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WYETH

Purely a Personal Expression

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Andrew Wyeth, *Pre-study for Christina's World*, 13 by 19 inches, pencil on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

Andrew Wyeth: Works on Paper will be on exhibition at Gilcrease Museum, January 28 through April 16. The exhibition includes 50 works representative of the artist's development from 1939-1978 and features a range of media — watercolor, drybrush and pencil.

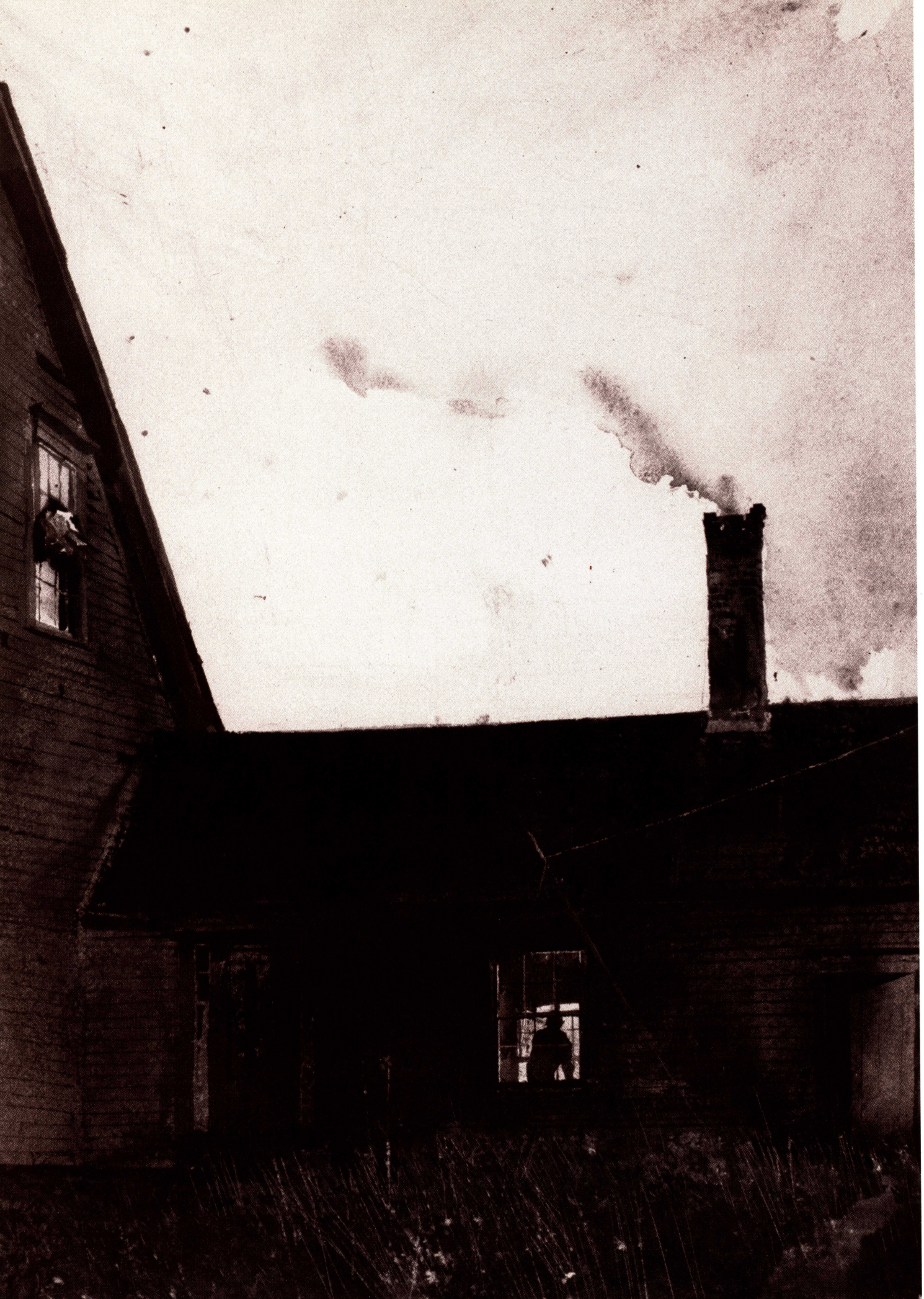
On loan from the Holly and Arthur Magill collection and the Greenville County Museum of Art, this will be the first museum showing of these Wyeth works, west of the Mississippi.

ANDREW WYETH

Purely a Personal Expression

"I'm not here to record today, as it is now. I'm only recording how I feel about things. I'm really painting my own life, my own doubts — purely a personal expression."

ANDREW WYETH, 1980



Andrew Wyeth

Purely a Personal Expression

BY PAULA HALL

By his own admission, he changes things terribly from what really is the truth. That comes from painting from memory, he says, memory of his own feelings.

