

CROPSEY, WYETH, AND THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE TRADITION

Never before seen on any museum's walls, Jasper Francis Cropsey's monumental canvas *Autumn in the Ramapo Valley, Erie Railway* of 1873 has been hidden away in British private collections since the year it was made. Thanks to the generosity of the J. Jeffrey and Ann Marie Fox Foundation for American Art, Brandywine is proud to present the global museum debut of this rediscovered masterpiece from an era in which the major talents of the American art world were competing to make large-

format landscape paintings like this one. In dialogue with landscapes from the Brandywine and Wyeth Foundation collections, this forgotten artwork takes its rightful place in the history of American art.

The rediscovered Cropsey invites reflection on the evolution of the art of landscape painting in America, with a particular exploration of Andrew Wyeth's landscape practice. The genre of landscape experienced a particular flowering in the nineteenth century including a loose New York-centric group of artists that included Cropsey commonly known as the Hudson River

School and numerous art colony movements in places like New Hope, Pennsylvania and Woodstock, New York. Wyeth was aware of these traditions; owned books about, and works of art by, his predecessors in American landscape painting; and made groundbreaking landscapes of his own that engaged the history of this art-form.

George de Forest Brush (1855–1941)

Scene on the Nile, c. 1889

Oil on panel

Wyeth Foundation for American Art

Collection



Fitz Henry Lane (1804–1865)

Blood Family Homestead, 1859

Oil on canvas

Private Collection



Mary Blood Mellen (1819–1886)

Moonlight Seascape, Gloucester Harbor,

c. 1870s

Oil on canvas

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection



These three paintings by prominent 19th-century American artists belonged to Andrew and Betsy Wyeth. George de Forest Brush is known for his depictions of Native Americans, but he also made numerous landscapes, including this one thought to be from a trip to North Africa in 1889. Fitz Henry Lane was an influential painter primarily of marine scenes who was well represented in the Wyeths' library. Blood Family Homestead depicts the childhood home of his star pupil, Mary Blood Mellen. Mellen made numerous versions of this moonlit scene in Gloucester, identifiable by Ten Pound Island lighthouse at left.

Jasper Francis Cropsey (1823–1900)

Autumn on the Brandywine, 1887

Oil on canvas

Purchased with Museum funds, 1981 81.7



Cropsey is especially known for the depiction of the high colors of fall in the northeastern U.S., a phenomenon so foreign to British audiences that he had bright red maple leaves shipped to

London to be shown alongside his paintings to show that their brilliant color was not artistic license. While Autumn in the Ramapo Valley, Erie Railway was made at the peak of his career, the humbler size of Autumn on the Brandywine is consistent with market demands of his clientele in later years as tastes shifted away from grand scale visions in paint. Financial circumstances dictated that he move to a more modest house and limit his travels to the mid-Atlantic region, like the trip to the Brandywine Valley that produced this painting.

William Trost Richards (1833–1905)

*The Valley of the Brandywine, Chester
County (September), 1886–1887*

Oil on canvas

Purchased through a grant from the
Mabel Pew Myrin Trust, 1986



William Trost Richards created a series of paintings of farms in Chester County, where he settled in 1884, across the cycles of the year, here emphasizing the tiny figures amid the vastness of the natural world. A student of Paul Weber, whose work is on view nearby, Richards gained an international reputation for evocative forest interiors and scenes of crashing surf.

Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902)

Coast of California, 1870s

Oil on paper mounted on canvas

Richard M. Scaife Bequest, 2015

2016.11.2



Bierstadt was one of a very few artists who kept pace with Cropsey at the top of the American art world in the 1860s and 70s, competing for the new industrial fortunes being spent on paintings of imperial scale. This oil study made in the open air is a trace of the roots of his practice in on-site sketching, while he would become best known for large format paintings that bear direct comparison with the big Cropsey. Donner Lake from the Summit was completed earlier in the same year, 1873, for another tycoon in celebration of the completion of his own railroad through the scene it depicted.

