A watercolor painting of a sailboat on a sea with a colorful, abstract seabed below. The sailboat is white with a single sail, sailing on a sea of various shades of blue and green. Below the water, there is a vibrant, abstract seabed with colors ranging from dark purple and black to bright yellow and red. The overall style is soft and painterly.

Schoelkopf

Enter Andrew Wyeth

ALW

Enter Andrew Wyeth



Andrew Wyeth, c. 1937.
Archives of the Andrew &
Betsy Wyeth Study Center

There are times, apparently, when he has been tempted to take a leaf from John Marin's notebook and allow his paintings to explode with a loud bang and a shower of fireworks. At such moments the ghost of Winslow Homer lays a restraining hand on his shoulder and whispers, "Not yet my son. There will be time enough for such experiments. Meanwhile, let's paint things the way they really look."

— Craik Morris, writer for the *Wilmington (Delaware) News Journal*, November 25, 1936, on Andrew Wyeth's first solo exhibition, all watercolor paintings, when Wyeth was just nineteen years old¹

In 1936, the most popular and critically acclaimed painters in America were all watercolorists: John Marin, Edward Hopper, and Charles Burchfield. As wildly diverse as the three artists are in their use of the medium and their approaches to pictorial representation, the three were being called spiritual brethren of the great American master of watercolor, Winslow Homer.² Described as independent in their artistic character and distinctly American in their subject matter, each man was grounded, like Homer, in the direct observation of nature and the immersive experience of place—Marin in Small Point, Maine; Hopper (in his watercolors) in coastal New England towns populated by Victorian cottages; and Burchfield in the bleak, haunting backyards of his hometown, Buffalo, New York. They all served, each in his own way, a growing nationalistic spirit, an expanding audience that was liking its art unaffected and rooted in some aspect of America's landscape and people. Winslow Homer was much on the minds of art critics, painters, and the art enthusiastic public in 1936: that year saw a succession of Homer centenary exhibitions dedicated to the artist, born in 1836, all of them rich with watercolors. As it happened, Homer's successors, too, were in the limelight on this occasion: Marin in a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (with 160 watercolors) and Burchfield in a solo show at the city's

In 1936, watercolor painting in America reached a new phase, as a new national art form, one with proud historical roots and a new relevance for artists both progressive and traditional.

Enter Andrew Wyeth.

Frank K.M. Rehn Gallery, which was showing Hopper watercolors, too.³ Moreover, 1936 saw the first of the Whitney Museum's biennial exhibitions of American art to focus exclusively on watercolors and pastels—208 works.⁴ To add to the mix, this was the year of the expansive First National Exhibition of American Art, a vast survey, in all media, from forty-six states and America's possessions held at Rockefeller Center under the auspices of New York's Municipal Art Committee.⁵ Homer (see, e.g., fig. 1), Marin (see, e.g., fig. 2), Hopper (see, e.g., fig. 3), and Burchfield (see, e.g., fig. 4) were inspiring followers from every scenic locale, their enthusiasms for painting local color now encouraged by the federal government's newly-established national fine arts programs. In 1936, watercolor painting in America reached a new phase, as a new national art form, one with proud historical roots and a new relevance for artists both progressive and traditional.

Enter Andrew Wyeth.

Flexing his muscles, soaking up the country

In early July 1936, in that Winslow Homer centenary summer, N.C. Wyeth's nineteen-year-old artist son set off from the family's home in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, in his father's car, heading toward their summer house at Port Clyde, Maine, with plans to see a sequence of Homer watercolor exhibitions along the way. He visited three Massachusetts museums that were showing their notably rich holdings of Homer's watercolors: the Worcester Art Museum; the Fogg Museum, Harvard University, in Cambridge; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.⁶ Then he drove north to catch, on its first day, July 18, the highly anticipated show of Homer watercolors and memorabilia that had been gathered by art dealer Robert Macbeth to display in the painting room of the artist's ocean-side studio at Prout's Neck, Maine. There, young Wyeth had the good fortune to meet, and spend

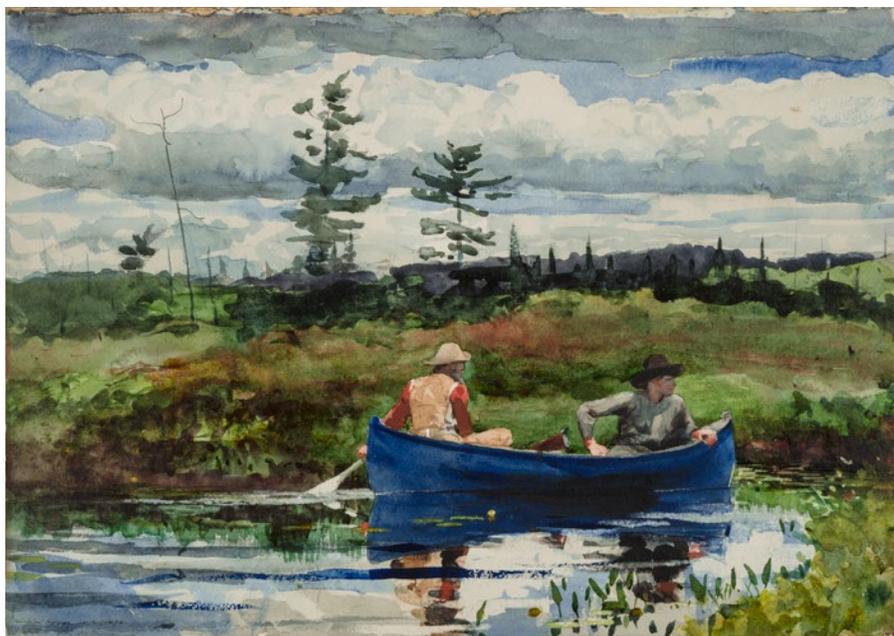
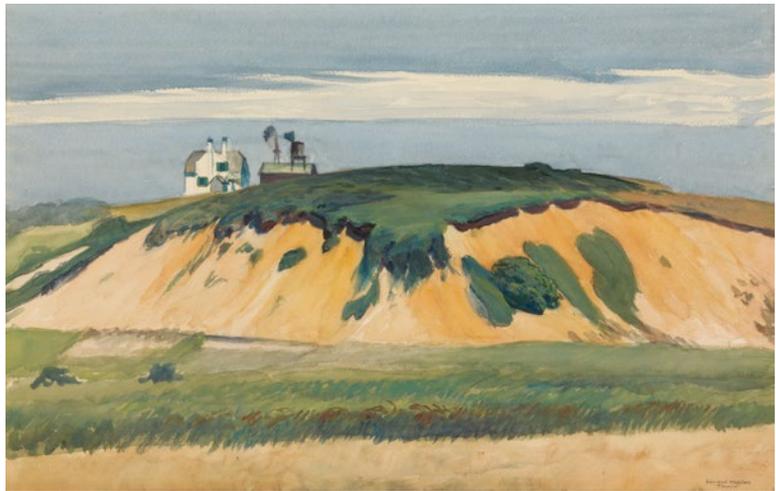


