

Andrew Newell Wyeth

(An-drew Why-eth)

Painter; realist style

Modern/Postmodern Period of Art (lived during)

Born: July 12, 1917, Chadds Ford PA

Died: January 16, 2009, Chadds Ford, PA

Active: 1930s - 2008

Andrew Wyeth was the youngest child of Golden Age Illustrator (and Rockwell predecessor-contemporary) Newell Conyers (N.C.) Wyeth. (1882 – 1945). Like all of his siblings, Andrew was named for family members and ancestors: his grandfather and great-grandfather Andrew Newell Jr (1853 – 1929) and Andrew Newell Sr. (1817 – 1900). The family lived in New England since the 1640s.

Due to his poor health, young Andrew was homeschooled by his father, who focused on Wyeth's art abilities. In fact, Mr. Wyeth Sr. focused so hard, Andrew became an accomplished draughtsman (person who can draw well) before Wyeth Sr. realized Andrew did not know how to read! Nevertheless, by the time he was grown, Wyeth was assisting his father, and producing professional works and was only 20 when he held his first solo New York gallery show!



Andrew started in oils, like his father, but when he was 23, his brother-in-law, Peter Hurd, introduced him to the “amateur” watercolors and tempera paints, and Wyeth, enchanted, switched mediums. Most of his well-known works are watercolors or tempera. (the same paints Georgia O’Keeffe were told were “only for women amateurs”-Wyeth bucked that trend going the other way!)

While Wyeth lived during the Modern and Postmodern periods of art, his art style was considered “realism.” Art critics often abused Wyeth's art, since it was so different from the abstract expressionist art that was popular at that time. However, his art was so popular with the average American viewer that his shows and exhibitions were sold-out successes (which also made him unpopular with the critics!) Wyeth's art often depicted the New England landscape he knew and loved so well.

Andrew Wyeth had two boys, and lived near his family his whole life. Wyeth's sisters and their children grew up and ran around in the family neighborhood. While Andrew was, by far, the most famous of his siblings, his brother and sisters became accomplished artists, portrait artists, art teachers, musicians, composers and inventors. In fact, when Andrew's own son Jamie (born 1946) wanted to learn painting, it was his Aunt Carolyn who taught him. (Jamie is now a professional artist)

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy awarded Andrew Wyeth the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the first artist to be given that award. He was also inducted to the French Academe de Beaux-Arts (only the second American to gain this award) and the British Royal Academy of Art (first living American artist to do) and the Congressional Gold Medal in 1988. The family home is now a museum and can be visited.

Art Vocab: Resist

In art, a resist is a substance or a process where you lay a substance on your soon-to-be painted surface to make any later paints, dyes, or colors “resist” sticking to the surface after.

When using water-based colorants like watercolors, you use fatty or rubbery substances like:

- Candle Wax
- Crayons
- Oil Pastels
- Rubber Cement/Glue
- Masking Solution

Wax Resists:

Since oil and water don’t mix, oil-based resists like Wax, crayons, and oil pastels will prevent the watercolor from sticking to the paper. Simply draw whatever needs to be “resisted” before you start painting, and the paint will not stick to the paper where the wax has been laid down. The waxy resists stays on the paper when the painting is done.

Removable (Rubberized) Resists

Rubber cement and Masking Fluid cover the surface with a waterproof, rubber-like layer, which keeps the paint from reaching the paper. These are removed later, revealing the fresh paper underneath. Sometimes, a resist is laid before any painting is done, preserving a crisp, clean white shape. Other times, a colored field is painted, dried, then resisted, so a darker color can be laid over top, while still preserving the crisp, clean lines of the earlier color.

Etymology:

Resist (v.)

Late 14th century word which came from an Old French word *resister*, meaning, “to hold out against”. This word came from the Latin word *resistere* composed from the prefix “re-” (against) and “sistere” (“take a stand, stand firm”)

Definition drawn from the Online Etymology Dictionary

Quotes by Andrew Wyeth

“I surrendered to a world of my imagination, re-enacting all those wonderful tales my father would read aloud to me. I became a very active reader, especially history and Shakespeare.”

