

## **UP EAST: ANDREW WYETH IN MAINE**

Andrew Wyeth's rigorously place-based practice focused on two narrowly circumscribed regions across a long and productive career: the immediate environs of Chadds Ford in the fall and winter and the lower St. George River area in mid-coast Maine in the spring and summer. Years were evenly divided between these locales, and through this devotion to a consistent subject matter Wyeth developed a visionary practice in which observation and imagination intertwined.

The region of Maine that became his core focus is a space between. With neither the urban bustle of neighboring Casco Bay off Portland nor the Gilded Age luxury of Penobscot Bay farther down east, Muscongus Bay and the coves of its St. George River provided the artist a hard-working landscape of granite, weathered evergreens, and salt air. From Waldoboro to the west and Rockland to the east, from Thomaston to the north and Allen Island to the south, he painted the meeting of land and water, as well as the structures and vessels characteristic of the area. The people of the place became friends,

models, and guides who were essential to his work.

All the works in this exhibition are by Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009) and are from the collection of the Wyeth Foundation for American Art, the support of which has made this exhibition possible. *Up East* is the latest in an ongoing series of exhibitions drawn from that remarkable collection, now managed by the Brandywine. Most of these watercolors have never been exhibited before. Unseen works are identified by the following icon:

\*\*\*

Plotting a radius of just five miles from the village of Port Clyde captures the majority of the Maine sites that inspired Wyeth across thousands of works of art. This helps us to understand the physical experience of making these largely on-site creations: carrying the perfectly portable medium of watercolor with him on foot, via a manageable morning's row in a dory or on a powerboat later in life, and occasionally with an assist from a car, he was able to return to these sites readily as inspiration dictated and required.

This map identifies the key locations of Andrew Wyeth's Maine work that are called

out on the individual object labels. We invite you to take the map with you for later reference by scanning the QR code.

## **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 also provided for 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.

*Fisherman's Houses, 1937*

Watercolor on paper

B0072r



---

This early work depicting a scene in Port Clyde is an important trace of Wyeth's "big bang" moment: the rapturously received



exhibition of his watercolors at New York's Macbeth Gallery in October 1937, when he was 20 years old. While all the works in the initial hanging of this show sold out quickly, an additional group of backup works were hung as replacements, of which *Fisherman's Houses* was one.

Because most of the exhibited works remain in private collections, this is a rare opportunity to see one of the fresh, colorful Maine watercolors that were central to the formation of the widespread narrative that Wyeth was a natural heir to Winslow Homer in the American watercolor tradition.

\*\*\*

Untitled, 1937

Watercolor on paper

M0698



---

Acquired when the artist was around three years old, the Wyeths' family home "Eight

Bells" in Port Clyde was the site of a key studio to the end of his life, and it is the setting for this low-tide view toward nearby islands in Muscongus Bay. The property took its name from a canvas by Winslow Homer, now in the collection of the Addison Gallery of American Art, evidence of the special esteem the Wyeths held for that artist. This untitled watercolor is known to have been sent to Macbeth Gallery with the summer works that launched Wyeth's reputation in the fall of 1937, but it was not displayed. Accordingly, this is its first public exhibition.

\*\*\*

Untitled, 1940

Watercolor on paper

M1100



This view of Port Clyde harbor near the Wyeths' summer home features a spritsail-rigged dory, the traditional sail-and-oar workboats that, with slight regional variations, have been fixtures of the New England coast for centuries. Their graceful but purposeful form called to the artist across dozens of dory paintings and drawings over his lifetime, including major temperas like *Hay Ledge*. Wyeth's dory was a fundamental tool of his youthful painting practice in Maine, allowing him free access to outlying islands and the Cushing peninsula.



\*\*\*

*Back Country Stream*, 1939

Watercolor on paper

B0156



Admirers of Wyeth's wintry work in Pennsylvania, characterized in most cases by a severely limited palette of dark earth tones, may find early summer works like *Back Country Stream* startlingly colorful. This view across the St. George River from the west side of the Port Clyde peninsula is an example of what he later referred to derisively as his "blue sky period." Wyeth's conscious choice to limit his creative options in later years to a narrower set of colors than used here, even for depicting the truly blue-green world of a Maine summer, is a critical part of his artistic legacy.