FIG 1 Winslow Homer, *The Blue Boat*, 1892. Watercolor over graphite pencil on paper, 15¼ × 21½ inches (38.6 × 54.6 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, 26.764

FIG 2 John Marin, *Bare Poles, Two-Master, Maine, 1923*. Watercolor on paper, 13 × 15⁵/₈ inches (33 × 39.7 cm) © 2024 Estate of John Marin / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo credit: Olivia Divecchia

FIG 3 Edward Hopper, *Dune with Green Top, 1930*. Watercolor on paper, 15¹/₂ × 24¹/₂ inches (39.4 × 62.2 cm). © Heirs of Josephine N. Hopper/Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Sold by Schoelkopf Gallery in 2021. Photo credit: Joshua Nefsky



memorable time with, Charles Lowell Homer, the late artist's nephew, and with the art historian and critic Lloyd Goodrich, who had just been tapped by Macbeth to begin to assemble the catalogue raisonné of Homer's vast body of work.⁷ Andrew Wyeth arrived at his family's "Eight Bells"—their Maine house named for Homer's famous oil of North Atlantic fishermen—eager to share his heady experience with a family of Homer enthusiasts and ready to paint as never before. "Andy's trip up was quite an eventful one," N.C. reported to daughter Henriette. "The Homer watercolors . . . were almost all new ones, and he went wild over them. It all is resulting in a lurid flow of watercolor over many sheets of paper, here in Port Clyde."⁸

"I just let myself go completely," Wyeth recalled to his biographer, Richard Meryman, of that Homer-fueled painting summer of 1936. "I was sort of flexing my muscles, just

soaking up the country."⁹ Watercolor is an intuitive medium naturally, but Wyeth painted with a new-found brio under Homer's spell. And he regarded summer now at the fishing communities of Port Clyde and Martinsville through a Winslow Homer lens. He painted the drama of coastal skies and the chromatic qualities of the water, its Cerulean and deep Prussian blue and indigo. He enlisted his lobstermen friends Walt Anderson and Henry Teel for local color, effectively using his knowledge of men and boats and the sea.

That November, 1936, the summer's watercolors were featured in what was Andrew Wyeth's first solo exhibition, at the Philadelphia Art Alliance.¹⁰ The Wyeths had earlier exhibited at the Alliance as a family group, but this was Andrew's breakout moment. His exhibition was installed adjacent to a room of prints by modernists John Marin,



FIG 4 Charles E. Burchfield, *Ice Glare*, 1933. Watercolor, charcoal and graphite pencil on paper, 31½ × 25 inches (80 × 63.5 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Purchase, 33.64. Digital image © Whitney Museum of American Art / Licensed by Scala / Art Resource, NY. Reproduced with permission from the Charles E. Burchfield Foundation and the Burchfield Penney Art Center.

FIG 5 Newell Convers Wyeth, *The Duel on the Beach*, 1920. Oil on canvas, 40½ × 29¾ inches (102.9 × 75.6 cm). Photo credit: Joshua Nefsky



Max Weber, and George Overbury "Pop" Hart.¹¹ Andrew was being seen in a new context, not as a chip-off-the-old-block of his artist father (see, e.g., fig. 5) and not as another representative of a regional Brandywine tradition of illustrator-painters, but as a contemporary watercolorist.¹²

For all the enthusiasm expressed by the show's organizers—modernist painter Earle Horter and photographer Yarnall Abbot—and the Philadelphia and Wilmington, Delaware, grandees who turned out in numbers for the opening, there were no sales from the exhibition.¹³ Only one critic, from the *Wilmington News Journal*, took serious notice, writing perceptively in the passage quoted in the epigraph above of the singular place this young artist of obvious promise had managed to achieve between the lively gestural color abstraction of Marin and the seeming truth of Homer.

It would fall to New York dealer Robert Macbeth (fig. 6) to make Andrew Wyeth a critical and market success.

Robert Macbeth, the man for the moment

On January 4, 1937, Andrew Wyeth took the train to Manhattan to pay a call on Robert Macbeth at his Midtown galleries on 57th Street, just off Fifth Avenue. He carried with him some twenty of the Maine watercolors (and two drawings) from his recently closed Philadelphia show, and left them for Macbeth to see. Wyeth might have specifically scheduled his visit so as to catch the exhibition of Homer watercolors that Macbeth still had on view at the gallery, a reprise of the Prout's Neck studio show—and maybe even to see Lloyd Goodrich's sprawling Homer centenary exhibition, which was about to close at the Whitney Museum of American Art in Greenwich Village.¹⁴ Their letters suggest that sometime earlier Wyeth had either offered his work or Macbeth had requested it for inclusion in the group show of watercolors that Macbeth was soon to open, on January 19. Wyeth's visit was not necessarily unexpected then but it was, unfortunately, ill timed, as a convalescing Macbeth was not present to review the watercolor sheets together with his eager caller.¹⁵

Macbeth was deeply impressed by what he ultimately saw, and he sent word to Wyeth two weeks later that he would make room for one of the large sheets in the group show he was then hanging (“These big fellows are awfully big,” he said) and would keep the rest easily accessible to show to potential buyers. But more importantly, Macbeth announced straight away in his letter to Wyeth that he had additional plans, big plans, for the young artist: “Our first reaction is that you being desirous and willing, we must give you a one-man show next year. I think you have got something quite new to offer, and we would like to help you make your New York debut.”¹⁶

