

ANDREW WYETH'S TEMPERA PAINTINGS

Over a prolific career that included being considered one of the twentieth-century's foremost watercolorists, Wyeth is perhaps best known for his work in the ancient medium of egg tempera. In this challenging painting method, which he learned from the fifteenth-century treatise *Il Libro d'Arte* by Cennino Cennini, crushed mineral colors are suspended in a mixture of egg yolk and distilled water, mixed fresh daily and applied to a prepared rigid surface in successive fine layers.

There was a wider tempera revival in the 20th century, which included artists like Mark Rothko and Jacob Lawrence, but Wyeth was uncommonly committed to weeks or months of work to build up a picture in the medium in which oil and acrylic paints readymade in tubes offered far more immediate results. The benefit of such an undertaking was a highly refined enamel-like surface that served the artist's goals best for certain subjects, while he opted for the freedom and spontaneity of watercolor for others.

Pennsylvania Landscape, 1942

Tempera on panel

Brandywine Museum of Art, Bequest of Miss
Remsen Yerkes, 1982



This visionary portrait of a sycamore tree is a composite of multiple views, a fusion that is representative of an artistic method that was fundamentally poetic rather than photographic. The building visible through

the branches is the eighteenth-century Gideon Gilpin House that was thought to have been used as the Marquis de Lafayette's headquarters during the Battle of Brandywine in 1777. This context was of great interest to Wyeth, who was passionate about the Revolutionary area since his childhood in this landscape so rich in history. As such, *Pennsylvania Landscape* is a classic statement of Wyeth's singular voice for which past and present, observed and the imagined, meld.

Woodshed, 1944

Tempera on panel

Brandywine Museum of Art, Bequest of C.

Porter Schutt, 1995



Like *Pennsylvania Landscape* nearby, this stark painting is a good example of just how experimental the compositions of Wyeth's highly refined works in tempera can be. The subject was one he stumbled on at the

Kuerner Farm, the inspiration for nearly 1,000 artworks by Wyeth and the site of many of his reflections of the presence of death in life, a core concern in his work.

Night Sleeper, 1979

Tempera on panel

Collection of the Wyeth Foundation for American Art



This monumental work is a portrait of both the Wyeth's dog, Nell, and of Brinton's Mill, the eighteenth-century industrial site that Betsy James Wyeth restored and repurposed into a timeless family home in a landscape rich in associations with the Revolutionary War. Like so many of Wyeth's works, the view is visionary rather than photographic, combining views of multiple sites in Chadds Ford with memories of childhood trips to Maine summers on overnight trains.

Adam, 1963

Tempera on panel

Brandywine Museum of Art, Gift of Anson

McC. Beard, Jr., 2002



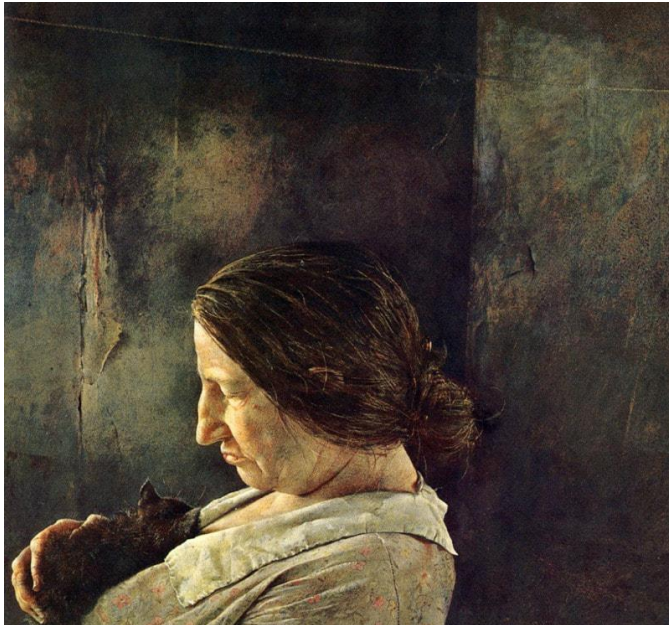
Wyeth had a sustained relationship with Adam Johnson for over thirty years and would visit him on his frequent walks through the open spaces of Chadds Ford. In an extensive oral history, the artist recalls being drawn to Johnson as an imposing figure and

one with a steady, confident presence. Johnson was a prominent member of the Chadds Ford African-American community centered on the church formed by Reverend Lydia A. Archie, another subject Wyeth painted often.

Miss Olson, 1952

Tempera on panel

Private Collection



Four years after Andrew Wyeth made Christina Olson iconic in *Christina's World* (Museum of Modern Art), he created this tender portrait of her. With extraordinary sensitivity to a seemingly straightforward subject – a woman and a cat in the corner of a worn room – he invites us to reflect on the stories this person and place could tell.

Snow Hill, 1989

Tempera on panel

Collection of the Wyeth Foundation for
American Art



Snow Hill is both fantasy and memorial, a visual summation of the iconic places and people of Chadds Ford that occupied Wyeth for the previous fifty-five years. He brings them all together in a re-imagined composite

view as if from the top of Kuerner's Hill, a key recurring motif in his work. By so overtly combining disparate people and places, this monumental panel clarifies Wyeth's fundamentally transformative rather than merely replicative method.

Depicted to the left are the railroad tracks where Wyeth's father N.C. Wyeth was killed in 1945, and the Kuerner farmhouse and barn, now owned by the Brandywine. Some of his most inspiring models follow: Karl Kuerner (dressed in his World War I uniform) holds the hand of his wife Anna, who is in turn linked to Bill Loper, whose prosthetic hook is held by Helga Testorf. Rounding the circle is Allan Lynch holding the hand of

Adam Johnson, who is depicted elsewhere in this gallery. Visible just beyond Helga Testorf is Reverend Lydia Archie's octagonal church, with Adam Johnson's shed and haystack to the far right.