ANDREW WYETH: HUMAN NATURE

One of Andrew Wyeth's most significant artistic commitments was to the subject of the human body. The rarely seen paintings and drawings on view in this exhibition are the work of an artist who was aware of, and engaged with, the history and contemporary practice of figure painting. Case studies include early figure drawings made in his father's studio, self-portraits, intimate depictions of close family members, a little-known body of commissioned portraits, a broad representation of his mature practice in tempera and watercolor, and nudes. These

artworks, drawn largely from the collections of the Brandywine Museum of Art and the Wyeth Foundation for American Art, reveal the working methods of an artist who sought through his portrait sitters ways of evoking the unseen and unspoken.

All the works in this exhibition are by Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009). *Andrew Wyeth: Human Nature* is made possible by the Brandywine's ongoing partnership with the Wyeth Foundation for American Art.

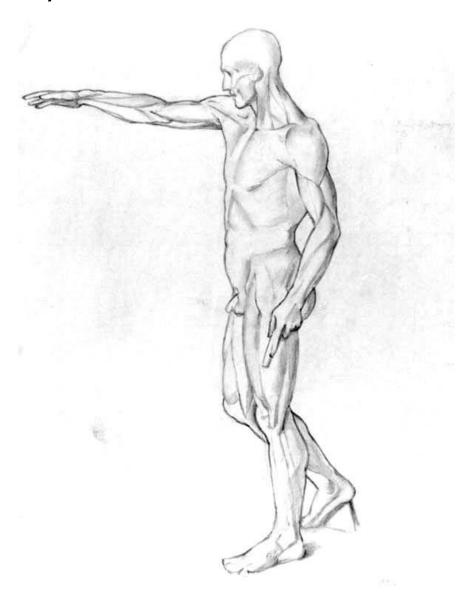
LEARNING THE HUMAN FORM

Andrew Wyeth did not receive a conventional artistic education beyond the home. However, he did get significant training from his father, the artist-illustrator N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945), some of whose methods are on view here. Central to this home-schooling was the study of art history through the family's extensive library, including making drawings in response to images in books and plaster sculptures. Live models were also brought in to pose for the student artist. In a reminiscence about this process years later,

he offers some insight into his motivations for figure painting:

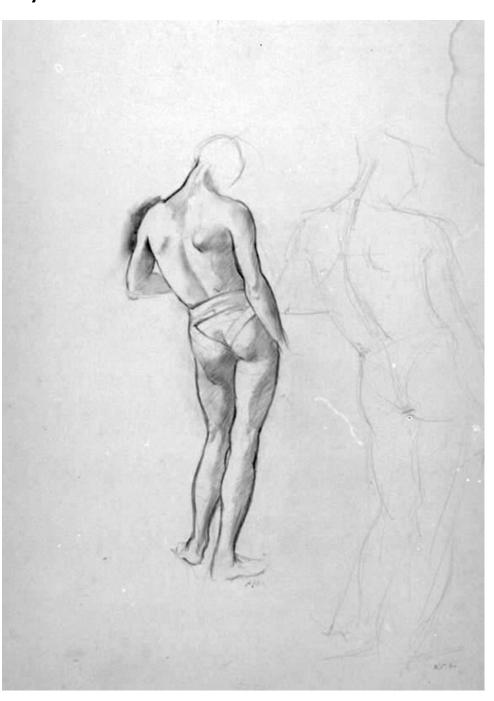
The local people would come for maybe three, four hours a day and would pose in a position I would fix them in, and I'd work in oil or perhaps charcoal. . . . When I'd tell them to have a rest for fifteen minutes or so, I'd really begin to work. That's when they would sit or stand or relax in odd, truly human positions. That was really the human figure. . . . I was getting something absolutely real, akin to human nature.

Untitled, 1935
Pencil on paper
Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B2272r



Another method of Andrew Wyeth's figure study was sketching from plaster casts. The tabletop-scale plaster that inspired this drawing, which remains in the Wyeth Foundation collection, is an écorché, or flayed figure, which depicts the full human musculature without skin.

Untitled, 1935
Pencil on paper
Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B2280



This drawing, presumably of a live model, shows a figure in the rest position known as contrapposto, a classic pose in Western art associated with ancient Greek and Roman statuary. This sheet evinces the hands-on nature of Andrew Wyeth's training because it shows both his drawing at left and his father's demonstration depiction at right.

Untitled, 1937
Pencil on paper
Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B0419



The nude figure depicted twice is a sketch after a Leonardo da Vinci original illustrated in a book N.C. Wyeth had given his son for Christmas in 1936, shown nearby. The face is that of his older brother, the engineer and inventor Nathaniel Wyeth (1911–1990), who was married in January of this year. The inscription reads "Nat before the wedding with Lupe, 1937."