That summer at Port Clyde Wyeth was simply “afame,” his father reported to Macbeth.¹⁷ In early September Andrew had some fifty watercolors mounted and matted so as to have them ready for exhibition.¹⁸ When Macbeth received them in New York—Andrew, still painting in Maine, had sent them on via his father—the veteran American art dealer replied to N.C.: “Opening up the bundles of Andy’s pictures was what I might call a ‘faith-justifying’ experience. He has done himself proud this summer, and I am very glad indeed that I offered to give him his initial show.”¹⁹ Macbeth launched Wyeth on October 19, with twenty-two of the new sheets (fig. 7).²⁰

Macbeth’s imprimatur brought out the buyers and the art press in force. The exhibition announcement, illustrating a very Homer-like painting of a lobsterman hauling his traps, the sun illumining the white hull of a splendidly drawn dory, showed visitors what they could expect to see. The exhibition sold out in its first days.²¹ The show drew the attention of all the New York critics, even the irascible Henry McBride of the *New York Sun*, who was an avowed Homer and Marin devotee. The extent of the coverage in itself was an extraordinary achievement. “When a twenty-year-old youngster in his first exhibition adventure in New York can win liberal space in each of the daily newspaper critical columns, his debut can be called successful to a high degree,” the *Art Digest* asserted in reporting on the show’s surprisingly strong opening.²² Critics and buyers were obviously keen to see the young artist that the venerable house of Macbeth, with its historic association with Homer, was heralding as a worthy addition to its roster and, more than that, as an important entry onto the New York contemporary art scene already crowded with watercolorists and dominated by the big three in that medium, Hopper, Marin, and Burchfield. But it was Macbeth’s firm belief, after all, that Wyeth had “something new” to offer.



FIG 6 Andrew Wyeth (left) visited in his studio in Maine by Charles Homer (center), nephew of Winslow Homer, and by his dealer, Robert Macbeth, in August 1938. Photograph by William Phelps. Archives of the Andrew & Betsy Wyeth Study Center

When critics in the 1930s looked at watercolors by Hopper and Burchfield, they typically saw subject first, a nostalgic sense of place—old Gloucester, or gloomy Depression-era Buffalo. When these same New York critics saw the Maine coast watercolors of Wyeth in 1937 they saw only paint. “His land and seascapes have the breadth and force of monumental oils,” said the *New York World-Telegram*. “His color is crisp and brilliant in some papers, deep and resonant in others,” the writer continued, “[a]nd yet he manages to make white space equally eloquent.”²³ “These are very breezy, arresting papers,” the writer for the national *Art News* said, “indicating a talent which intrigues one’s interest . . . for the freshness of the artist’s approach.”²⁴ *Art in America* summed up the uncanny naturalism in these free-form color notes:

Wyeth uses his brush with a really almost spectacular freedom, laying his color on unhesitatingly, and thereby achieving an effect of convincing verisimilitude . . . and in the aggregate, his work inevitably challenges comparison with that of our greatest in his field—men like Winslow Homer and John S. Sargent.²⁵

But Wyeth's sheer fluency in the medium drew skeptics, too. Had Macbeth included some of Wyeth's drawings he could have effectively demonstrated the young artist's already extraordinary draughtsmanship and the rigorous study that informed his practice; he greatly admired the drawings and would show examples in subsequent exhibitions of Wyeth's watercolors. But at this moment the *New York Post* could only regard his summary strokes as "dashing through" the laborious formal problems, it said, though the *Post* permitted Wyeth this: "[H]e certainly is a brilliant dasher, and one undoubtedly destined for great success along that line."²⁶ Royal Cortissoz in the *Herald Tribune* saw only youthful exuberance in whatever sacrifice of form came of the "audacious force" with which Wyeth applied watercolor, and Cortissoz predicted a natural course correction with experience.²⁷ But Henry McBride, in the *Sun*, was rather cutting about Wyeth's mannerisms: "Mr. Wyeth has the breadth of view that is associated with the name of Homer, and he has a brave way of applying a wash to the paper and he is unafraid of color, and with these accomplishments he finds it easy to present you with clean, crisp watercolors," McBride allowed. "Homer, the great, however, lacked this facility, and did not find it easy to make watercolors. He plodded rather humbly to the heights," McBride explained, and then he added, in words that surely smarted, "with no startling cleverness to win him clients."²⁸

"When the Winslow Homer touch gets into some other artist's work, it is a hard thing to get rid of," McBride cautioned Wyeth. In so many words, the seasoned critic, a great admirer of watercolor, then went on to wonder if the specter of Homer, which hung over this young watercolorist's most auspicious debut, would inhibit him. Would that specter interfere with his becoming Andrew Wyeth?²⁹

Unfolding

"I never wanted to copy the work of other people," Wyeth told Richard Meryman, "but I wanted to find the truth in nature that they were expressing and then find my own truth. So Homer led me to something else."³⁰ Wyeth's Homer-inspired painting summers of 1936 and 1937 gave way to seasons of changing focus and with that an evolving technique. They were part of what his father, N.C. Wyeth, would call his young son's irregular and varied but inevitable phases of unfolding.³¹

Painting between Chadds Ford and Maine made Wyeth appreciate distinctions in the two places as never before