"Painting to me is a matter of truth and your memory of what it is. Finally when a painting is good, it'll be mostly memory," Wyeth says.

Wyeth, who has enjoyed a wide and enthusiastic public acclaim through a career spanning more than five decades, has been heralded by some as the most important American painter of his time. He paints the people and countryside of two worlds in which he lives — Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, where he has lived all his life and Cushing, Maine, where he spends his summers.

His masterful representations of rural America have been deeply influenced by these two localities and a handful of people. The Pennsylvania countryside of fall, winter and spring is revealed through Wyeth's eyes primarily as the world of his friend, the late Karl Kuerner and other neighbors. But the summer world is primarily that of the Olson property in Maine where he was inspired to create his most famous painting, *Christina's World.*

"Everything I've painted are of places that I've had experiences. I feel very strongly about the personal element. That's the strength of my work, to go deeply into something I know and try and pull it out."

The Kuerner's farm appealed to him primarily because it possessed those cherished colors of the Brandywine River valley and the feeling of the "strength of the land," the solidity of it. Maine appealed to him for almost the opposite reason. Maine is spidery, light in color, windy perhaps, sometimes foggy, "giving the impression sometimes of crackling skeletons rattling in the attic."

Wyeth is a confirmed recluse who confines his social activities to his family and old friends. Wyeth's intense desire for privacy has created a legend about him that only recently was fueled by the unveiling of the Helga pictures. Astonishment and curiosity, in the art world and at large, greeted the news that this major American artist had for 15 years been working in virtual secrecy on a substantial new series. More than 240 works centered around one model, Helga Testof, a neighbor of the Wyeths in Chadds Ford and the German nurse that cared for Karl Kuerner during his final illness.

Wyeth has been depicted by many as aloof and uncommunicative. Others who are close, describe him as a

Andrew Wyeth, *Breakfast at Olsons'*, 23¾ by 16 inches, watercolor on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

Andrew Wyeth, *Loden Coat*, 30 by 22 inches, watercolor on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

The distinct Helga series was executed over a 15-year period from 1971 through 1985. Helga was 38-years-old when Wyeth began to draw her and 53 when he brought the series to an end. The collection when acquired by Leonard Andrews consisted of 240 works, mostly on paper. Three other paintings in the series, Day Dream, Loden Coat and Knapsack *had been sold earlier into other collections. In a sense, the Helga series is a coda to the paintings of Karl Kuerner and the hill, which appears in many of Wyeth's paintings. According to those who have known her, during Karl Kuerner's final illness it was Helga, a woman from East Prussia, who looked after and nursed him. Helga was seen walking down the Kuerner's driveway toward the house in her Loden coat every morning at exactly the same hour.*

Andrew Wyeth, *Pre-study for Anna Christina*, 11½ by 17¼ inches, pencil on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

warm man with a fine sense of humor who likes nothing better than to talk into the night with friends. His reclusiveness, however, keeps him close to the sources of his inspiration — the people and places that have nourished his life and work.

"I love people but they intoxicate me so that it's fatal to go out much. That's why I have to keep to myself. It might sound as though I'm scared, but I see so many men's work with influences in it, and I want to keep out influences and try to do what is true to me."

Truth is in his memory and Wyeth says he draws a great deal from his childhood memories.