Thomas Hill (1829–1908)

View on the Susquehanna River, 1867

Oil on canvas mounted on board

Gift of Mrs. A. DeWitt Smith, 2003

2003.13.1



This painting by an artist better known for his depictions of what is now Yosemite National Park was recently identified as one of a pair depicting areas along the Susquehanna River in northeastern Pennsylvania. Cropsey also depicted this region in one of his seven-foot canvases, *Valley of Wyoming*.

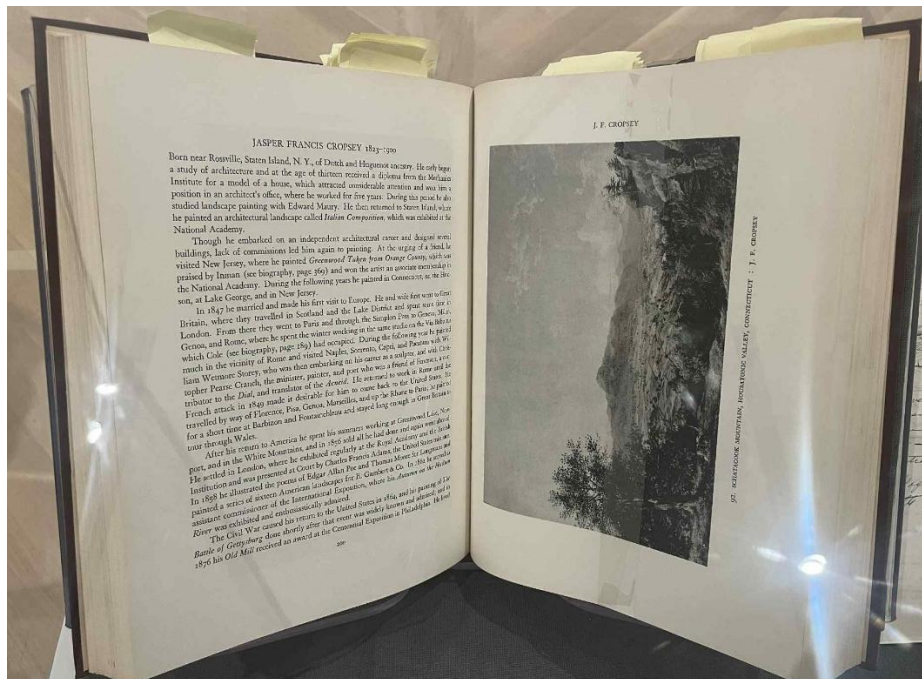
CASE OBJECTS

John I.H. Baur et al

*Maxim and Martha Karolik Collection of
American Paintings, 1815-1865,*

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,
1949

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection



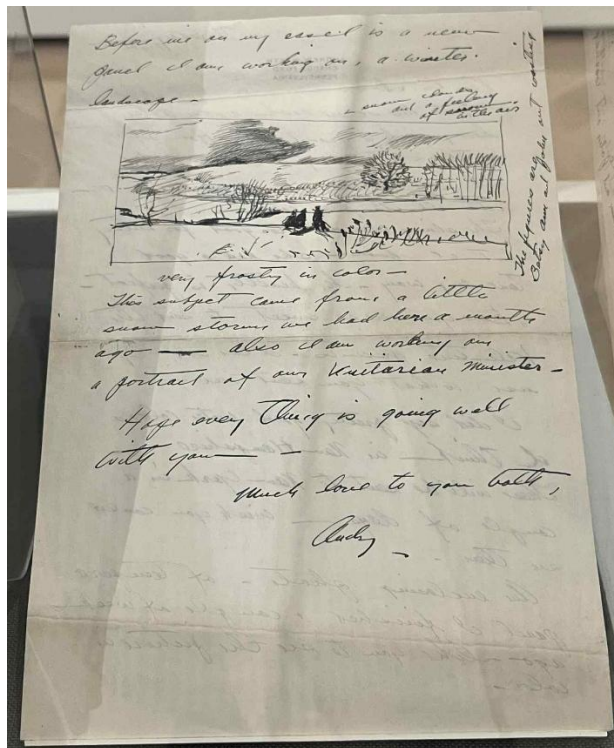
Andrew Wyeth (1917-2009)