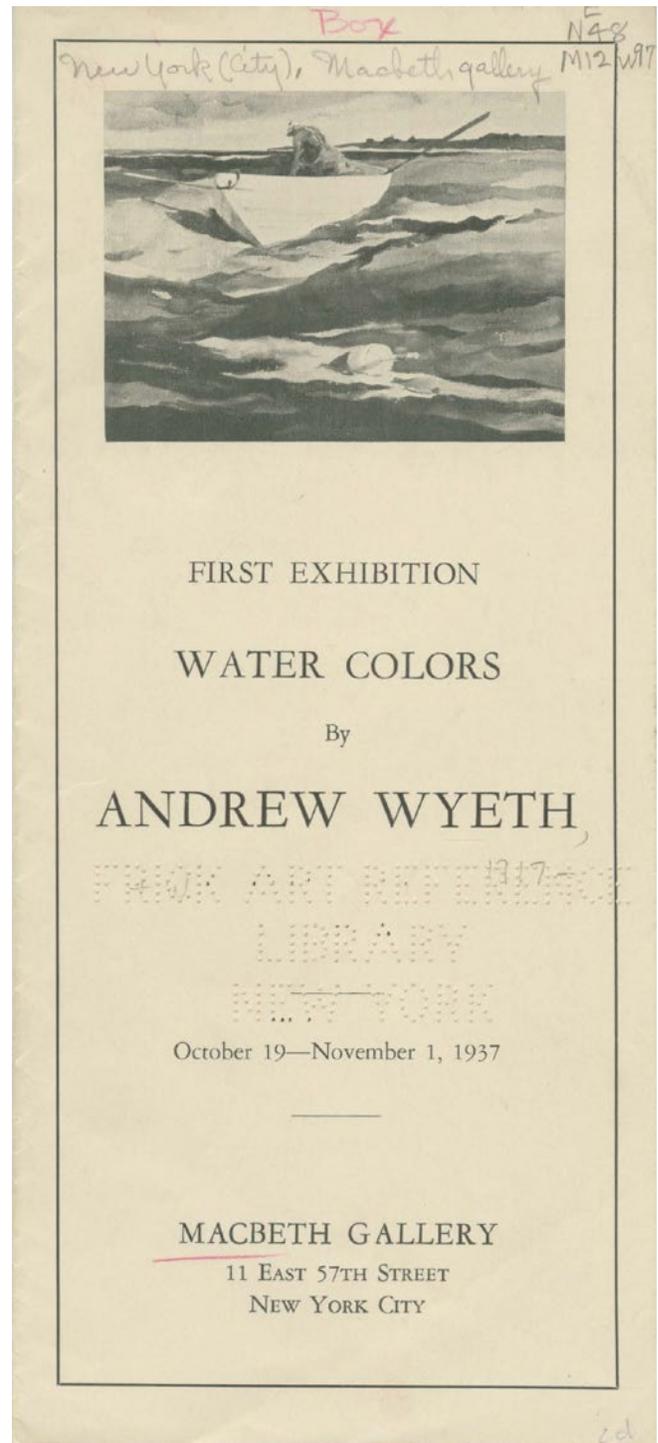


FIG 7 Cover of exhibition catalogue for *First Exhibition: Water Colors by Andrew Wyeth*, held at Macbeth Gallery, New York, October 19–November 1, 1937



FIG 8 Andrew Wyeth, *Untitled*, 1939. Watercolor on paper, 15 × 21 inches (38.1 × 53.3 cm)
 © Wyeth Foundation for American Art/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photo credit: Lowy, Michael Tramis

and revealed to him the limits of transparent watercolor as he had been practicing it. Chadds Ford offered Wyeth structure and texture, the patina of scarred earth and weathered fieldstone. What was similarly fundamental and eternal in the watery world of coastal Maine had eluded him. “I look at these islands and think that I know them, and then I realize that I only know them on the outside,” Wyeth wrote rather plaintively to his father.³²

He would deepen his experience of Maine. Wyeth went to Port Clyde in late winter, 1938, to see Maine in a different guise. This Port Clyde was unfamiliar to him, grim, and empty, with the lobstermen now hiding away their little-known indoor selves. The color and contours of the coastline were dramatically stark: the sea a deeper blue and green, Wyeth reported, and the yellow-brown

rockweed that carpeted the shore had turned a veritable black.³³ This was a heightened experience not just of place but of nature, as he studied with fresh eyes familiar rocks and shoals. “Maine,” his father wrote to assure his doubt-ridden son in these weeks of bracing re-discovery, “has opened secret pages to you which are *vital*.”³⁴ Wyeth would come to see and paint now the changing seasonal pools of variegated color—ochre, brown, black, red, and orange. These studies approached pure abstraction; we see that in later examples, like the untitled watercolor of summertime blue and green and purple patterns in the shimmering shoals where a doryman will soon alight (1939; fig. 8), and the spare, somber, wintry color pattern at the shore of *Maplejuice Cove* (1942; fig. 9).

FIG 9 Andrew Wyeth, *Maplejuice Cove*, 1942. Watercolor on paper, 18 × 22 inches (45.7 × 55.9 cm) © Wyeth Foundation for American Art/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photo credit: Tom Morrill



It would not be long before Wyeth's vantage on Maine changed dramatically, and forever, and it changed his art. In the summer of 1939 he met Betsy James, and over the next year, as they prepared to marry, Wyeth's sphere expanded to her family's place inland on the Saint George River at Cushing. It offered a particularly quiet, almost austere landscape that was previously unknown to the painter. Later in life Wyeth would usually say that his formative years between 1936 and 1940 fell into two distinct periods, each defined by his medium of choice: impulsive transparent watercolors were an early phase, but the mastery of egg-tempera marked his maturity.³⁵ His youthful high spirits gave way, he would say, to a more disciplined, introspective self, as befitted the age-old technique of painting intricate strokes of pure pigment on meticulously prepared gessoed panels over an armature of exacting ink drawing. But in 1955 Wyeth told Lloyd Goodrich what we would come to see in Wyeth's art of the 1940s: that the shift in locale from Port Clyde to Cushing at the beginning of that decade was the profoundly transforming experience.

"Before I had only known the close relation of the sea to those who fish it. Now I realized that there was a more subtle presence of the sea in the rural farming country of Cushing," Wyeth explained for Goodrich.³⁶ Cushing was emptiness and quietude, little more than a sparse string of "white houses and plainspoken farms strung along three miles of road" to Thomaston, as Richard Meryman would describe it and as Wyeth would paint it (see, e.g., *Bradford's House*, 1939; fig. 10).³⁷ Port Clyde had offered the "bigness" of Maine, "the swish and swirl of the sea," but inland showed Maine's personal side, its humble and private farm people.³⁸ It was here where Wyeth famously encountered the bewitching Christina Olson, her brother Alvaro, and their weather beaten house. The old farmhouses and their weather worn inhabitants made Cushing seem ethereal: "one of those things that almost isn't," Wyeth put it.³⁹ This desiccated environment placed its own dictates upon Wyeth's choice of mediums as it held his imagination over the next three decades.

The fluidity of transparent watercolor and the discipline of dry tempera converged at this juncture in a distinctive



FIG 10 Andrew Wyeth, *Bradford's House*, 1939. Watercolor on paper, 17½ × 21½ inches (44.5 × 54.6 cm) © Wyeth Foundation for American Art/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photo credit: Tom Morrill

technique Wyeth adopted from Albrecht Dürer in service of such flinty subjects. This was the “drybrush” watercolor, the term describing perfectly the character of the stroke. With his soft sable brush filled with ink or color, wrung out, and pressed by his fingers into sharp points, Wyeth found that he could effectively draw in fine lines, as Dürer had, with his watercolor brushes to give volume, detail, and texture. Following his initial summer’s work inland at Cushing in 1939, Wyeth was able to surprise critics that fall with his first “drybrush” studies, he specifically called them, made there and at Chadds Ford, too. He unveiled a group of them, all black and white, as a supplement to the fluid, brilliantly hued transparent watercolors of Maine that were featured once again in his second Macbeth Gallery show in October 1939.