CASE

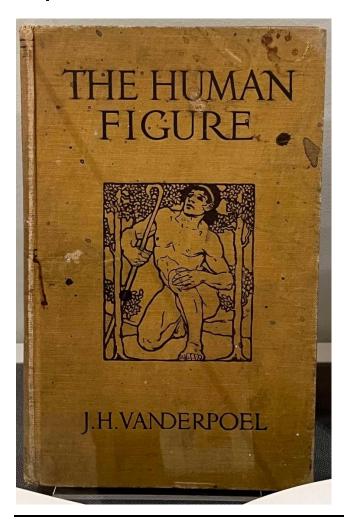
Above Left

John H. Vanderpoel (1857 – 1911)

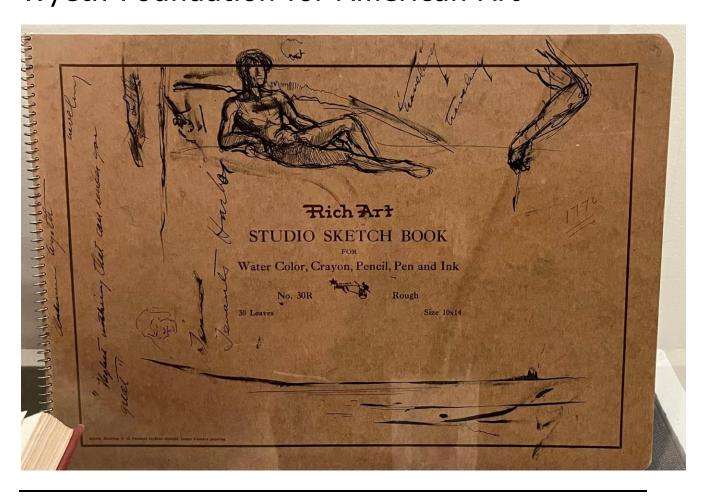
The Human Figure, 11th edition, Chicago:

The Inland Printer Company, 1921

Wyeth Foundation for American Art



Above Right
Andrew Wyeth (1917 – 2009)
Sketchbook, 1938
Pen and ink on board
Wyeth Foundation for American Art



Vanderpoel's *The Human Figure* is one of the many books in Andrew & Betsy Wyeth's library that discuss the depiction of the human form and likely contributed to his approach to the artworks in this exhibition. The connection is even more direct between the drawing shown in a 1931 collection of reproductions of the work at Leonardo da Vinci and one of Wyeth's student drawings after this very page nearby. The sketchbook shows his figure study process unconstrained by the fine paper within and spilling even on to the cover of the pad.

Left

Heinrich Bodmer (1885 – 1950)

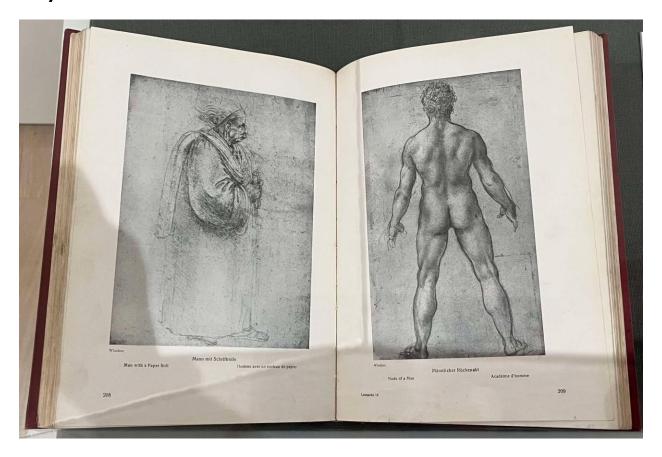
Leonardo: Des Meisters Gemalde und

Zeichnungan (Leonardo: The Master's

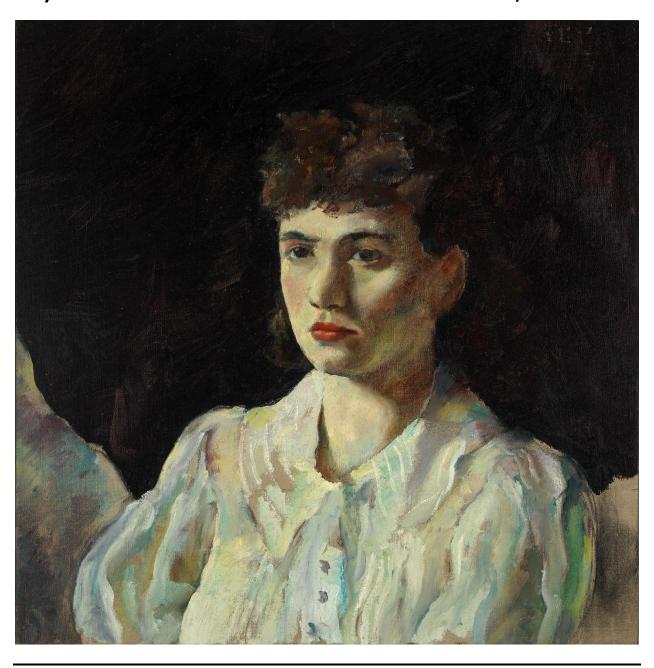
Paintings and Drawings), Stuttgart:

Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1931

Wyeth Foundation for American Art



Ann Wyeth in White, 1936
Oil on canvas
Wyeth Foundation for American Art, Oil 53

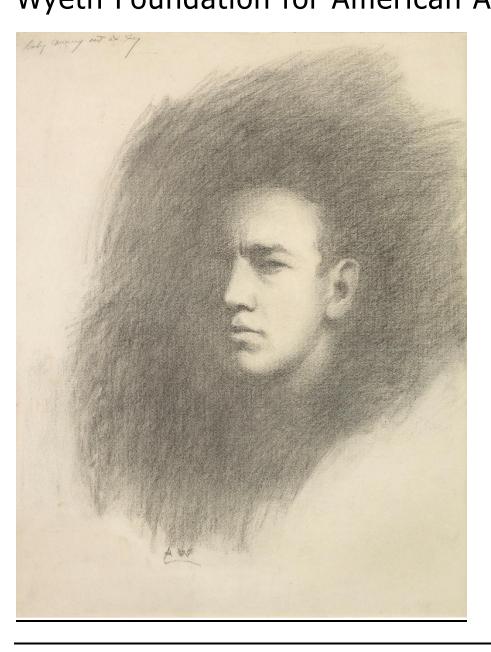


As a young artist, Wyeth made a few dozen works in oil on canvas before abandoning this medium for good. There is a stark difference between the two portraits of pianist and composer Ann Wyeth, the artist's sister, made three years apart. This depiction is handled very freely, in contrast to the more tightly painted tempera to the right, in which the artist and, by extension, the viewer loom over the subject in a most unsettling way while Ann Wyeth ignores our gaze in her peripheral vision.

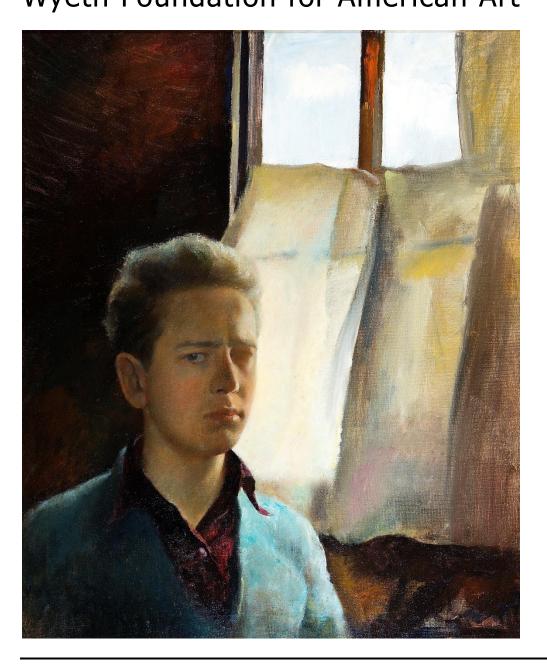
Ann, 1939Egg tempera on panelWyeth Foundation for American Art, B1797



Self-Portrait (Andy Coming Out of Fog), 1936 Charcoal on paper Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B2659



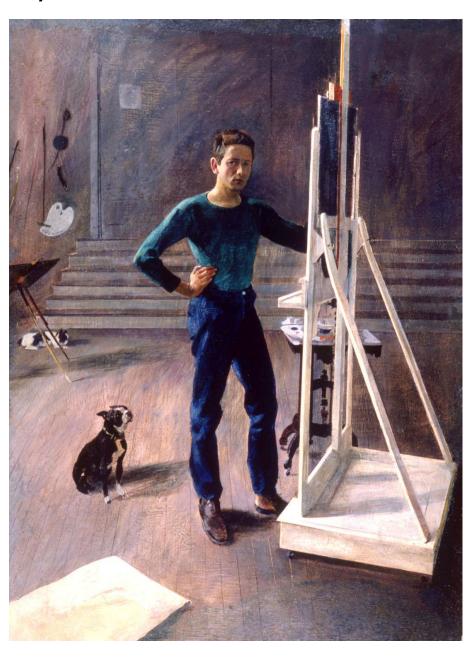
Self-Portrait in N.C. Wyeth Studio, 1935 Oil on canvas Wyeth Foundation for American Art



Self-Portrait, 1939

Egg tempera on panel

Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B0008



This bold depiction of a 22-year-old artist marks a kind of conclusion to Andrew Wyeth's early period of studying figural work throughout art history and from his own appearance in the mirror. The palpable confidence that radiates from the painting suggests the artist's early success. By this time, he had already had broad exposure in Philadelphia and New York and one critic had called him the next Winslow Homer.

My Mother, 1968

Drybrush watercolor on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B2429



Wyeth's intimate depictions of immediate family members speak to his overarching goal of capturing human nature in candid and revealing moments. This depiction of his mother, Carolyn Bockius Wyeth, is a good example of the mode of watercolor that the family called "drybrush," in which most moisture is squeezed off the brush to create incredibly fine lines, not dissimilar to what the artist could achieve in tempera.

Untitled, 1954
Watercolor on paper
Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B0336



The majority of Andrew Wyeth's selfportraits come from his most focused
period of figure study in the 1930s, so this
is a rare later example. The artist used a
mirror to capture his own likeness in the
attic of the eighteenth-century John Chads
House, associated with the tavernkeeper
and ferryman who gave Chadds Ford its
name.