\*\*\*

Untitled, 1940

Watercolor on paper

M0638





While the Wyeth family were committed Maine summer people, Merle and Bess James had moved from near Buffalo, New York, to live year-round at their home on Broad Cove, depicted here. Andrew Wyeth first came to this property earlier in 1940 in hopes of meeting Merle, a skilled amateur painter, but found someone much more interesting: their daughter Betsy James, who would become his wife, his partner in art and business, and an environmental designer.

\*\*\*

Untitled, 1949

Watercolor on paper

B0217



Among Betsy Wyeth's many contributions to her husband's artistic success was the introduction she provided to Christina and Alvaro Olson, who, in conjunction with the house they inhabited, would become one of the defining inspirations of this creative life, made famous by temperas like *Christina's World* (1948, Museum of Modern Art) and *Weatherside* (1965, North Carolina Museum of Art). This unfamiliar view of the Olson House across a neighboring cove makes it clear how exposed it is to the storms of Muscongus Bay.

*Front Door Study, 1944*

Watercolor on paper

M1028



Amid the stern vernacular architecture of mid-coast Maine, the playful ornaments of this house near Betsy Wyeth's family home in Cushing called out to the artist for study and would result in the creation of a tempera with the same composition, now in a private collection.



\*\*\*

*East Waldoboro Study, 1945*

Watercolor on paper

M1021



The Hoffses House depicted here was an abandoned, and now demolished, eighteenth-century landmark near the Goose River that, for Wyeth, evoked the Revolutionary War through its association with an early occupant who fought in that conflict. This creative chapter was the focus of a July 1953 feature in *Life* magazine with photography by Kosti Ruohomaa, on view in the case nearby.

*The Captain's Coat, 1948*

Watercolor on paper

B0188





Wyeth's response to the interior of the Hoffses House south of Waldoboro captures an environment that seems frozen in time. When the statesman and accomplished amateur painter Winston Churchill made his fourth and final visit to Boston in 1949 to give a nationally televised lecture on the postwar world, he requested an Andrew Wyeth artwork for his hotel room. This was the one selected for display.

*House on Teel's Island, 1945*

Watercolor on paper

M1154



Teel Island off Port Clyde is a subject Wyeth explored with his close friend and regular model Walt Anderson via a dory. The artist's palette has become more subdued by this date compared to his 1937–39 works on view in this gallery.

\*\*\*

Untitled, 1953

Watercolor on paper

B0241



The creative partnership between Andrew and Betsy Wyeth was complex, comprising not only her cataloguing, titling, and marketing of his artwork but even matters of content and style. In this case, the fundamental role she played in his practice reveals itself through her design work: the house he depicts on the James family property on Broad Cove was the first building she designed herself, with many more architectural designs to follow.



\*\*\*

Untitled, 1953

Watercolor on paper

B0324



This low-tide view from the water toward the house Betsy Wyeth designed on Broad Cove shows the artist's fascination with the textures of the foreshore: seaweed, tide pools, and ancient granite. The watercolor closely mirrors the composition of a photograph of the Wyeth family by Kosti Ruohomaa made a few years earlier, on view in the case nearby.

\*\*\*

*Sandspit Study, 1953*

Pencil on paper

B0722





Because watercolor was such a natural and instinctive medium for Wyeth, he usually used it from the very first stages of working out a new compositional idea rather than starting from graphite or ink. For this reason, it is a relatively rare privilege to see the artist working in pencil at midcareer. The subject here is just across the St. George River from the property of Betsy Wyeth's family on Broad Cove.

\*\*\*

Untitled, 1954

Watercolor on paper

M0649



Teel Island off Port Clyde was a frequent subject for Wyeth, rich in associations with the hard labor of subsistence fishing through the figure of Henry Teel, for a time the island's sole inhabitant. This composition reveals a key afterlife of the place: Betsy Wyeth's environmental design work on Benner Island would include a direct response to this remembered view with its pond and New England vernacular house.