In 1942, *American Artist* magazine interviewed Wyeth at length about his watercolor practice for the benefit of students of painting. Addressing the puzzlement of the two Wyeths, the watercolorist and the tempera painter, the author offered the example of young Wyeth’s emerging artistic personality as a word of advice to artist readers:

[T]he well-rounded man is a different man at different times, as he takes devious directions to arrive at a goal that cannot be approached by a single path. Only the artist himself can see the map whereon those divergent paths finally meet in the ground strategy of a single purpose. We shall watch for the meeting of those paths in the work of Andrew Wyeth.⁴⁰

The ground strategy of a single purpose

The two sides of Wyeth’s split artistic personality were reconciled after 1940. Explosive watercolor did not give way in Wyeth’s art, it evolved. For Wyeth, expressive passages of purely emotive watercolor could still be the foundation of watercolor painting, but he could weave together his color improvisations now with the dry brush. In the examples here, *After the Flood* (1993; fig. 11) and *First Mowing* (1994; fig. 12), both impressions of his Chadds Ford home, the drybrush passages bring loose color abstractions magically into focus.

FIG 11 Andrew Wyeth, *After the Flood*, 1993. Watercolor on paper, 20 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (51.1 × 69.8 cm) © Wyeth Foundation for American Art/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photo credit: Tom Morrill

FIG 12 Andrew Wyeth, *First Mowing*, 1994. Watercolor, 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 28 inches (52.7 × 71.1 cm) © Wyeth Foundation for American Art/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photo credit: Olivia Divecchia



Spontaneous watercolor was still the medium of Wyeth's field notes, the means through which he communed with a subject, in the moment, page after page, absorbing it enroute to distilling it into a summary statement in tempera. Wyeth expanded the idea of the watercolor "study" to reference not just a compositional aid to tempera painting but an extended period of investigation of a subject via watercolors in pursuit of a multi-dimensional sense of it. *Mother Archie's Church* (fig. 13), for example, a watercolor and ink painting of 1945, is one of a group of sheets that appear to have been done in close succession at or in the old African-American church at

Chadds Ford, all of the sheets compositionally different and none of them relating directly to the tempera that would be the culmination that fall of months of concentrated study at Mother Archie's.⁴¹

The process by which Wyeth deepened his engagement with a subject through extensive field studies means that pictures interconnect in ways that may not be obvious. For instance, Wyeth's fifteen-year-long fixation on model Helga Testorf, from 1970 to 1985, surely informs watercolors of the Kuerner house that he made alongside the furtive Helga pictures at this same time (e.g., *Evening at Kuerners Study*, 1970, and *Snowed In*, 1980; fig. 14). The house was a



FIG 13 Andrew Wyeth, *Mother Archie's Church Study*, 1945. Watercolor on paper, 14¼ × 20½ inches (36.2 × 52.1 cm) © Wyeth Foundation for American Art/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photo credit: Lowy, Michael Tramis

FIG 14 Andrew Wyeth, *Snowed In*, 1980. Watercolor on paper, 19¼ × 26⅞ inches (48.9 × 68.3 cm) © Wyeth Foundation for American Art/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photo credit: Charles Kaufman



highly charged subject for the artist for many reasons, not least because it was here where he painted Helga in secret in those rooms behind the small windows that are so conspicuous in the Kuerner house compositions.

Wyeth would find his singular purpose. On October 19, 1945, N.C. Wyeth was tragically killed by an oncoming train at the Ring Road crossing near the Kuerner farm in Chadds Ford, and with that, Wyeth's focus changed again, suddenly and thoroughly. Place, which had been the subject of his art heretofore, was no longer just some pictorial tableau. Now the places Wyeth had known his entire life summoned his grief and torment and his imagination. And Wyeth was now in possession of an impressive arsenal of skills, studiously developed over the previous decade—in drawing,

watercolor, and tempera—that he could deploy instinctually, variously, and in combination, as his emotions directed him.

Wyeth worked from a retrospective frame of mind after the death of his father. In 1966 he painted the tempera *Far from Needham* (fig. 15), the cryptic title alluding to the distance he had traveled, artistically speaking, in the thirty years since his debut as a daring young watercolorist—Needham, Massachusetts, was his late father's birthplace and a touchstone for both father and son. Even Wyeth's portrait of his elderly Chadds Ford friend Andy Davis (*Turtleneck*, 1984; fig. 16) owes its inception in part to his childhood memories of his father and their Sunday outings and their shared joy in glimpsing Davis as he sat watching the traffic on the road close-by the old Davis house.⁴² The