My Sister, 1967
Pencil on paper
Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B2643



Tom and His Granddaughter, 1959 Pencil on paper Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B0855

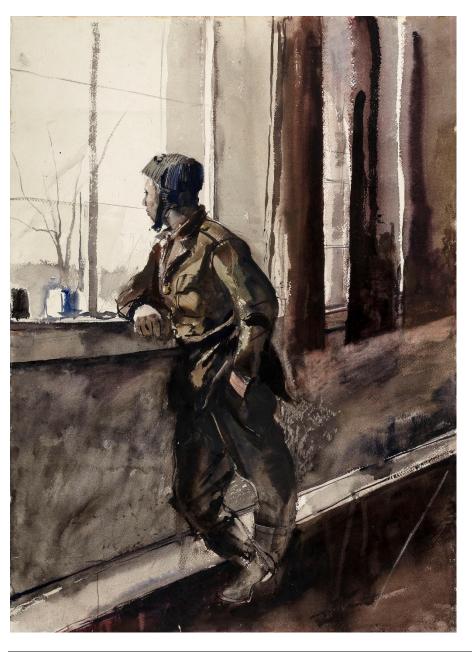


This pair of depictions of a Chadds Ford neighbor, Tom Clark, shows how Andrew Wyeth broke a body down into its constituent parts in order to build it back up for his major works, in this case the 1960 tempera *That Gentleman* (Dallas Museum of Art).

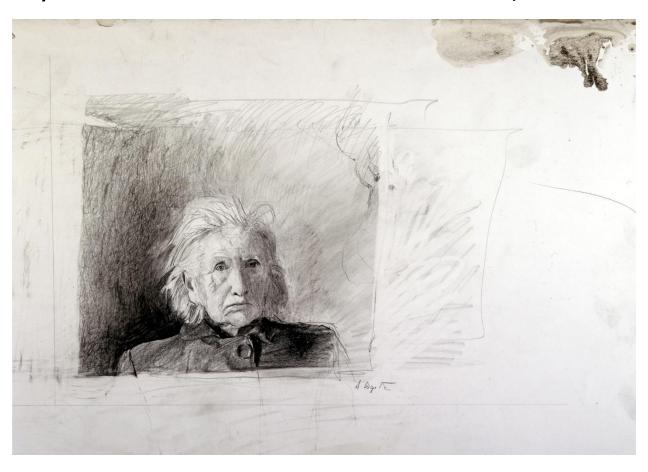
Winter, 1946 Study, 1946 Drybrush watercolor and pencil on paper Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B0632



Winter Rain, 1946
Watercolor on paper
Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B0148



The Kuerners Study, 1971 Pencil on paper Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B2040

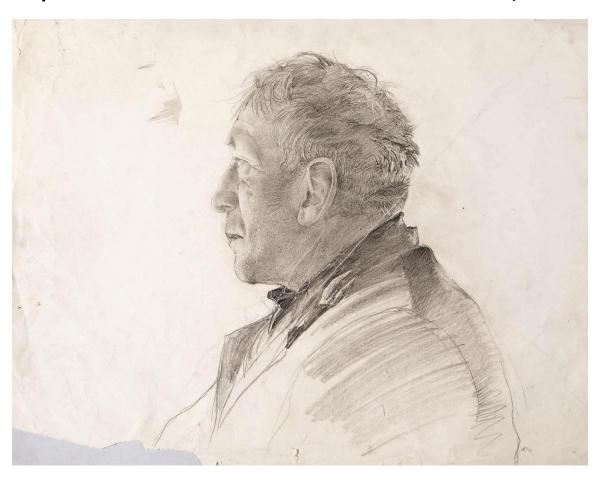


The Kuerner Farm, located only a mile away, and its German-immigrant inhabitants were a consistent source of

In contrast to Karl Kuerner, who was content to linger for the meticulous drawing nearby, Anna Kuerner, his wife, was a far more elusive and wary subject who required all the speed of figure study the artist could muster.

This creative period is the focus of the new book and nationally traveling exhibition Andrew Wyeth at Kuerner Farm: The Eye of the Earth, which will be on view after Human Nature in this gallery from June 22 to September 28, 2025.

Karl Study, 1948Pencil on paperWyeth Foundation for American Art, B0648



W.S. Carpenter Study, 1954

Pencil on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B0674

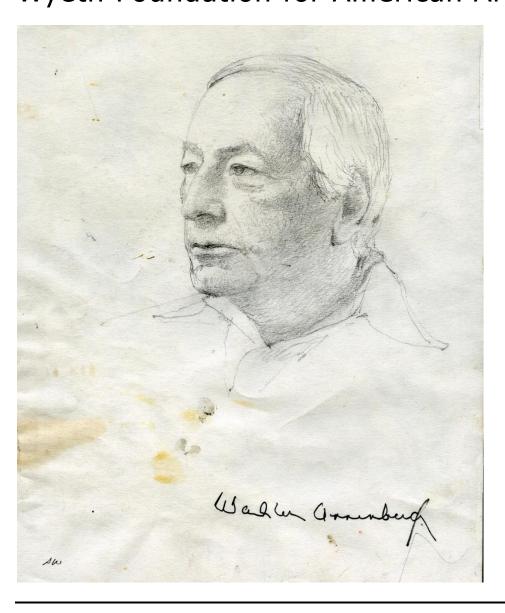


COMMISSIONED PORTRAITS

Andrew Wyeth's painting practice was characterized by creating works without specific buyers in mind, so the rare instances in which he accepted a commission to paint a portrait clarify some features of his response to the human form. We might ask ourselves if his work suffered when he was required to satisfy a wealthy patron rather than to paint whatever he pleased. Preparatory works related to three of his lifetime tally of no more than ten commissioned portraits are presented here. Regardless of the constraints the artist may have found in

the circumstances of a specific commission, significant psychological studies emerged even in this outlying body of work.