\*\*\*

Untitled, 1954

Watercolor on paper

M0875



This never-before-seen watercolor, made on the property of Betsy Wyeth's family on Broad Cove, is a classic example of the artist's lifelong practice of improvisatory, energetic watercolor. Bold and free creations like this speak to his awareness of the rise of the New York School abstract expressionists, a movement that fascinated him.



\*\*\*

Untitled, 1961

Watercolor on paper

M0544



Works like this view on Teel Island looking north, as well as the adjacent image on Broad Cove, reflect the characteristic mid-coast ecosystem of dry grasses and wind-and-salt-battered evergreens that somehow grow in the thin layer of soil atop the prevailing granite. Wyeth once reflected on the difference between the Pennsylvania and Maine landscapes as each impacted his work: "In Pennsylvania, there's a substantial foundation underneath, of depths of dirt and earth. Up in Maine I feel it's all dry bones and desiccated sinews." This is no painter of cozy seaside scenes for the tourist trade.

\*\*\*

Untitled, 1967

Watercolor on paper

M1405



---

Because Wyeth worked with continuous rolls of fine watercolor paper, he was not limited to conventional formats. Here, he uses the panoramic possibilities of his chosen medium to capture a slice of the property on Broad Cove that by this date had become Andrew and Betsy Wyeth's upon the death of the latter's parents.



*The Culvert*, 1963

Watercolor on paper

M0073



Wyeth continued to find inspiring facets in and near the property on Broad Cove that had belonged to Merle and Bess James, Betsy Wyeth's parents. This immersive and intensive practice in a select few places, instead of over a wider range of geographies, is characteristic of his working method.

*Maine Door – First Version, 1970*

Watercolor on paper

M2102



Another subject Wyeth painted intensively over a period of years was the Cushing home of the Ericksons, a Finnish immigrant family whose members became important models for the artist. Wyeth's tempera portrait of the daughter of the house, *Siri*, is on view in the selection of temperas at the end of the gallery.



\*\*\*

*The Intruder Study*, 1971

Watercolor on paper

M1511





The meeting of water and land was a persistent concern of Wyeth's work, from the banks of the Brandywine Creek to the Gulf of Maine. In this case, the subject is a prominent boulder along the Goose River. In the free and fluent gestures of this watercolor, we can imagine the artist in his characteristic outdoor sketching pose: sitting on the ground with a board across his lap to serve as an easel, working swiftly to capture an urgent inspiration.

\*\*\*

Untitled, 1978

Watercolor on paper

M2109



The presence of Walt Anderson is not always as evident in Wyeth's Maine practice as it is here, but even when invisible, Anderson was key to this body of work. The two formed a close friendship that lasted decades and connected Wyeth to the outlying islands and remote coves that Anderson knew intimately from exploring and fishing them for a lifetime.

\*\*\*

Untitled, n.d.

Watercolor on paper

M3357r



This very late perspective in Wyeth's studio at the family property "Eight Bells" in Port Clyde shows his continued interest in the subject of windows, most associated with the tempera *Wind from the Sea* (1947, National Gallery of Art). After Wyeth's death, this watercolor was found in the space depicted.



\*\*\*

Untitled, 1979

Watercolor on paper

M2111



Betsy Wyeth acquired Southern Island off Tenants Harbor in 1978. With this first island the Wyeths owned outright, their love affair with the Maine archipelago only intensified; it had begun with childhood trips to distant Monhegan and crystallized through exploring the near-shore islands of Muscongus Bay with Walt Anderson. The setting is the so-called Keeper's Room at the foot of the lighthouse at the southern tip of the island, now the home of the Wyeths' son, Jamie.

\*\*\*

Untitled, 1983

Watercolor on paper

M2310



To obtain this startling perspective of the Southern Island lighthouse and pyramidal fog bell tower, the artist must have climbed to a precarious position indeed: seaweed-covered rocks at the water's edge at low tide. He would have needed to capture the compositional idea quickly before waves reached him.

*New Moon Study, 1985*

Watercolor on paper

M2414



---

The sounds, smells, and sublime mood of life on the isolated Southern Island amid the power of the North Atlantic pervade this nocturne.