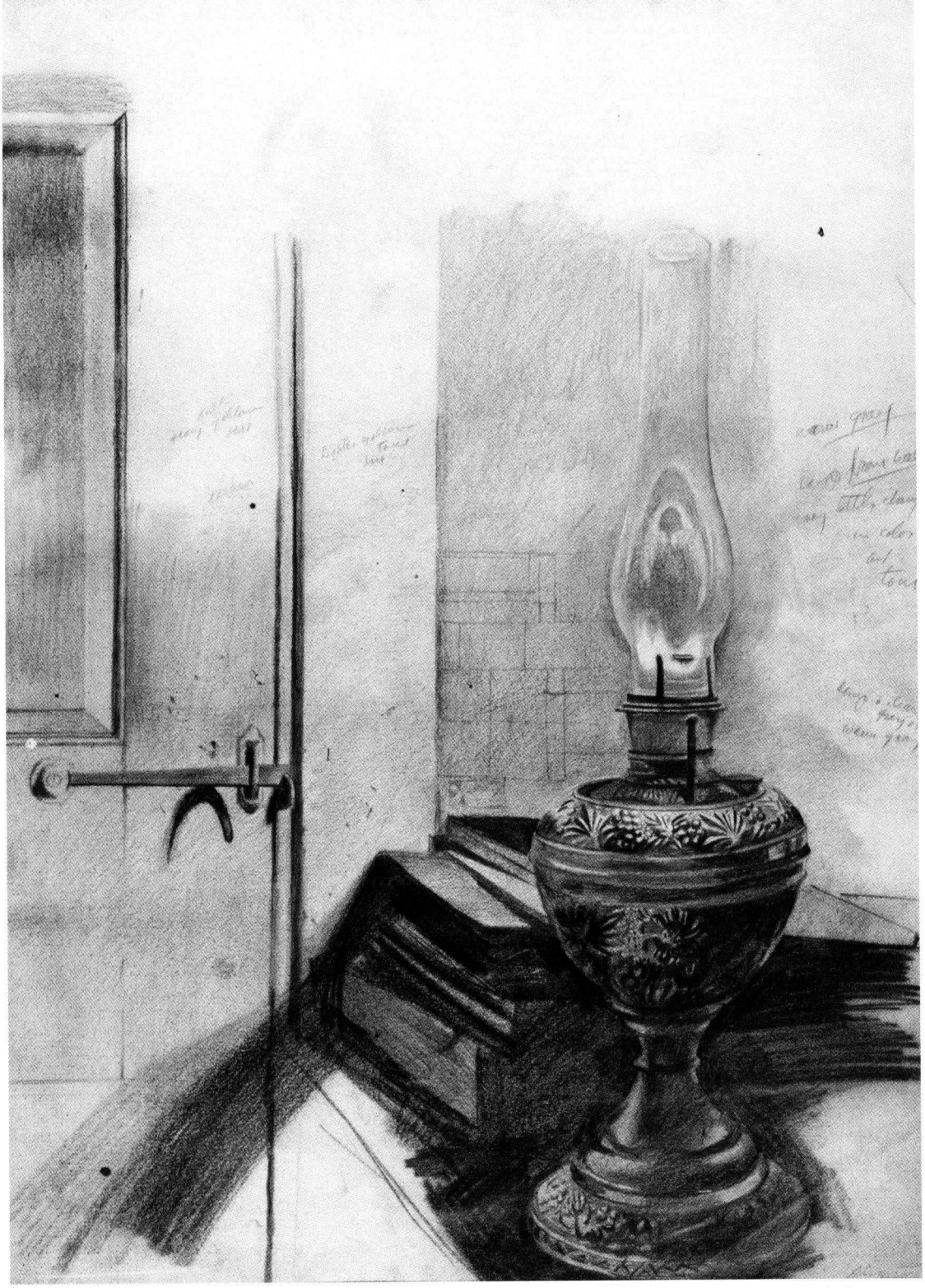
Andrew Wyeth is the youngest son of painter Newell Converse Wyeth, a man of extraordinary vitality who shared a variety of passions with his large, talented family. N.C. Wyeth moved to the Brandywine Valley at age 19 to study with writer-illustrator Howard Pyle. The countryside captivated the elder Wyeth and he settled down to become a famous illustrator, providing the renowned Scribner's editions of children's classics with kings, princesses, buccaneers and buckskins.

He built a house on a hill overlooking the hamlet of Chadds Ford and he and his wife raised their five children. N.C. believed in exciting the imagination of his children and often remarked that an individual gains all the experiences that are carried through the rest of life between the ages of say 6 and 18.

"He was a remarkable man who knew I was going to be an artist or illustrator. He often said to me how important it was for a child that was going to be creative to spend his life alone. That was why he was against college education for a painter," Andrew Wyeth once recalled.

Andrew spent most of his childhood rather secluded. He was never very healthy as a child and was tutored at home. He had no formal education in art except through his father. He spent as much time as possible outdoors in the hills of Brandywine Valley, encouraged by his parents, who felt that long walks would strengthen his lungs.

He wandered the hills, brooks and forests and got to know the Brandywine River valley intimately. He fabricated



Andrew Wyeth, *Pre-study for Oil Lamp*, 21¾ by 14½ inches, pencil on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

Wyeth made drawings for Oil Lamp *at night sitting in the kitchen talking with Alvaro, late in the fall of 1945. Wyeth would watch Alvaro's kind but sad face illuminated by the soft glow from the oil lamp on the kitchen table. He wanted to do a life-size portrait. Wyeth had almost completed it, when he received word that his father had been killed at Chadds Ford. Because it was October, Wyeth did not return to Maine that year and completed the painting in Pennsylvania. "It was practically finished before. The painting has a sort of amber color. It is a very odd picture." Alvaro never posed for Wyeth again, although Wyeth included the presence of Alvaro in many paintings.*

Andrew Wyeth, Pre-study for Oil Lamp, 22 by 30 inches, pencil on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

Andrew Wyeth, *Pre-study for Oil Lamp,* 13½ by 17 inches, pencil on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

stories about what was happening around him. One day the area around his home would be Sherwood Forest and the next it might be the English countryside. All these imaginary scenes filled Andrew's days, sprinkled with extraordinary fantasies acted out by his father on such special occasions as Christmas and Halloween. Such intermingling of fantasy and reality, play-acting and human warmth, constituted the spice that was Andrew's childhood.