Letter to Merle and Elizabeth James,

February 27, 1941

Ink on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection



The evidence of Andrew Wyeth's interest
in Hudson River School artists in general,

and Cropsey, in particular, includes books like this heavily referenced volume from the family library. The Karoliks, whose influential collection is documented in this volume, were important contributors to a revival of interest in Cropsey after a period out of favor. They were also the original purchasers of Andrew Wyeth's major 1950 painting *Soaring*, now in the Shelburne Museum. The artist's correspondence includes number discussions of landscape as one of his major concerns, including this letter to the parents of his wife, Betsy James Wyeth.

LANDSCAPE AND INDUSTRY



Cropsey was one of the leading lights of American art in the third quarter of the nineteenth century: a period in which new fortunes from natural resources and transportation were being spent on ambitious landscape paintings depicting the very regions that were the sources of their wealth. Cropsey's rivals included the

likes of Frederic Edwin Church and Albert Bierstadt. All three worked regularly for railroad barons, and all three achieved notable success, while the so-called “landscape boom” lasted, that allowed them to build statement mansions in New York’s countryside.

It was at Cropsey’s country home, “Aladdin,” in Warwick, New York that he made this painting for the transatlantic businessman James McHenry. Irish-born, Philadelphia-raised, Liverpool-launched, and London-based by this time, McHenry was a European supplier for, and investor in, American railroads. By this date, he had taken control of the Erie Railway

and, in celebration, commissioned a depiction from Cropsey of its passage through the scenery of the Ramapo Valley near the northeastern border of New Jersey with New York. Cropsey had already gained a national reputation for paintings that blend industrial and natural subjects in this way, most famously in his 1865 painting *Starrucca Viaduct, Pennsylvania* (Toledo Museum of Art) depicting a major engineering feat of the same railroad McHenry now controlled, so he was a fitting choice for this commission.

While many American landscape artists were traveling and painting

internationally in the period, interest in their work generally came from American audiences. Cropsey was an exception: he worked in London for seven years and exhibited thirteen paintings at the Royal Academy of Art's competitive annual exhibitions, was presented to Queen Victoria, and sold numerous works to British buyers. The return of *Autumn in the Ramapo Valley, Erie Railway* to the United States is a landmark moment for scholars and art lovers alike that helps in telling a fuller story of the global networks that surround historical American art.

Paul Weber (1823–1916)

Sunrise in the Alleghenies, c. 1853

Oil on canvas

Richard M. Scaife Bequest, 2015

2016.11.29



This warm, golden view presents an idealized wilderness, inspired by scenes in western Pennsylvania. Paul Weber emigrated from Germany in 1848, settling in Philadelphia just as the popular taste for landscape painting was reaching new heights. Before returning to Germany in 1860, he made his mark both as a painter and a teacher, and he frequently exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

Martin Johnson Heade (1819–1904)