*Hunter's Ledge – First Version, 1988*

Watercolor on paper

M2931



---

This site on an inlet of the St. George River came to be associated with Bruce Stanley, the titular hunter whom Wyeth encountered on these rocks.

\*\*\*

*Tide's Out – Second Version, 1991*

Watercolor on paper

M2762r



---

The rivulet of water remaining amid the mudflats of Broad Cove at low tide inspired

Wyeth to showcase his formidable abilities in the watercolor medium: painting water with water and with its absence, in the case of the passages in which the white of the paper is left to shine through. While high and low tides vary only about two feet in the nearby Chesapeake Bay, tides in Muscongus Bay rise and fall around ten feet, so their rhythms are a powerful and defining feature of life on the coast.

Through this and other works responding to the tides in this exhibition, we come to understand that when the Maine half of the year began, Wyeth had to calibrate his practice to this natural daily cycle.



\*\*\*

*Jupiter Study*, 1991

Watercolor on paper

M2884r



The pond in this image was created on Benner Island by Betsy Wyeth as part of her decades-long environmental design project there and on neighboring Allen Island, both of which the Wyeths came to own.



\*\*\*

*Shellback Study, 2004*

Watercolor and pencil on paper

M3293



While Wyeth's place-based practice lulls us into thinking of him as a kind of documentary photographer in paint, recording places just as they were, his recursive returns to favored subjects were nothing if not visionary and selective. In this case, he reimagines his lifelong friend Walt Anderson's burial in Martinsville, years after the event had occurred. Wyeth seems to envision an entombment not in the earth but in a mound of blue mussel shells, calling to mind the Abenaki shell middens that are a prominent feature of this coast.

\*\*\*

*Eagle Eye Study, 2007*

Watercolor and pencil on paper

M3389r





\*\*\*

*Half Staff Study, 2007*

Watercolor and pencil on paper

M3303r



This pair of late depictions of the Benner Island environment that Betsy Wyeth had designed shows her success in making an immersive world that would, among its other purposes, serve as an inspiring subject for her husband to paint. Neither of these watercolors has been exhibited before.



*Goodbye Study, 2008*

Watercolor and pencil on paper

M3417



---

This building is a nineteenth-century sail loft Betsy Wyeth had transported from the mainland in pieces and reconstructed on Allen Island to serve as a museum. It is a fitting testament to the Wyeths' enduring creative partnership that the artist chose this subject for his final tempera.

## **CASE LABELS**

Anonymous, "Artist Paints a Ghostly House"  
*Life*, July 27, 1963, pp. 80-83

---

Plaque and letter designating Andrew  
Wyeth an Honorary Citizen of Maine, 1963.  
Maine State Legislature proclamation in  
recognition of Andrew Wyeth's 80<sup>th</sup>  
birthday, 1997.

Collection of the Wyeth Foundation for  
American Art

---

The Wyeth Study Center's archive includes  
materials reflecting the artist's deep

association with the State of Maine. In addition to the various state honors and proclamations across the decades, the deep dive into his Maine practice that appeared in a 1963 issue of *Life* Magazine has been an important reference for scholars, with the help of the Kosti Ruohomaa photographs that illustrate it.

Letter from Andrew Wyeth to Robert Macbeth, September 8, 1937.

---

Wyeth's sold-out exhibition at New York's Macbeth Gallery in the fall of 1937 launched his career with a group of primarily Maine subjects. The artist's

correspondence with Robert Macbeth before the show opened sheds some light on the incredible productivity of the preceding summer, including “fifty or more” new watercolors ripe for sale. The image of Andrew, Betsy, Nicky, and Jamie Wyeth on the rocks at Broad Cove in Cushing includes the artist’s trademark dory in the background and a structure known as the Shore House, which was Betsy Wyeth’s first work of architectural design.

Cover and interior of the exhibition  
brochure for *First Exhibition: Water Colors*  
by Andrew Wyeth, Macbeth Gallery, 1937.

---

Maine State Award, presented to Andrew &  
Betsy Wyeth, 1973

---

Kosti Ruohomaa, The Wyeth Family, 1951.

© Kosti Ruohomaa / Black Star

---