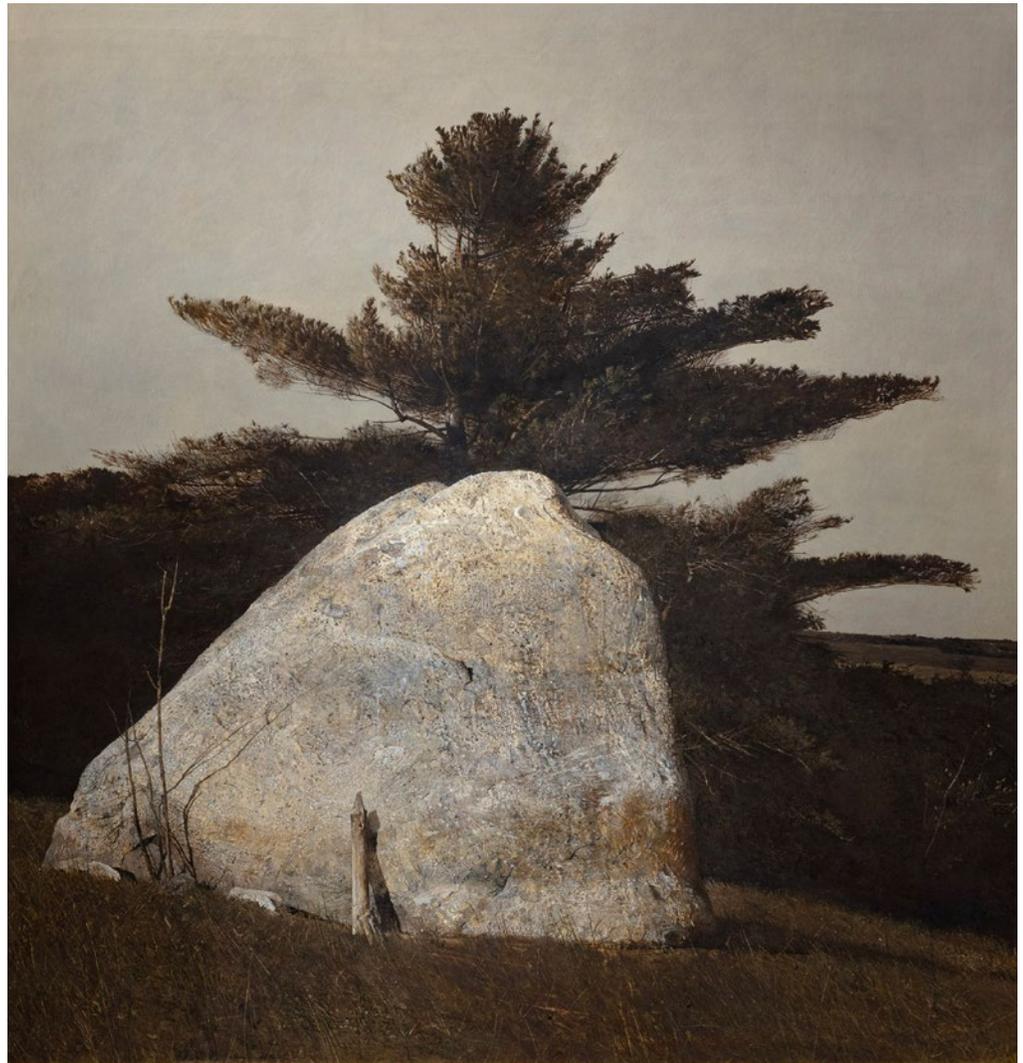


FIG 15 Andrew Wyeth, *Far From Needham*, 1966. Tempera on panel 44 × 41¼ inches (111.8 × 104.8 cm) © Wyeth Foundation for American Art/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photo Credit: Tom Morrill



FIG 16 Andrew Wyeth, *Turtleneck*, 1984. Tempera on panel 22 × 34¼ inches (55.9 × 87 cm) © Wyeth Foundation for American Art/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photo credit: Lowy, Michael Tramis



FIG 17 Andrew Wyeth, *Left Hook*, 1984. Watercolor on paper, 22 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 29 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches (56.8 × 75.9 cm) © Wyeth Foundation for American Art/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photo credit: Tom Morrill

watercolor *Left Hook* (1984; fig. 17), is a bleak wintertime rumination on what had been a test of wills with his father that still embittered Wyeth after fifty years. The composition references one of Wyeth's first paintings, an oil done under his father's tutelage, which depicted their African-American friend Bill Loper wearing his steel arm hook. Wyeth was forever haunted by the action of his demanding father when he dismissively rubbed out this key detail in his son's effort because it seemed too dark and menacing, too real for art.⁴³

A seminal period in his art and life

By 1940, while still a very young man, Andrew Wyeth had achieved an exposure and critical acclaim through his watercolors that brought him out from the shadow of his once more famous father, N.C. Wyeth. In his prodigious technical range and innovation Wyeth had defied the skeptics and thrown off the Winslow Homer touch. Henceforth he would regularly be represented by watercolors in the closely-watched Whitney Museum annual exhibitions and others nationally, and when in 1944 he won election into the National Academy of Design, it was as a watercolorist.⁴⁴ Andrew Wyeth had quickly established himself alongside all of the better known American masters of watercolor—Marin,

Hopper, and Burchfield. But by the end of the decade he would shun his enviable early success in that medium to get ever closer to his chosen subject matter via the slow, meditative technique of tempera and the drybrush method he innovated to make watercolor accommodate his introspective side. With his father's death in 1945, Wyeth turned inward, channeling his feelings of grief, love, and anger, into a new sense of purpose, a focus on the *why* to paint that eclipsed those overriding questions of his unfolding years, the questions of *what* or *how* to paint.



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NOTES

1. Craik Morris, "Brush, Palette, Pencil," (Wilmington, Delaware) *News Journal*, November 25, 1936: p. 9.

2. The climate for watercolor painting in 1936; the primacy of Marin, Hopper, and Burchfield; and the linkage of the three contemporary watercolorists with Winslow Homer is amply presented and thoroughly documented in these two sources in particular: Kathleen A. Foster, "The 'American Medium' and the Moderns," in her *American Watercolor in the Age of Homer and Sargent* (New Haven: Yale University Press; Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2017), pp. 333-373; and Virginia M. Mecklenburg, *Edward Hopper: The Watercolors* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company; Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1999), pp. 1-7.

3. The exhibitions were these: *John Marin: Watercolors, Oil Paintings, Etchings*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, October 19–November 22, 1936; *Watercolors by Charles Burchfield—Prints by Peggy Bacon*, Frank K. M. Rehn Galleries, New York, November 16–December 5, 1936. Hopper would receive a retrospective exhibition in 1937: *An Exhibition of Paintings, Water Colors, and Etchings by Edward Hopper*, Carnegie Institute Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, March 11–April 25, 1937.

4. *Second Biennial Exhibition, Part II: Watercolors and Pastels*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, February 18–March 18, 1936.

5. *First National Exhibition of American Art*, International Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, May 18–July 1, 1936. See Forbes Watson, "Is There—Will There Be—An American Art?," *New York Times*, May 24, 1936, p. SM14; and Forbes Watson, "Assaying American Art," *New York Times*, May 24, 1936, p. X7.

6. The exhibitions were these: *Paintings and Drawings by Winslow Homer, Belonging to the Museum's Collections and Loans*, dates unclear, but extended into Harvard's summer session, 1936; see "Report of the Fogg Art Museum," *Annual Report, 1935-1936*, p. 3; the annual report shows significant gifts of Homer watercolors to the Fogg in 1936, including a gift from Mrs. Charles S. Homer in memory of Winslow Homer; and it shows a large number of Homer watercolor loans, most significantly from Horace D. Chapin, works that may have been among the "new" ones that Wyeth saw; "Annual Report," p. 21; and *Exhibition of Works by Winslow Homer and John LaFarge*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, June–August, 1936. The Worcester Art Museum did not mount a special Homer exhibition that summer, but it is likely that the museum used the centenary to put a selection of its permanent collection holdings on view. I am grateful to Rebecca Morin, Head Librarian, Worcester Art Museum, for checking the museum's exhibitions history for me.