His talent was visible from a very young age. As a boy, he drew constantly and delighted his father with his developing ability and imagination. Once he built a miniature theater and made cut-out figures to perform for him on strings. He worked in his father's studio and brought his particular talent for control and fineness of detail to watercolor work while still a student.

Andrew's first professional job was executed when he was 12 years old. It was an illustration for one volume of a new edition of the works of Howard Pyle. The first show of his watercolors in 1937 sold out on its first day. He was 20 years old.

The year after his first show, Andrew met the woman he would marry while summering with his family in Maine. Through his wife-to-be, Betsy James, Andrew met Anna Christina Olson and started his involvement with the Olsons that lasted for the next 30 years.

"That very day I met her, Betsy told me that she wanted to show me a marvelous house and she drove me down to Olsons, and I met Christina for the first time. She had been a very close friend of Betsy's since she was a little girl. Through the Olsons I really began to see New England as it really was . . . they would let me wander all over and through the house. Again, I didn't have or need a formal studio and so I used the upstairs rooms of the Olson house as a studio. I'd go down there by boat early in the morning and stay there all day long," Wyeth recalled during an interview with Thomas Hoving, the former Director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Betsy and Andrew were married in 1940 and although illustration might have become a career for the younger Wyeth as it had for his father, his young wife encouraged him to succeed as an artist. The Olsons and the Kuerners seemed to hold a key.

"The Olson house was filled with ghosts of New England history. They were seafaring people . . . I stayed right within the environment. It was everything. The world of New England was in that house overlooking the mouth of the Georges River."

The Olsons, Christina and her younger brother Alvaro, lived in the clapboard house their great-grandfather, a Hathorn, built out on Hathorn's Point. Once it was a boarding house used by the clipper ships coming down from Newfoundland. One of those ships brought her Swedish father who married Hathorn's daughter and they had four children.

A birth defect or injury went undetected until Christina was 3 years old, when her mother realized the child was

These studies in a sense are portraits of Alvaro. *He is there because he's using it and he's near it.* Alvaro *was a strangely delicate man, a sensitive man who only sat for* Wyeth *one time. "And it makes me sick to think that* I *never really painted him the way he was. Sometimes, he'd come in from the barn wearing this old hat with cowlicks shooting out of the hole in the top of it, . . . and there he'd be covered with hay and straw and feed. Just part of the barn that he lived in."*

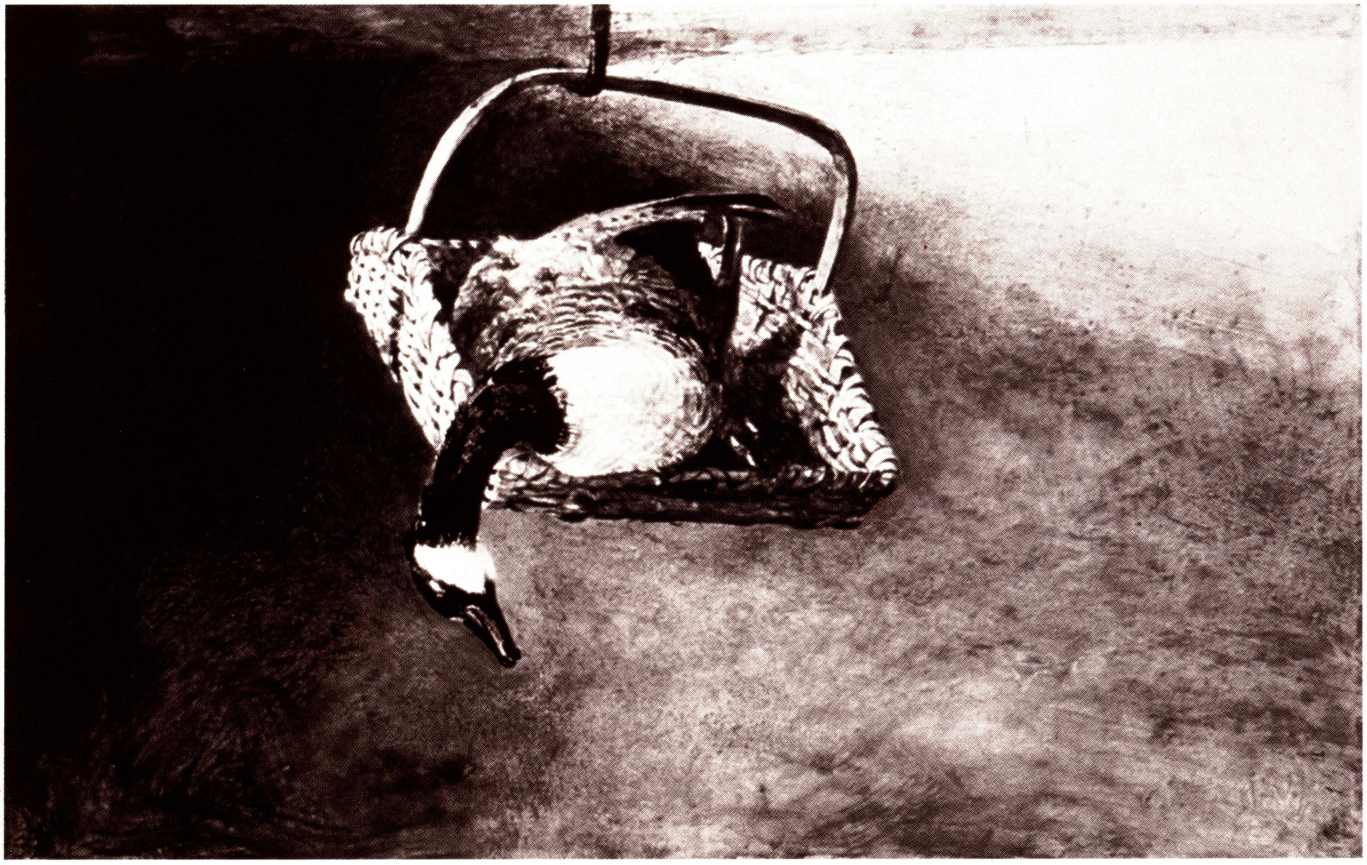
Andrew Wyeth, *Pre-study for Blue Measure,* 11 by 14 inches, pencil on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