New Jersey Salt Marsh, c. 1875

Oil on canvas

Richard M. Scaife Bequest, 2015

2016.11.11



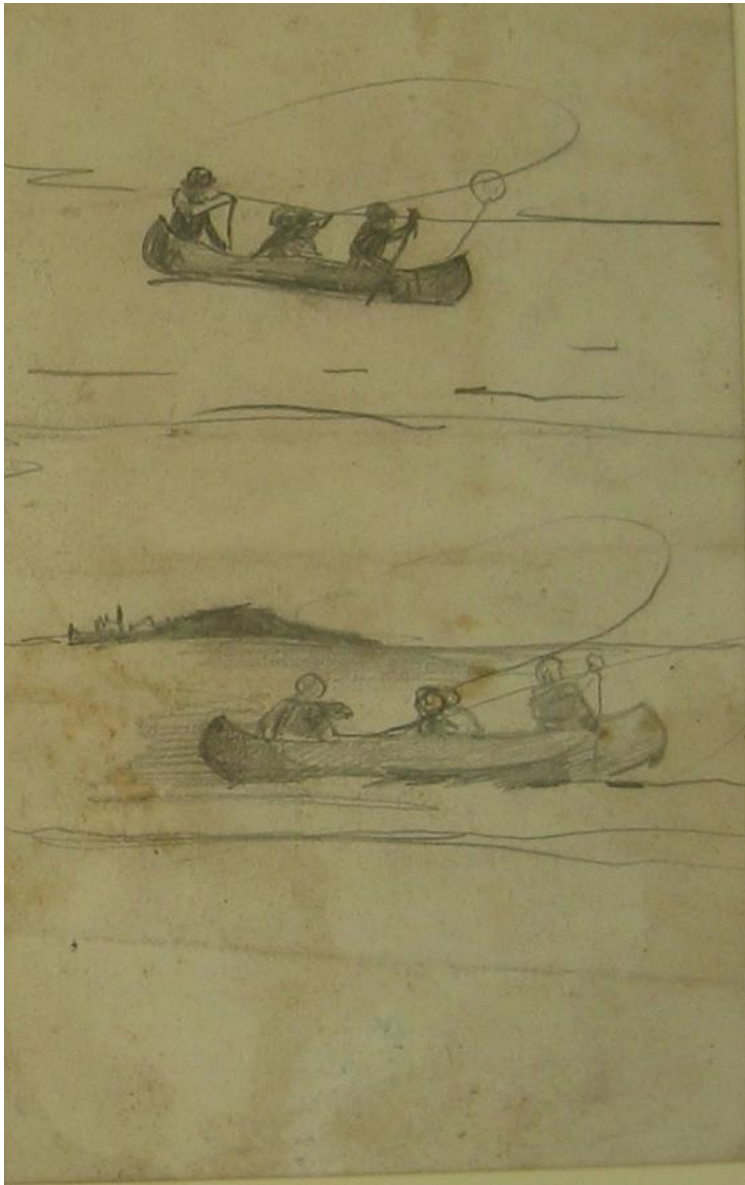
Heade has become so famous for paintings like this one that it is hard to imagine there was a time when it was unusual to see a marsh as picturesque. Recent scholarship reveals that marshlands were viewed in the 19th century as dangerous fringe environments: wastelands in which people on the edges of society eked out a living. Martin Johnson Heade struck a quietly iconoclastic course during this period in the American art world by finding beauty in such places instead of great river valleys and mountains.

Winslow Homer (1836–1910)

Untitled, n.d.

Pencil on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection



Winslow Homer (1836–1910)

Boy and Girl on a Wood Scoot, 1879

Pencil on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection



These rarely seen drawings from Andrew & Betsy Wyeth's collection are evidence of the supreme place Winslow Homer held in their esteem. They owned numerous other originals and reproductions by, and books about, the artist. Fondness for Homer went back a generation to N.C. Wyeth, who named the family's summer home in Port Clyde, Maine, "Eight Bells," after one of Homer's paintings. Among other reasons for this devotion—including his successful straddling of the worlds of commercial illustration and fine art—his distinction as a painter of the Maine landscape in watercolor and oil loomed large.