7. We know of Andrew Wyeth's itinerary from N.C. Wyeth's letter to his daughter Henriette, from Port Clyde, July 24, 1936, in Betsy James Wyeth, ed., *The Wyeths: The Letters of N.C. Wyeth, 1901-1945* (Boston: Gambit, 1971), p. 756; N.C. Wyeth also tells of his son's meeting Charles Lowell Homer and Lloyd Goodrich at Homer's studio; Goodrich, as Macbeth's choice for compiling a new Homer catalogue raisonné, is announced in various places—see Edward Alden Jewell "Winslow Homer's Century 'At Home,'" *New York Times*, August 12, 1936, p. 9. Wyeth was visiting the Homer exhibitions with his sister Carolyn and possibly with his father's illustrator friend, George Whitney; see "Artists to Visit Some Galleries," (*Wilmington, Delaware*) *News Journal*, July 8, 1936: p. 10. The studio show was *An Exhibition of Paintings by Winslow Homer*, Prout's Neck, Maine, July 18–August 2, 1936. The show was held under the auspices of the Prout's Neck Association, a residents' organization, but the *New York Times* reported at length on Macbeth's role in organizing and presenting the

show: see Jewell, "Winslow Homer's Century." Macbeth reprised the show in his New York galleries as *An Introduction to Homer*, Macbeth Galleries, December 15, 1936–January 18, 1937; catalogue, newspaper clippings, and related material in Macbeth Gallery Records, Archives of American Art (AAA), Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., "Scrapbooks," Box 127, folder 2, Scrapbook 15, 1935 February–1938 January.

8. N.C. Wyeth, in Betsy James Wyeth, ed., *Ibid.*

9. Andrew Wyeth to Richard Meryman, *Andrew Wyeth: A Secret Life* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), p. 111.

10. *Exhibition of Water Colors by Andrew Wyeth*, Philadelphia Art Alliance, November 16–December 6, 1936. See Morris, (*Wilmington, Delaware*) *News Journal*. I am grateful to John Pollock, Curator, Research Services, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books, and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania Library, for locating what scant material remains of the 1936 solo show. The Wyeth show was organized by modernist Earle Horter, who was then chairman of the Alliance watercolor committee and was a friend of the Wyeths, including young Andrew. See Michael Taylor, "Between Realism and Surrealism: The Early Work of Andrew Wyeth," in Anne Classen Knutson, ed., *Andrew Wyeth, Memory and Magic* (New York: Rizzoli, 2005), p. 29.

11. C. H. Bonte, "Current Exhibitions in Philadelphia Art Galleries," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 22, 1936: p. 41. Bonte describes the modernist prints: Marin Venetian and Parisian images and one each of the Brooklyn Bridge and Woolworth Building; Hart prints of Mexican subjects; and Weber color prints referencing African sculpture. Bonte also mentions in this piece the previous year's Wyeth family exhibition and the relationships he believed were evident in the art.

12. Even Craik Morris, who wrote perceptively of Wyeth's Art Alliance show, had low expectations before the opening for work that would distinguish young Andrew from his father and siblings. "As the years roll by it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish the paintings of one member of the Chadds Ford group from those of the others." See Morris, "Brush, Palette, Pencil," *News Journal*, November 5, 1936: p. 9.

13. See "Wyeth—A New Star," *Philadelphia Art Alliance Bulletin*, November 1936, n.p.; and Theo B. White, *The Philadelphia Art Alliance: Fifty Years, 1915-1965* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965), p. 70. Mina Carol, writing in the *Wilmington, Delaware, Morning News* in advance of the exhibition's opening, offered a lengthy appraisal of the youngest Wyeth's earnest traits as an illustrator, and although the piece offers insight into Wyeth's methods in that genre, it offers little about his new watercolors; see Mina Carol, "Youngest Wyeth to Make His Bow in One-Main Show," (*Wilmington, Delaware*) *Morning News*, November 10, 1936: p. 6. Also see Taylor, "Between Realism and Surrealism," p. 28. The list of attendees who were expected at the special opening of the show is given in "Among Local Folk," *Morning News*, November 7, 1936: p. 10.

14. Macbeth's exhibition was *An Introduction to Homer*, Macbeth Gallery, December 15, 1936–January 18, 1937. Macbeth produced an illustrated catalogue. The show included drawings, watercolors (thirty works) and a few oils, along with Homer's painting palette and maul stick, watercolors by his mother, letters, and photographs of the installation in the Prouts Neck studio the previous July; copy in Macbeth Gallery Records, AAA, "Scrapbooks," Scrapbook 15, Box 127, folder 2, 1935 February–1938 January. The Whitney Museum exhibition was *Winslow Homer Centenary Exhibition*, Whitney Museum of American Art, December 15, 1936–January 15, 1937. Catalogue by Lloyd Goodrich.

15. Andrew Wyeth to Robert Macbeth, January 5, 1937, Macbeth Gallery records, AAA, microfilm reel 2665. Macbeth to Wyeth, January 18, 1937, *Ibid.*