Walter Annenberg Study, 1978 Pencil on paper Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B2514



Winterthur Study, 1951 Watercolor on paper Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B0658



The Children's Doctor, 1949

Egg tempera on panel

Gift of Betsy James Wyeth, 1980. 80.29.1



This unusual depiction of pediatrician and family friend Margaret Handy presents a person of action in multiple moments: pausing contemplatively, and then on to her next obligation with the attribute of her profession in hand, a physician's bag. These successive frames suggest Wyeth's passion for film and awareness of early Renaissance religious paintings that often include multiple episodes in a story within a single panel. Handy gave the artist a similar doctor's bag, which he would use to hold his pigments for years to follow.

Dana Talley, 1976

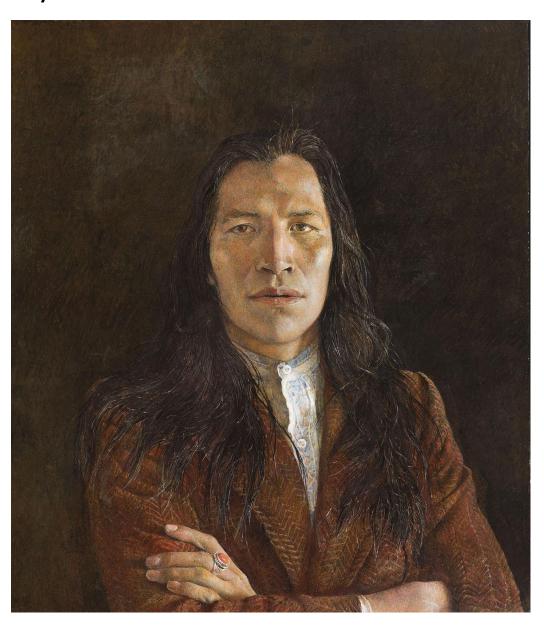
Egg tempera on panel

Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B2685



A rare chance to see an unfinished tempera, *Dana Talley* clarifies the successive layers required to build a picture in this time-consuming medium. The model was not available to complete the portrait sessions, so Andrew Wyeth abandoned the painting. The pose closely follows that of a figure by Botticelli who appears in a reproduction in the artist's studio.

Nogeeshik, 1972
Egg tempera on panel
Wyeth Foundation for American Art

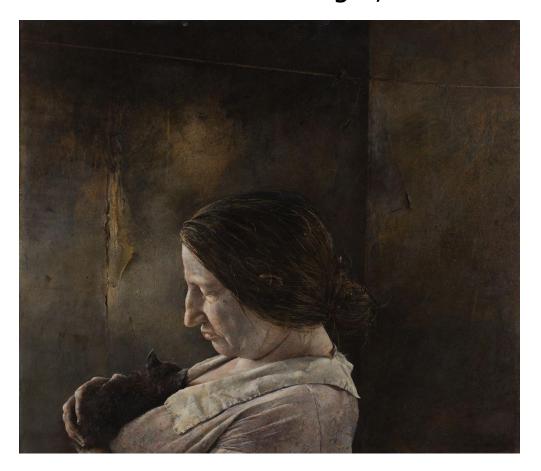


In contrast to the majority of Wyeth's portraits, in which the subjects avert their gaze, here Nogeeshik Aquash confronts the artist, and us, directly. Aquash was a member of the Ojibwe of Walpole Island First Nation in Ontario and an active participant in the American Indian Movement's Indigenous justice efforts. In the same year as the artist encountered him in Chadds Ford and requested to make this work, Aquash was a participant in the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in Washington, DC.

Miss Olson, 1952

Egg tempera on panel

Gift of Alida R. Messinger, 2024. 2024.6



Four years after Andrew Wyeth depicted Christina Olson outdoors in the iconic *Christina's World* (Museum of Modern Art, New York), in *Miss Olson*, he hones in on

her profile in an intimate interior of the Olson House. This is a major statement of what is possible in the tempera medium, which allows the artist to capture nearly every strand of the kitten's fur, Olson's hair, and the subtle textures of the wall. The composition suggests his awareness of other artists who have used this pose to great effect, like James McNeill Whistler and Johannes Vermeer. When asked how her appearance could be so different in the two depictions, Wyeth replied, "It would be possible to paint all the people I've portrayed so far again and each would probably be different. Don't we all have many sides?"