George Wesley Bellows (1882–1925)

Blasted Tree and Deserted House, 1920

Oil on panel

Purchased with Museum funds, 2023

2023.11



This scene is at Overlook Mountain, near Woodstock, New York, which was home to an important art colony in the period. This setting was closely associated with the Anglo-American landscape painter of an earlier generation Thomas Cole (1801– 1848). Cole came to be known as the “father of the Hudson River School” for his work based in the nearby town of Catskill; he was also known for his depictions of lightning-blasted trees like this one that evoke the power of the natural world. George Bellows became famous for his charismatic images of boxing, but he was also a highly original landscape painter who worked in some of

the same Maine environs as Andrew Wyeth. Both Cole and Bellows are well represented in the Wyeths' library.

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)

Fairy Cove, Port Clyde, c. 1925–1930

Oil on canvas

Bequest of Carolyn Wyeth, 1996 96.1.46



Andrew Wyeth's father was also his teacher in still life, figure painting, and, indeed, landscape. The loose brushwork here is dramatically different from the more N.C. Wyeth employed in his illustrations.

Carolyn Wyeth (1909–1994)

Snake Fence, 1975

Oil on canvas

Purchased with Museum funds, 2014

2014.3



Carolyn Wyeth evokes the history of her native region by depicting the characteristic zigzag, or snake, fencing used by Euro-American settlers. Like her brother Andrew, she was trained by her father, N.C. Wyeth, and practiced landscape in the environs of Chadds Ford and coastal Maine throughout her life.

ANDREW WYETH AND THE HISTORY OF LANDSCAPE ART

The selections from the Wyeth family art collection, library, and correspondence on view in this gallery show the extent to which Andrew Wyeth was steeped in the history of American landscape painting. Contrary to a perception in some quarters that his education primarily at home and commitment to rural subjects made him a kind of outsider artist, there is abundant evidence that he was a diligent student of art history with a particular interest in historic landscape painters.

The dialogue with the past that this exhibition offers invites questions about the meaning of landscape to the artist. Wyeth produced deeply receding views of natural scenes throughout his career, but as the highlights of his tempera practice at the far end of the gallery demonstrate, he was not content to stay within the boundaries of any single genre, also painting people, buildings, botany, and interiors. The works that bear the closest compositional relationship to the major Cropsey occurred in Wyeth's early career: distant, sweeping perspectives that use a fairly even division of foreground, middle ground, and background. Wyeth's later

landscapes become progressively more subdued in palette, more enigmatic in content, and more experimental in composition.

Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Pennsylvania Landscape, 1941