“Art to me, is seeing. I think you have got to use your eyes, as well as your emotion, and one without the other just doesn't work. That's my art.”

Examples of resists in other art forms include:

Resist-dyed fabric The art of drawing or printing designs on fabric with wax, and then dyeing fabric is ancient. Many cultures, including Ancient Egypt, Tang-dynasty China, Nara-period Japan, India, Nigeria, Indonesia and Malaysia all created resist-dyed fabric. One common style of resist-dyed fabric is “Batik” fabric from the island of Java . *(Photo of traditional Batik on right is from Wikipedia)*



Tie-Dyed Fabric: Many tie-dye patterns use rubber bands to make their patterns. The rubber bands are a physical barrier to resist the dyes.

(Right) A Tie-dyed bundle and its result. From <http://www.bystephanielynn.com/2015/06/tie-dye-folding-techniques-16-vibrant-tie-dye-patterns-tiedyeyoursummer.html> which has many other techniques for tie dye.



Pysanky Eggs: This traditional eastern Europe art form uses wax and eggs to make a special decorated egg for Easter (Pascha). Using the white egg, you draw a pattern with the wax. When the pattern is hard, you dye the egg yellow. You add more wax where the egg will stay yellow, and dye the egg orange. Continuing this way, the artist will dye the egg multiple times until the wax is heated and rubbed off. *(Photo: Wikipedia.)*

Wax Resist Pottery. In ceramics, wax can be added to pots to keep glaze from sticking to parts of a pot. Most pots, regardless of glaze, have a resist applied to the bottom of the pot to keep the glass-based glaze from melting, dripping down on the base of the pot, and sticking to the inside of the kiln.



Longquan Celadon vase from China. The terra-cotta medallions were coated with wax before it was glazed and fired. Vase in British Museum, London. Photo: Wikipedia

Resist Paintings by Andrew Wyeth: The First Snow (1959)



34×54.6 cm

Dry brush (watercolor) , Paper

Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington

Each “snowflake” in this composition is a resist fluid which Wyeth sprinkled on the canvas before he started painting. He then painted the entire composition like usual, painting right over the “snow”, rather than around it. Once he was done, and the painting was completely dry, he removed the resist, revealing the white paper preserved beneath, which gives the appearance of snowflakes.

A good part Wyeth’s work is set in the fall and winter. In his own words...

“I prefer winter and fall, when you feel the bone structure of the landscape – the loneliness of it, the dead feeling of winter. Something waits beneath it, the whole story doesn’t show.”

The Granary (1961)



In this composition, you can see the lines of sprinkled resist that Wyeth laid before painting: look under the upper window of the left-hand building, that spattered circle shows where and how Wyeth “threw” resist onto the clean paper (similar to Jackson Pollack’s Spatter Paintings). There are also splashed lines of resist near the left-hand side of that building as well. It’s hard to see individual splashes of resist on clean paper, so the artist sometimes does not know themselves how the resist lines will reveal when they lay down the darker paint over top.

Christina's World (1948)



This is one of the most well-known of Wyeth's works. Called "Christina's World," this painting was inspired one day when Wyeth noticed one of his neighbors, 50-year old Anna Christina Olson (1893 – 1968), crawling across her farm's fields to get back to her home after visiting the family cemetery. A degenerative disease meant Miss Olson lost her ability to walk when she was in her thirties. She refused to use a wheelchair (which would confine her to her house) and instead determinedly crawled across her property, working her farm with her brother. This stubborn determination inspired Wyeth, and he painstakingly painted this image of Christina doggedly taking herself back home, regardless of personal difficulty. The grass alone took months of detailed work, and when it was done, Wyeth hung it in his living room where...no one commented on it. Convinced that the painting wasn't as good as he had hoped, he shipped it off to his gallery agent in New York. Within weeks, word spread of an extraordinary painting on display, and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) purchased it, where, to the curator's chagrin (they preferred European Modern Expressionist Art) Christina's World soon became one of their most popular pieces. Today, it is a central part of the MoMA's collection, and rarely leant for traveling displays.