Maga's Daughter, 1966
Egg tempera on panel
Wyeth Foundation for American Art

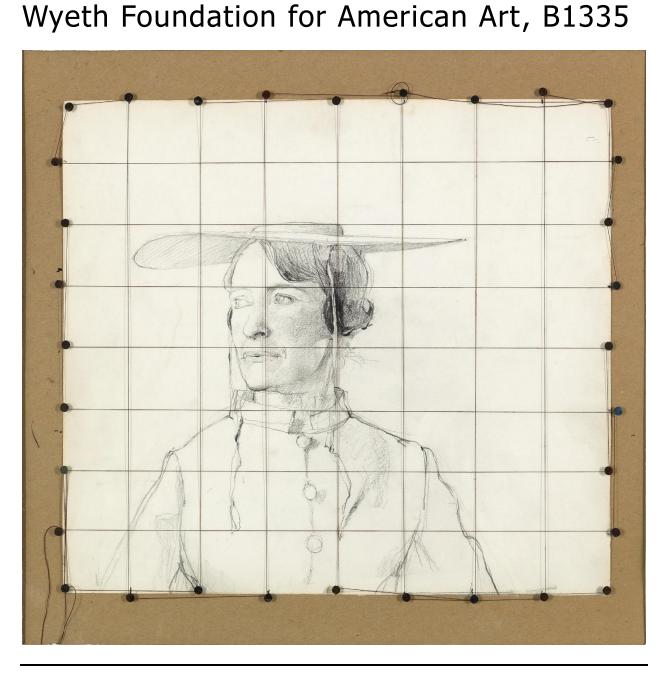


In this portrait of Betsy James Wyeth, the artist's wife and key creative partner, Andrew Wyeth enters into dialogue with the austerity of Dutch portraiture, including the works of Rembrandt van Rijn, one of the artist's touchstones. She wears a Quaker cap acquired at a local antique shop, evidence of the Wyeths' deep interest in the Quaker history of this region that infused many aspects of their collaboration. Maga was a family nickname for her mother, Elizabeth James.

String and Nails, Study for Maga's

Daughter, 1966

Pencil on paper



When Andrew Wyeth's sketches had been finalized for a composition in tempera, he sometimes created a grid to transfer elements of drawing onto a panel in preparation for painting. Many artists working in traditional media employ such techniques, but these often result in damage to the drawing. The "string and nails" process allows for a grid without affecting the surface, thus preserving drawings that are beautiful in their own right, evidence of the value Wyeth placed on his studies.

Siri, 1970

Egg tempera on panel
Purchased with funds provided by John T.
Dorrance Jr.; Mr. and Mrs. Felix du Pont;
Mr. and Mrs. James P. Mills; Mr. and Mrs.

Bayard Sharp; two anonymous donors; and The Pew Memorial Trust, 1975. 75.1.3



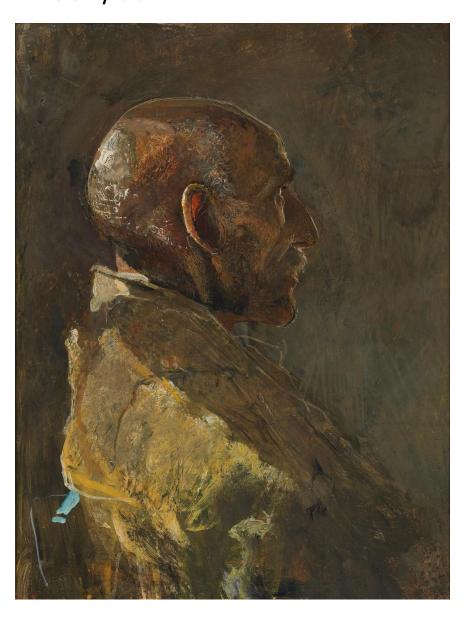
Andrew Wyeth started painting Siri Erickson, a member of a Finnish American household in Cushing, Maine, not long after the 1968 death of the artist's best-known model, Christina Olson, who is depicted in Miss Olson nearby. Wyeth described Erickson as "a burst of life, like spring coming through the ground, a rebirth of something fresh out of death." The young sitter's shirt includes the traditional embroidery, or ribbonwork, associated with the Indigenous Sámi people of northern Finland and Sweden. The Wyeths had the frame made to match the depicted fireplace molding.

That Gentleman Study, 1960

Egg tempera on panel

Wyeth Foundation for American Art,

B2057/0012



James Loper, 1952
Egg tempera on panel
Gift of Harry G. Haskell Jr., 1971. 71.5.2



Joyce Hill Stoner, 1999 Watercolor on paper Private collection



THE MODEL'S PERSPECTIVE

In a gallery full of depictions of the many facets of Wyeth's models, one might wonder what it felt like to be painted by the artist. By all accounts, it was not a comfortable experience. Some speak to the feeling of being seen right through. Others describe how jarring it was when the intimate encounter of artist and subject was finished and he moved on swiftly to other inspirations.

Dr. Joyce Hill Stoner, a leading art conservator who worked closely with the Wyeths, shared memories of the

experience of being Wyeth's model for a work on view nearby:

He first tried sketches with me in a black hat and then abandoned that and would say, "Let's go to lunch." I, of course, thought, "Oh no! This is the end!" But then on another day, he called me, worked, and finished the most beautiful and detailed pencil sketch and then said, "Now I will make it a watercolor," and I wanted to say, "Oh no! It's beautiful as it is!" But he painted the watercolor, not ever allowing me to look directly at it, so I would sneak little peeks when he wasn't looking. Again he just closed his drawing pad and said,

"Let's go to lunch"— and I never knew if it was finished or abandoned until he presented to me the finished watercolor, framed, for Christmas! He always kept his models on tenterhooks.