Egg tempera on panel

Bequest of Miss Remsen Yerkes, 1982

82.8



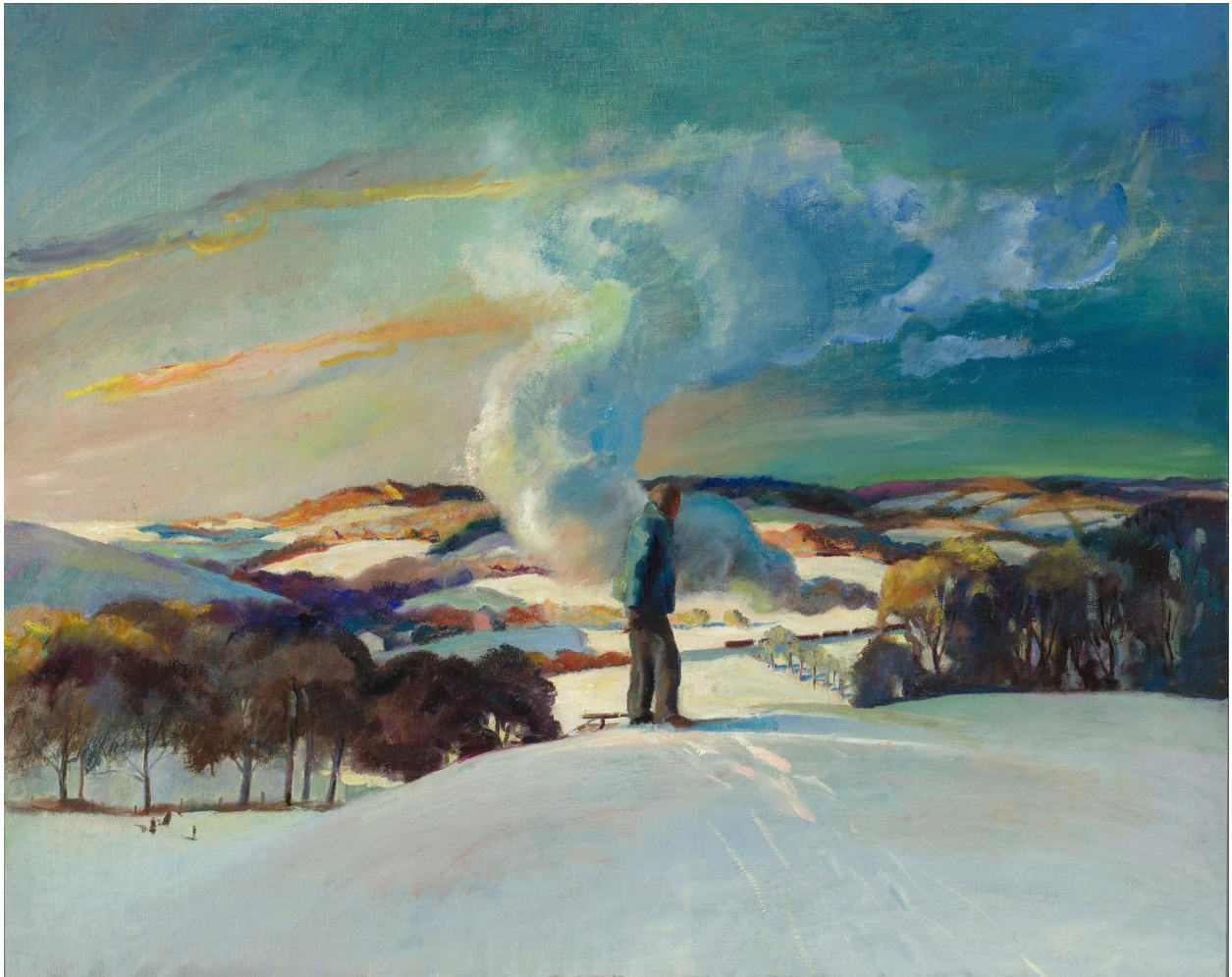
This visionary landscape is a composite of multiple views: a fusion of places both as seen and felt, the past and the present, that is representative of Wyeth's approach to the genre. The building visible through the branches is the 18th-century Gideon Gilpin House that was thought to have been used as the Marquis de Lafayette's headquarters during the Battle of Brandywine in 1777.

Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Robert Howarth Sledding, 1935

Oil on canvas

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection, Oil 47



Andrew Wyeth's few dozen oil paintings, made only in his early student days, are the work of a very different artist than the mature one whose work would be synonymous with a severely muted palette and bold compositional choices. Here, utilizing surprising color, the young artist offers a sweeping view of a wintry Chadds Ford that follows the general ratio of land to sky he knew from 19th-century paintings. He would soon challenge that rule in remarkable ways.

Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Fall at Archies, 1937

Egg tempera on panel

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection, P0002



In the medium of tempera that was then new to Andrew Wyeth, he depicts a local landmark nestled in its setting. The composition is roughly in thirds—foreground, middleground, and background—a conventional formula that goes away, along with the bright colors, in his later work. Painted a short walk from his childhood home, the subject is the African Union Methodist Protestant Church known as Mother Archie's, after its pastor, Reverend Lydia Archie.

Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Grazing Sheep at Hill Girt Farm, 1933

Oil on canvas

Wyeth Foundation for American Art

Collection, Oil 49



This never-before-exhibited oil makes use of a more muted palette than the early easel paintings nearby while still hewing to established ratios of land and sky.

Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

March Orchard, 1938

Watercolor on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection, M1794



The land almost crowds out the sky in this landscape, as Andrew Wyeth revels in the textures and tones of the grasses and trees. With growing confidence not long after his first sold-out exhibition in New York, he began to incorporate new ideas, like eschewing established land to sky ratios, into his practice. Such bold compositions would be key to his mode of modernism in abstract times.

Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Winter Fodder, 1939

Egg tempera on panel

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection, M2133



This depiction of a neighbor who was a regular model, Adam Johnson, suggests lessons Wyeth learned in elevated and distant perspectives not only from American artists of the 19th century like Jasper Francis Cropsey but also from British artists of the period like John Constable. Wyeth's library has more than a dozen books on Constable, unusual depth for any single artist, and it is easy to see why he might have felt a kinship with this artist of another era who maintained devotion to rural subjects despite urban pressures. In words that could as easily come from Wyeth, Constable famously said "the sound of

water escaping from mill-dams, willows,
old rotten planks, slimy posts, and
brickwork, I love such things...As long as
I do paint, I shall never cease to paint
such places."

Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Peter Hurd Painting, 1943

Watercolor on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection, P0149



Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Osborne Hill, 1943

Egg tempera on panel

Gift of Elizabeth H. McCoy, Easton,
Maryland 82.21



The overlook depicted in this panoramic landscape, which takes its cues from the ambitious vistas associated with 19th-century American art, served a key

strategic role for the victorious British forces in the Battle of Brandywine in 1777.

Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Untitled, 1941

Watercolor on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection, P0209



Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Untitled, 1940

Watercolor on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection, P0104



Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Untitled, 1940

Watercolor on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection, P0150



This is a rare depiction by Andrew Wyeth of a subject somewhere other than the immediate environs of Chadds Ford and of Port Clyde, Maine: New Hampshire. Not long after meeting his future wife Betsy James, he visited her at college in that state. While there, he also visited the artist Paul Sample, another significant contributor to the revival of tempera painting in the mid-19th century.

Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Fraternity Village Study, 1948

Watercolor on paper Wyeth

Foundation for American Art Collection,
M0969



This never-before-exhibited watercolor of a landscape near Rockport, Maine relates to one of Andrew Wyeth's last commercial illustration commissions: the cover for a 1949 collection of short stories by Ben Ames Williams about the fictional Maine town of Fraternity.

Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Snow Flurries Study, 1953

Watercolor on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection, P0299



Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Hoffman's Slough Study, 1947

Drybrush watercolor on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection, P2016r



In the year when Jackson Pollock's famous abstract expressionist splatter painting technique began, Wyeth was

experimenting with ways of abstracting observed landscape subjects like this one. With sweeping, free brushstrokes and an almost monochromatic palette, this powerful watercolor has the air of an artistic breakthrough.

Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Night Mare, 1973

Watercolor on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art

Collection, P2656



Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Sunday Times, 1987

Watercolor on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection, P5030



The mature works of Andrew Wyeth include no small number of intrusions of modernity: a jet contrail, a yellow road sign, or bright newspaper advertising as seen here. The interconnection of past and present was an abiding interest of the artist.

Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009)

Hoar Frost, 1995

Watercolor on paper

Wyeth Foundation for American Art
Collection, P5042



The resemblance of the mound of earth pushed up by a snowplow to a recumbent female figure called out to the artist for depiction. Andrew Wyeth's seemingly empty landscape paintings are often grounded in a narrative sensibility that shows lessons learned from his father, artist-illustrator, N.C. Wyeth.

Barkley L. Hendricks (1945–2017)

Boxing Day (Part Deux), 2003

Oil on canvas

Purchased with Museum funds, 2020

2020.9



Landscape painting continues to be a vital current in contemporary American art, as exemplified in this recent acquisition by the Brandywine. The oval shape mirrors a format used by numerous 19th-century American artists. Barkley Hendricks is best known for life-size portrayals of Black men and women in contemporary fashions, but he also made nature studies on annual winter sojourns in Jamaica, like this image.