16. Macbeth to Wyeth, *Ibid.* The group show was *Group of Water Colors*, Macbeth Gallery, January 19-February 1, 1937; typewritten checklist in Macbeth Gallery Records, AAA, "Scrapbooks," Box 127, folder 2, Scrapbook 15, 1935 February-1938 January. Macbeth said to Wyeth, "We have so little room for watercolors in this show tomorrow that I can put in only one, but I shall have the others easily accessible so that if anything does happen, I can easily trot them out." But Wyeth has two entries on the checklist. Macbeth sold one of the watercolors from the show.
17. N.C. Wyeth to Robert Macbeth, September 20, 1937, Macbeth Gallery Records, AAA microfilm reel 2665.
18. Andrew Wyeth to Robert Macbeth, September 8, 1937, *Ibid.*
19. Robert Macbeth to N.C. Wyeth, September 30, 1937, *Ibid.*
20. See catalogue of the exhibition, Macbeth Gallery Records, AAA, "Scrapbooks," Scrapbook 15, Box 127, folder 2, 1935 February-1938 January. October 19, as it happened, was a charged date in the Wyeth household. It was a date when milestone events took place—like Andrew's entering his father's studio to begin formal study. N.C. saw the show's opening as Macbeth's great birthday gift to him, he said. October 19, in 1945, was the date of N.C. Wyeth's death.
21. Macbeth's commissions ledger identifies all the buyers, who comprise a few obvious discrete groups: there were Homer collectors, like Bartlett Arkell of Canajoharie and Francis Minot Weld; prominent names from Wilmington and Philadelphia who would have known the Wyeth family (Mrs. Robert Wheelwright—Ellen Dupont—of Chestnut Hill and North Haven, Maine, bought four); admirers of N.C. Wyeth's illustration art, including a prominent collector of illustrated books from West Virginia; and well-known art collectors (Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney, Mrs. Frederic March, Vincent Price), those with no easily discernible connection to the artist, his family, or his Maine subject matter. See Macbeth Gallery Records, AAA, Series 2: Financial and Shipping Records/Artist Commissions, Credits and Purchases, 1930-1938, Box 97, folder 2.
22. "Andrew Wyeth, in Debut, Wins Critics' Acclaim," *Art Digest* 12, no. 3 (November 1, 1937), p. 15. The painting is *The Lobsterman*, which Macbeth sold to Beulah Emmett, a close friend of the Wyeths; now in the Hunter Museum of American Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee. See Macbeth Gallery Records, AAA, "Scrapbooks," Scrapbook 15, Box 127, folder 2 and "Artist Commissions . . .," *Ibid.*
23. "Younger Painters Carry Torch for American Art This Week," *New York World Telegram*, October 23, 1937, clipping in Macbeth Gallery Records, AAA, Series 5: "Scrapbooks," Scrapbook 15, box 127, folder 2.
24. "Here and There in the Galleries," *Art News* 36, no. 4 (October 23, 1937): p. 15.
25. Milledge L. Bonham, Jr., "The Watercolors of Andrew Wyeth," *Art in America* 26, no. 1 (January 1938), p. 41.
26. *New York Post*, October 23, 1937, clipping in Macbeth Gallery Records, Scrapbook 15, box 127, folder 2.
27. Royal Cortissoz, "A French Draughtsman and Some Painters," *New York Herald-Tribune*, October 24, 1937: p. F8.
28. Henry McBride "Attractions in the Galleries," *New York Sun*, October 23, 1937, clipping in Macbeth Gallery Records, Scrapbook 15, box 12, folder 2.
29. McBride cited this parallel to Wyeth's Homer predicament: "It is like the 'Sargent influence' in the work of John Whorf, for which he was so much commended at his debut, and which he now finds interfering with his ever becoming just John Whorf." *Ibid.*
30. Wyeth to Meryman, p. 116.
31. N.C. Wyeth to Robert Macbeth, February 19, 1939, in Betsy James Wyeth, ed., p. 786.
32. Andrew Wyeth to "Ma and Pa," May 17, 1938, in Meryman, p. 117.
33. Wyeth, writing to Alice Hollingsworth Moore, March 20, 1938, from a series of love letters to the young woman, a good friend of the Wyeth family, who lived in Poughkeepsie, New York, but visited Wyeth often in Chadds Ford and Port Clyde. The letters cover a period from August 1, 1937, to April 19, 1939, just before Wyeth met Betsy James in Cushing. Wyeth wrote much about his art to Moore, whom he hoped to marry, for he was trying desperately to make her understand him. The letters are extremely useful for chronicling Wyeth's activity in this period, and for his recording, in the moment, his developing thoughts on his art and his aspirations. Some contain sketches of works in progress. The letters surfaced in 2016, and were offered at auction by Grogan & Company, Boston, "The Fall Auction," November 11, 2018; high resolution images of all the letters are archived at <https://www.groganco.com>. I am grateful to Mary Landa of the Andrew Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné for providing me with transcriptions of the letters in 2016 (in the author's files).
34. N.C. Wyeth to Andrew, May 18, 1938, in Betsy James Wyeth, ed., p. 773.
35. See for example Wyeth to Wanda Corn, in *The Art of Andrew Wyeth* (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society for the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1973), p. 130.
36. Andrew Wyeth, in Lloyd Goodrich, "Andrew Wyeth," *Art in America* 43, no. 3 (October 1955), p. 13.
37. Meryman, p. 133.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*
40. "Andrew Wyeth: One of America's Youngest and Most Talented Painters," *American Artist* 6, no. 7 (September 1942), p. 24. The extensive illustrated article is unsigned, but Ernest W. Watson and Arthur Guptill were the magazine's editors. Watson-Guptill became a famous publisher of instructional books for artists.
41. Other examples are *Memorial Day*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, undated but probably 1945 (purchased in 1946); *Mother Archie's Church Study*, 1945 (Andrew and Betsy Wyeth Collection of the Wyeth Foundation for American Art).
42. See Wyeth's comments to his wife on the emotional and visual sensations that Andy Davis stirred within the painter: *Andrew Wyeth: Close Friends* (Seattle: University of Washington Press for the Mississippi Museum of Art, 2010), pp. 126-128.
43. See Wyeth's commentary about the original painting that his father altered (*Bill Loper with Big Tree Truck*, 1934, Andrew and Betsy Wyeth Collection of the Wyeth Foundation for American Art) in *Close Friends*, pp. 28, 141. There is a second version of this drybrush watercolor, also done in 1984, which is set in a green spring-time landscape: *Little Africa* (Andrew and Betsy Wyeth Collection of the Wyeth Foundation for American Art).
44. In a letter from Hazel Lewis of the Macbeth Gallery to Wyeth, she responds to concerns the artist has expressed about his being recognized in the Academy's Water Color Section, and hopes that it would not preclude him being honored eventually as a "painter" as well as a "watercolorist." Hazel Lewis to Wyeth, February 10, 1944, Macbeth Gallery Papers, AAA, microfilm reel 2665. For Wyeth's entries in the national watercolor exhibitions, see Peter Hastings Falk, ed., *The Annual Exhibition Record of the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1918-1989* (Madison, Connecticut: Sound View Press, 1991), pp. 423-424; and Raymond L. Wilson, ed., *Index of American Watercolor Exhibitions, 1900-1945* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1994), p. 770.