Andrew Wyeth, *Alvaro Painting His Dory,* 20¾ by 29¼ inches, watercolor on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

walking with a slight stagger. Gradually both arms and legs were affected. After her mother's death in 1929, she and her quiet brother Alvaro had the great responsibility of caring for the farm and their father who, crippled from arthritis, was confined to a wheelchair for the last 15 years of his life. Their two younger brothers had married and worked farms of their own.

Alvaro never married and gave up the life of the sea he loved and returned to farming. Scattered about the fields were decaying reminders of his lobstering and fishing days. Christina, crippled from the disease, was confined to the house on the hill and the surrounding area.

Christina, her brother and their lives had an astounding effect on Wyeth's painting. "Its emotional effect was powerful on me. I remember flying over the Olson house when I'd leave late in the fall and soaring over I would



Andrew Wyeth, *Canada,* 17¼ by 28 inches, watercolor on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

think of Christina sitting in that dry, magical house. She was a cripple and wasn't very attractive to look at, but she had a marvelous mind. You know, I wasn't even conscious when I did *Christina's World* that she was crippled. Isn't that strange? I just thought this is a simply splendid person," Wyeth explained in an interview with Thomas Hoving.

Alvaro, a small man with a large nose, posed for an early Wyeth painting, *Oil Lamp,* but refused to pose for the artist again. Wyeth painted him, however, in those things that belonged to him: the corn drying upstairs, his blueberry baskets hanging in the shed, his grain bags and the blue measuring cup.

Wyeth has always deeply valued the opportunity to move among his subjects such as the Olsons and Kuerners night and day as an observer. For Wyeth, observation is much more than just having a sitter for a portrait. He becomes totally involved with the subject and attempts to fade into the situation in order to feel the true setting. He has often stated that he wishes he could not be there to paint, only a pair of eyes watching. With the Olsons in their Maine home, as with the Kuerners and other subjects, Wyeth became invisible. He finally obtained what he described as "like walking in a landscape."

"You'll notice my paintings have that feeling of being there. It's very strange, it's almost as though you're floating on the air looking at them. That is caused by the fact that I don't work from a location. I make drawings in all directions. I try to keep my perspective fairly true . . . fairly true but it's certainly not an accurate perspective."

Wyeth's ability to become a part of his surroundings, "to breathe it," has been extremely important in all his works. His paintings are often characterized by the sense of people, despite their absence. The objects and scenes depict the personality and quality of a human subject, although there is no one in the painting itself. A strong sense of mystery and even witchcraft prevails in many Wyeth paintings. Restraint and understatement are typical of Wyeth's works.

"Wyeth paints survivors of this world. He doesn't paint

WORKS ON PAPER

From the Holly and Arthur Magill Collection

The works of Andrew Wyeth on view at Gilcrease Museum are 50 drawings and watercolors lent by two of Wyeth's most avid collectors, Holly and Arthur Magill of Greenville, South Carolina.