When asked what inspired him to paint this piece, he replied, "[I wanted] to do justice to her extraordinary conquest of a life which most people would consider hopeless. If in some small way I have been able in paint to make the viewer sense that her world may be limited physically but by no means spiritually, then I have achieved what I set out do."

Soaring (1942; 1950)



This painting was completed in two stages. First, in 1942, Wyeth, newly married, created this sky-eye view of buzzards over the landscape the Wyeth family knew so well. Andy Wyeth showed this painting to his father, renowned Golden-Age Illustrator N.C. Wyeth, who was unimpressed. “Andy, this doesn’t work...this is not a painting.” Discouraged, Andy put the painting in the basement where his boys eventually turned it into a table for their trains.

It was only in 1950, five years after Andy had lost his father, that a friend spotted the painting among the toy debris in the basement and insisted Wyeth should finish it. Wyeth, still deeply grieving his father and mentor, and starting to deal with his new-found fame after *Christina’s World* debuted, finally did so, sending the painting off in 1950 to the gallery where his works sold.

It was a hit with many who did not work in the art world, both beautiful and mysterious. The birds depicted were graceful...yet they were vultures, not the most well-loved of birds. They flew over a landscape that was both wild and cultivated, beautiful yet bare. It was another example of Wyeth’s realism that flew counter to the popular abstract art that dominated the mid-20th century. Wyeth once again broke different ground than his contemporaries, and this time, it was the public who appreciated him, not the critics.

This painting is now in the Shelburne Museum in Vermont.

Ideas to go Deeper at Home:

Sadly, there are currently no children's books on Andrew Wyeth which I could find. However, if you want to do more resist forms at home, here are some ideas:

Write a secret message: Using the same color crayon as your paper, write a message, then paint over it with watercolors to reveal the message. You can also use the technique to write something beautiful, like scripture or a favorite quote.

Glue Resist: If you have a type of bottled glue which will dry clear (I've always used Elmer's glue for this project) and some paints, colored pencils, or pastels/chalk, draw something simple on a piece of paper, then trace with the glue. Once the glue dries, the glue line will act as a resist, creating cells you can color inside. This project is really fun if you have tempera paints or pastels which show up against black paper. The glue line on black paper looks like the frame of a stained glass window.

Crayon resist: Draw something on a paper, and thoroughly cover the drawing with crayons. For example: Draw an underwater scene with fish and corals. Draw a collection of fall leaves, snowflakes, or shells. Make sure that the entire composition is heavily colored in with a thick layer of crayon.

Once done, paint the remaining bare background a dark color using Watercolor. The objects you've created should generally resist the paint and remain as a brightly colored object on the darkened paper.

Videos:

Fred Rogers, of Mr. Roger's Neighborhood, was a friend of Andrew Wyeth, and invited him to his show "Mr. Roger's Neighborhood" in 1972. In 1981, Mr. Roger's showed another painting by Wyeth, and replayed a section of his 1972 visit. If you have Amazon Prime, this episode is in the "Best of Mr. Roger's Neighborhood" Season 2, Episode 8 (#1483-Title: Competition). This episode is also currently available on YouTube. Wyeth's short appearance is in the first few minutes of this episode.

Field Trips:

Many museums around the world have Wyeth's work in their collections. Some of these include:

- Brandywine River Museum, Chadds's Ford, Pennsylvania (this museum has a large collection of Andrew Wyeth's work, as well as N.C Wyeth, Howard Pyle, and other contemporaries.)
- Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, Maine
- Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, South Carolina
- Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) and Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum; NYC
- Smithsonian Museum, Washington DC
- Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio
- Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri
- Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock
- Internationally: National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan; Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia; Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy; Académie des Beaux Arts, Paris, France.

Always check ahead to see whether they have a Wyeth on display (and which one it is!) before taking a long trip to see it!