

## Andrew Wyeth



*Christina's World*, 1948  
tempera on panel, 32 ¼ x 47 ¾  
Museum of Modern Art, New York

## The Artist

### Andrew Wyeth

Born Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania 1917; died Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania 2009

Andrew was in poor health as a child and was homeschooled by his father, Newell Convers Wyeth, and tutors. At age 15, Wyeth began to train in his father's art studio who was a famous illustrator. At the age of 20, he had his first one-man show at Macbeth Gallery in New York, which sold out in two days. After this show, *Saturday Evening Post* offered him occasional jobs painting covers for the magazine, however he declined because he wanted to be a more independent artist. For twenty years, Wyeth painted a farm owned by Karl and Anna Kuerlner, he was also used Christina Olson as a model until her death in 1969. She is featured in his best known piece, *Christina's World*, where he witnessed her out in the fields calmly pulling herself back to the farm house she and her brother inhabited. He was awarded the National Medal of Arts in 2007 and the Congressional Gold Medal in 1988. Wyeth was the first artist to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1963.

## Art Movement

### American Realism

This style of art depicted contemporary social realities and the lives and everyday activities of ordinary people. American realist works attempted to define what was real to the artist.

## The Artwork

### *Christina's World*

The woman crawling through the tawny grass was the artist's neighbor in Maine, who, crippled by polio. Wyeth commented about the woman as being, "limited physically but by no means spiritually." He later explained that, "the challenge to me was to do justice to her extraordinary conquest of a life which most people would consider hopeless." He recorded the arid landscape, rural house, and shacks with great detail, painting minute blades of grass, individual strands of hair, and nuances of light and shadow. In this style of painting, known as magic realism, everyday scenes are imbued with poetic mystery.

## Discussion Suggestions

### Discuss the Painting:

- *What makes you notice the woman in this painting? Why does her dress seem to stand out from the grass?*
- *What kind of a mood does this painting create? Why?*
- *Where do you see different textures? How did Wyeth make them look different from one another?*
- *Where is the negative space in this painting? Why is it important?*
- *What geometric shapes can you find in this painting?*
- *How does Wyeth lead our eyes through the painting?*

## Activity Idea

### First Snow:

- Sketch a simple outdoors scene on a sheet of white watercolor paper or heavy drawing paper. Sketch the scene very lightly with pencil
- Consider drawing a scene with subjects like those in Wyeth's paintings (old shed in barren field, seashell by a rock at the beach, wild bird perched on a leafless branch, fencepost with dried weeds around the base)
- Next place the drawing on newspapers. Dip the old toothbrush into the rubber cement. Then drag a thumb across the bristles, splattering until the sheet of paper is covered with tiny droplets and dots of glue. Let the glue drops dry completely on the paper.
- Paint a picture on top of the dry glue drops. Paint using rich autumn tones, like Wyeth (tans/browns, blacks/golds, gray skies/storm clouds, orange leaves, dark green pine trees)
- After the watercolor painting is finished and completely dry, rub away the spots of rubber cement glue with fingers. A perfect white dot of "un-painted paper" will be left beneath each dot of dry glue. When all the glue drops are rubbed away, the watercolor painting will be filled with the appearance of a sparkling white flurry of fresh falling snow.

### Materials Needed:

- White watercolor paper/heavy white drawing paper
- Jar of rubber cement glue
- Pencil & Eraser
- Old Tooth Brush
- Watercolor paints & brushes
- Newspaper covered work area