The majority are studies made in connection with Wyeth's paintings of Christina and Alvaro Olson and their farm in Cushing, Maine, where the artist spent his summers. The works in pencil, watercolor and drybrush, provide a loving and intimate chronicle of Wyeth's long association with and fascination for the Olsons and their austere Down East surroundings.

Although some of the pieces are loose and cursory sketches, they are executed with the meticulous, high-fidelity realism familiar from Wyeth's finished paintings. The collection offers an excellent opportunity to view a great American artist's thoughts and feelings at some of the earliest stages for many of Wyeth's most critically acclaimed works.

The Magill collection was begun in 1979 with a purchase from film producer Joseph E. Levine who assembled 26 works over a 10 year period. The remainder of the collection was purchased directly from Andrew Wyeth.

Arthur Magill moved his textile company to South Carolina from the industrial Northeast nearly 30 years ago in an effort to find a more nurturing business climate. In 1976, he sold the company and since his retirement has endowed numerous Greenville cultural projects, including funding assistance for the construction of the Greenville County Museum of Art.

Arthur Magill espouses a basic American philanthropic tenet, believing the successful businessman, not the government, must endow the country with art.

"I've taken a lot from this land and now I'm called upon to give something back," Magill says.

The collection is on permanent loan to the Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, South Carolina. In loaning the treasured collection, the Magill's said, "We are happy and proud to have had a part in making this Andrew Wyeth collection available to the Greenville County Museum of Art. Pictures are to be seen, not be locked away in a warehouse."

history. He's painting a world that doesn't exist anymore — remnants of history possibly, the decay. Death and decay are prominent subjects for him," explains James H. Duff, Director of the Brandywine River Museum in Chadds Ford.

Duff typifies Wyeth's world as one in which nature, although beautiful, can threaten discomfort and danger. This is a world that many viewers miss in claiming him as a recorder and defender of the picturesque and the quaint. Wyeth's starker and very personal view is distinctly a 20th century perspective, possibly affected by his isolation while growing up, Duff says.

Wanda Corn in *The Art of Andrew Wyeth* suggests Wyeth's view may have been influenced by his generation and growing up between the world wars.

"This bare chronology suggests that his was a generation brought up on the milk of harsh human realities. To be developing as an artist in the late 1930s and early 1940s meant coming of age in a time of bleakness. Things often seemed out of control; the future was terrifyingly uncertain; and the demonic side of man increasingly reigned around the world," Corn says.

In addition to these views on the influence of Wyeth's style, the death of his father in 1945 is said to have had the greatest impact on his painting. His father was killed when a train hit his car at a crossing, not far from the Kuerner's farm, just over the hill.

Wyeth says that the death of his father "changed me from just painting pictures into painting a reality with an edge, with a meaning. His death gave me a meaning to painting."

The abruptness of his father's fatal accident jolted Wyeth. He began to stay around the location where his father was killed (near the Kuerners) and paint. "It took on a strange quality of color for me, a mood of which I still retain to this day."

Andrew Wyeth, *First Drawing for Christina's World,* 12 by 18¾ inches, pencil on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

Prior to his father's death, Andrew's paintings were more brilliant in color, "flashy, full of a lot of swish. But there's quite a change if you look at my work from there on."

The dark toned tempera, *Winter 1946* is a direct response to his grief and the painting *Karl,* the artist once suggested is a surrogate portrayal of his father, whom he never painted. *Christina's World* evolved as much from Wyeth's deepened sense of loss and aloneness as from studies of Christina.

In *Christina's World,* the woman seemingly strains or yearns for the mystery-shrouded house on the horizon, almost beyond reach. Like many of his paintings, this one grew out of an incident he observed. Because of her crippled condition, Christina would pull herself along the ground or floor with her arms and drag her body. "I saw her crawling out of the little truck garden she had next to the house one day and it dawned on me what a terrific woman and magnificant subject."

Wyeth made a quick notation of Christina in the field with the house in the background. Several days went by and this idea kept building in his mind. He first began working on just the field, concentrating on the swell and curve to the field. He described the experience as building a house and finally living in it. Step by step he completed the entire painting and placed Christina in at the very end.

"I purposefully left her for last. I built the ground, thinking of her and then when I put her in and it was right. Timing is so important in painting. If you can restrain yourself until the right moment."

Christina became the nerve center of a vital network of feeling for Wyeth. He painted in his favorite room upstairs, listening to Christina occasionally stirring below. Sometimes she would call him for pie. He would see a hand push the pie onto the bottom stair, waiting until the sound of her dragging body receded before going to get it. Going home, he would leave his unfinished painting behind, "soaking up the atmosphere."