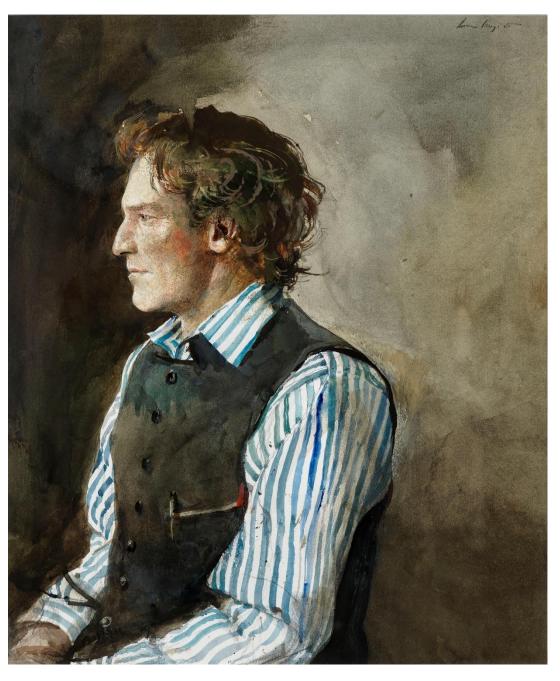
Tundra Study, 1993
Watercolor on paper
Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B3194



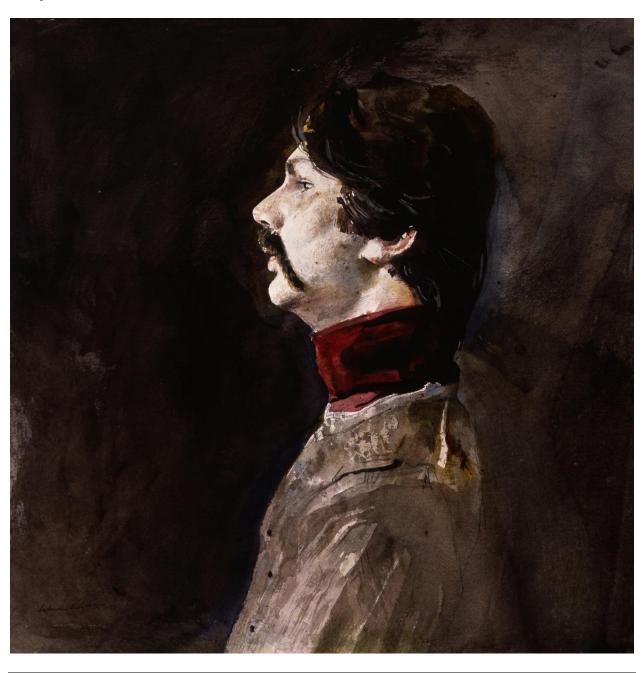
My Son, 1993

Drybrush watercolor on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B3462



Handlebar, 1989
Watercolor on paper
Wyeth Foundation for American Art



Glass House Study, 1991
Watercolor on paper
Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B3131



Willard, 1959Watercolor on paperWyeth Foundation for American Art, B1793



Adam, 1963
Egg tempera on panel
Gift of Anson McC. Beard Jr., 2002. 2002.9



Adam Johnson raised chickens and pigs a short walk from Andrew Wyeth's studio and was a vocal member of the pioneering Reverend Lydia Archie's church, another subject Wyeth painted repeatedly. By the time Wyeth made this major tempera that

reflects on the poverty in which Johnson lived and the precariousness of his improvised pigpen, they had known each other for some thirty years. Wyeth's kaleidoscopic method worked out small fragments of an image on dozens of separate sheets, like *Fur Hat*, gradually building up a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Fur Hat, I Study for Adam, 1963
Watercolor and pencil on paper
Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B1093



Roasted Chestnuts, 1956 Egg tempera on panel Gift of Mimi Haskell, 80.29.1



Neighbor, 2003
Pencil on paper
Wyeth Foundation for American Art



The neighbor portrayed here is Alan Messersmith, 47 years after Andrew Wyeth had depicted him in *Roasted Chestnuts*. Wyeth's extended relationships with his subjects were the norm rather than the exception in his place-based practice.

Man and the Moon Study, 1990 Watercolor and pencil on paper Wyeth Foundation for American Art, 3138

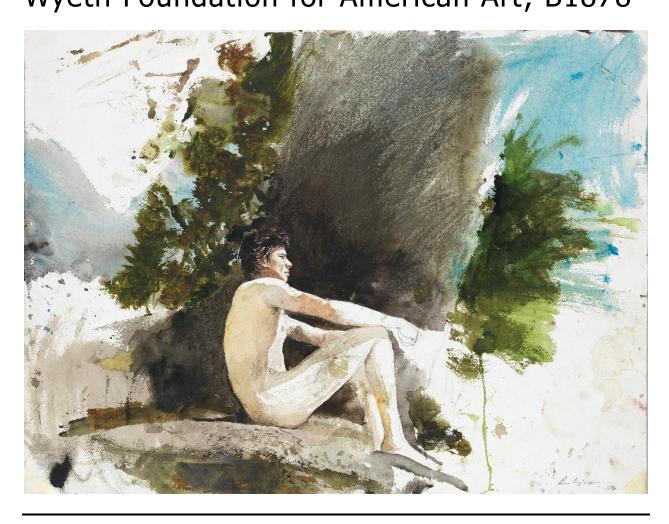


Andrew Wyeth painted a small number of male nudes throughout his career; this watercolor was a study for one of them. As with *The Swinger Study*, on view nearby, multiple meanings of "moon" were intended by the title Betsy Wyeth selected for the finished tempera. The subject of both works, Jimmy Lynch, said, of the experience of posing for Wyeth, "He extracts things out of you that most people can't get to. There's no words to describe the love you have toward yourself when you come out of it."

