - might Casey has struck out." Hey, I did that from memory!

Baseball is integral to American culture, and its influence extends well beyond the ballpark into the world of art. From paintings and photography to sculpture, literature, film, and music, baseball has inspired generations of artists to capture its drama, rhythm, and symbolism. The sport's connection to nostalgia, teamwork, and national identity makes it fertile ground for artistic exploration. One of the most famous painters to capture the essence of baseball was Norman Rockwell. His illustrations for *The Saturday Evening Post*, such as *The Rookie* and *Tough Call*, are iconic portrayals of baseball as a deeply human experience filled with anticipation, decision, and emotion. Sculpture has also honored the heroes and great moments of baseball. Statues of players like Jackie Robinson, Babe Ruth, and Willie Mays honor their athleticism and cultural impact. There is even a new solar powered baseball sculpture in Las Vegas that lights up at night. These works immortalize baseball's legends and the values they represent, including perseverance, equality, and courage.

In literature, Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* and the Robert Redford movie it inspired stands out as a classic American story that uses baseball as a mythic backdrop for a story about talent, failure, and redemption. The novel *Shoeless Joe*, the basis for the movie *Field of Dreams*, delves into memory, reconciliation, and the magic of baseball as a vehicle for healing and connection across generations. Photography has also portrayed baseball's aesthetic appeal. Photographer Charles Conlon's black-and-white portraits, like his famous image of Ty Cobb sliding into third base, freeze fleeting moments of intensity and motion, emphasizing the raw beauty of the game. Baseball cards act as miniatures adorned with staged portraits and action shots of players. One of my favorites is the famous photo by Nat Fein titled "Babe Ruth Bows Out." He captured the image at Yankee Stadium in 1948, during a ceremony where Ruth's number 3 was retired. It won Fein the Pulitzer Prize for Photography. Ruth had not actually played for the Yankees since 1934 when he left and played his final season with the Boston Braves.

Baseball has influenced music as well. From the upbeat tune of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," to John Fogarty's "Centerfield," or Bruce Springsteen's "Glory Days," songs about baseball often tap into themes of youth, time passing, and shared memories. Film has also embraced baseball with movies like *Bull Durham*, *A League of Their Own*, and *Moneyball*, each portraying different aspects of the game—from its romance and humor to its business side and its struggle for inclusivity. 42 with the late, great Chadwick Boseman, takes a hard look at racism in America as it tells the story of Jackie Robinson who was as much a star off the field as on as the first black major league player. Baseball continues to be a muse for artists in all genres, a mirror of society, and a stage on which the American spirit plays out. It remains a powerful symbol of dreams, failure, tradition, and hope that resonate deeply at the confluence of art and sports, something our schools might keep in mind when setting curriculum priorities.