Not long after his father's death, Wyeth fell ill with a serious lung condition that required surgery and a prolonged recovery. The experience altered his outlook and may explain why he has sought out survivors, such as Christina Olson. He described them as "tough" people, alone but not obviously lonely and aware of their worth, abilities and limitations.

Wyeth worked to show the two sides of Christina's life, "the tragedy as well as the joyfulness." He worked in the secluded upstairs room not knowing whether Christina knew or approved of the painting. But one day he noticed his chair had been moved and could see "by the dust on the floor that something had dragged itself along across the steps. The floor was polished slightly. She knew what I was doing, all right and never said anything."

Andrew Wyeth, *Pre-study for Christina's World,* 14½ by 20 inches, watercolor on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

Andrew Wyeth, *Pre-study for Christina's World,* 14 by 18 inches, pencil on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

Andrew Wyeth, *Swallows in the Olsons' Barn,* 23 by 29 inches, watercolor on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

The discovery of a meaningful "moment" for a major picture becomes perhaps the most significant part of painting in Wyeth's mature style. It may be stimulated by the simplest experiences: seeing the light strike the side of a building or a person's face. He struggles to preserve that abstract flash, like something he may have caught out of the corner of his eye.

A flash of reality is what inspired the famous tempera called *Wind from the Sea.* With the run of the Olson house, Wyeth entered the dusty third floor room on a hot August day and lifted a window. Just as he opened the window, the frayed curtain that had not had air for 20 or 30 years began slowly to rise. "It was that split second that I saw it, like a ghost lifting this dusty thing off the floor. I drew it very quickly." Although he didn't get a west wind for over a month, he did many drawings of the window and the curtain because he was so moved by the sudden, abstract moment.

That intense, quick moment of reality also inspired his self-portrait, *The Revenant.* After a day out sailing, Wyeth

The next summer after the death of Christina and Alvaro Olson, Wyeth returned to the house and found Christina's most treasured possession sitting on a shelf in "the shell room," a store house for shells brought back from all over the world. Shell picture frames her mother had made; valentines enclosed in shell boxes and a shell table were just a few of the items in the room. The teapot had been a part of her mother's wedding china.

Andrew Wyeth, *Christina's Teapot*, 22¾ by 28¾ inches, watercolor on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

Andrew Wyeth, *Pre-study for End of Olsons'*, 21¾ by 29½ inches, watercolor on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

ascended the stairs of the Olson house and opened a door on the second floor, across from Christina's bedroom, that had before been locked. He was startled by a figure standing there. It was an image of Wyeth in a dusty old mirror.

"More than 40 years of dust provided this illusion. It was a moment that I seemed to express what I thought about the house and the feeling of the ghosts of seamen that had long since gone."

As his approach to art changed after his father's death, Wyeth began to tighten his watercolor technique. The result was the drybrush method he used for many well-known works, in which watercolor is applied with a brush squeezed almost dry of moisture. It allows for building textures as with tempera, but Wyeth varies the technique by moving between dry and wet on the same piece of paper, achieving a variety of thick and thin surfaces. He considers it his most natural and spontaneous medium.

In contrast to the freshness and spontaneity of his watercolors are the paintings in tempera and the precise pencil drawings made as preparatory studies for them. At

Andrew Wyeth, *Pre-study for Wind from the Sea,* 13½ by 19½ inches, watercolor on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

Andrew Wyeth, *Pre-study for The Revenant*, 29 by 21 inches, watercolor on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

one time he made full-size, very detailed watercolor studies for the tempera pictures, but he now prefers pencil. He became very comfortable with the egg tempera medium that his brother-in-law Peter Hurd introduced into the Chadds Ford studio in the late 1930s. He uses this medium for his most sustained and controlled statements. It is a dry mineral pigment, ground to a fine powder, mixed with yolk of egg and thinned with water. Modern chemical pigments have not yet invaded the ancient technique, as Wyeth uses it. His colors are the old earths and minerals.

Wyeth's preoccupation with the ordinary and commonplace in quest of wider truths is the spirit in which he examines his few miles of Pennsylvania and Maine. Wyeth has often said that he thrives on Cushing, Maine, not because of the romance of the sea, but because of its "nothingness."

He doesn't use photography to aid in his painting. He feels it takes attention away from the subject. He says by sitting with an object, slowly unconsciously something seeps in. What I've gotten from being and experiencing the object, lifts it from just a photographic image."

In starting a painting, Wyeth lets memory take over. He

will put it down rather dully and leave it very rough, before he starts to "manipulate it. I don't want to put too much down because it'll freeze the idea. I want to keep it fluid — be able to dream about it."