Beauty Mark Study, 1984
Watercolor on paper
Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B2715r



Undercover Study, 1970 Watercolor on paper Wyeth Foundation for American Art, B1878



THE WYETH FOUNDATION COLLECTION

All the works in this exhibition are drawn from the collection of the Wyeth Foundation for American Art. Through the estate plan of Betsy James Wyeth (1921 – 2020), the Brandywine Museum of Art has been entrusted with the management of approximately 7,000 artworks by Andrew Wyeth (1917 – 2009) that are owned by the Foundation, along with rare documents and books. In concert with the important Wyeth material in the Brandywine's permanent collection and archives, this newly public treasure trove presents a

unique opportunity for art lovers and scholars alike to engage with some of the most iconic works in the medium of egg tempera, like *Night Sleeper* and *Pentecost*, masterpieces of watercolor, like *Wolf Moon* and *The German*, and the preparatory drawings behind many of these well-known works.

Betsy Wyeth's plans are provided the creation of a new department, the Andrew & Betsy Wyeth Study Center, to oversee these holdings of the Foundation and to facilitate conservation, research, and exhibitions like this one across two collections care facilities. These offices are

open by appointment at both the
Brandywine and the Farnsworth Art
Museum in Rockland, Maine, a key partner
in our work to bring the highest
professional standards to the presentation
of one of the best-loved stories in American
Art.

Body and Soul: Soul, 1999

Drybrush watercolor on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art

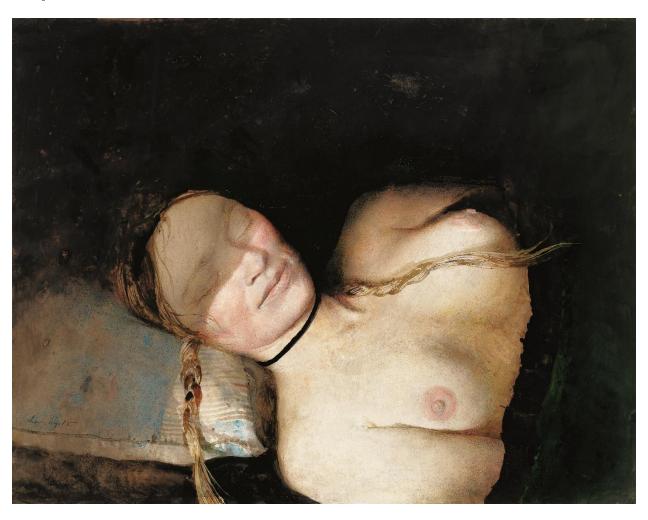


This is one side of a double-sided series depicting Senna Moore, a Chadds Ford local. The work was originally installed on a post planted in a millstone.

Night Shadow, 1978

Drybrush watercolor on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art



WYETH AND THE NUDE SUBJECT

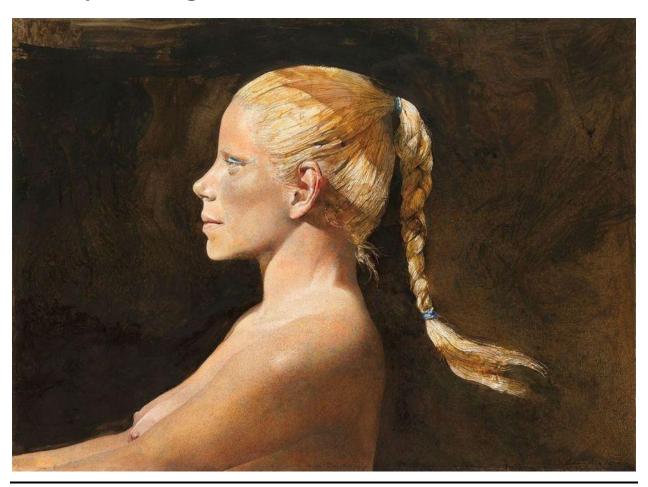
Andrew Wyeth made dozens of nudes over his career that are fundamental to understanding his sustained focus on the unseen and unspoken, and help to see what he learned from art history. Because of a widespread public fascination with the sustained inspiration he had taken from one key model who is often portrayed nude—Helga Testorf, the subject of *Night* Shadow, on view nearby—this body of work has sometimes been misunderstood. The watercolors on view here evoke the way in which the human body, too, served his

lifelong project of evoking that which lies beneath the surface of things.

Bareback, 1980

Drybrush watercolor on paper

Anonymous gift, 1988. 88.20



In 1980, Andrew Wyeth underwent hip surgery in Boston. His young nurse from the hospital, Pam Cowe, went to the artist's home in Maine during his recovery and he requested to paint her then.