Daily walks have always been a part of Wyeth's artistic process. The walks have brought him together with the things he paints. Throughout his life he has walked the hills around Chadds Ford and the coast of the peninsulas of Port Clyde and Thomaston, Maine, observing everything with an eye and ear. Sounds also stimulate him — the harsh sounds of animal hoofs against the frozen ground or the early morning sounds of Christina's kitchen.

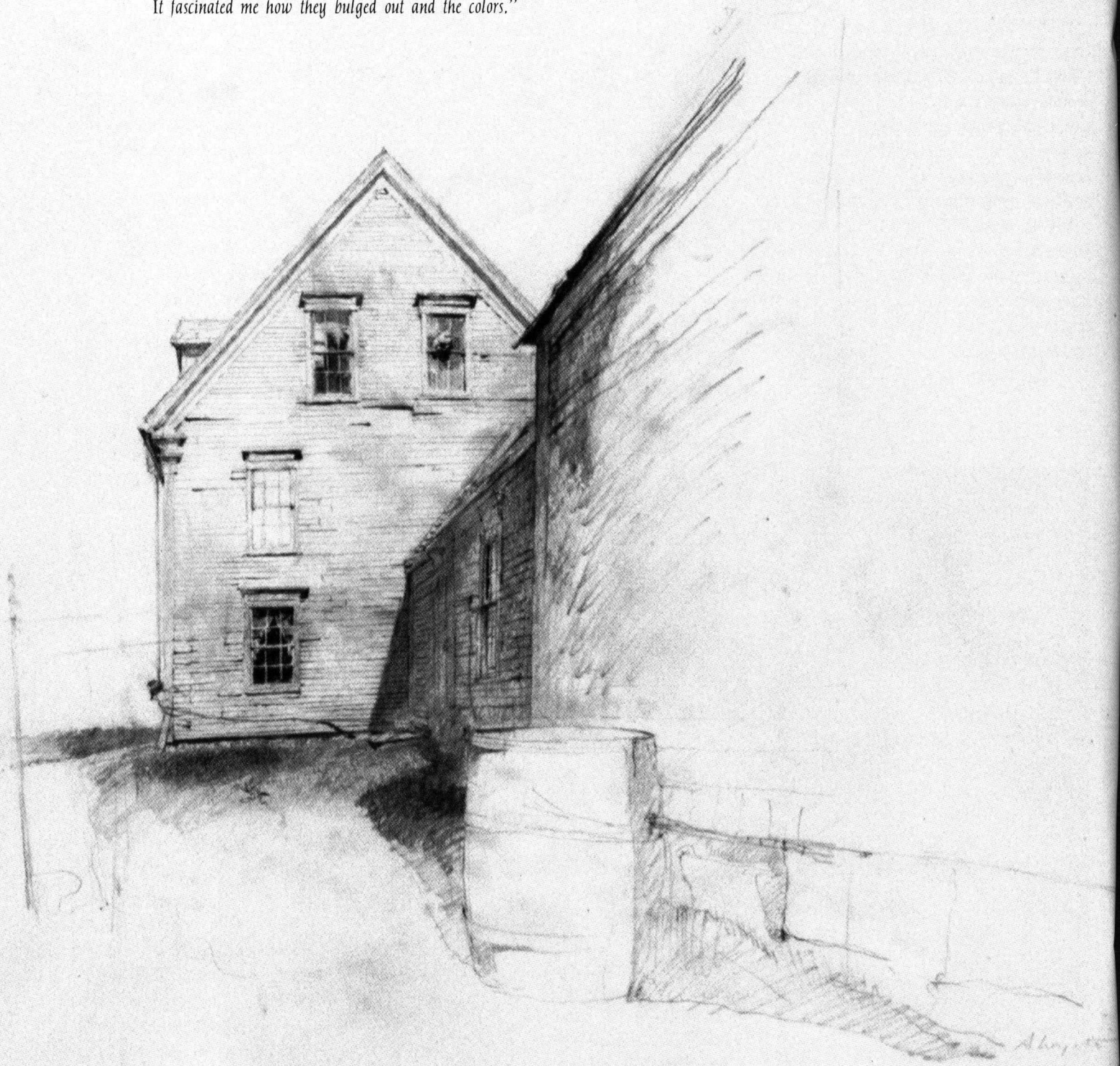
Wyeth speculates that many people visiting the areas he paints leave disappointed, seeing the liberties he has taken to portray the final feeling he has for a place or a subject. However, many art critics justify his manipulation and movement for the sake of simplification. He subtracts to make the painting more meaningful.

He considers himself more of an abstractionist. "I have such strong romantic fantasies about things that that's what I paint, but come to it through realism." However, in Maine, he paid scrupulous attention to the facts, as exampled by his almost frightening chaste *Weather Side,* the depiction of the Olson house from the windy flank. Wyeth claims to have "literally put the building together as if I were the builder."

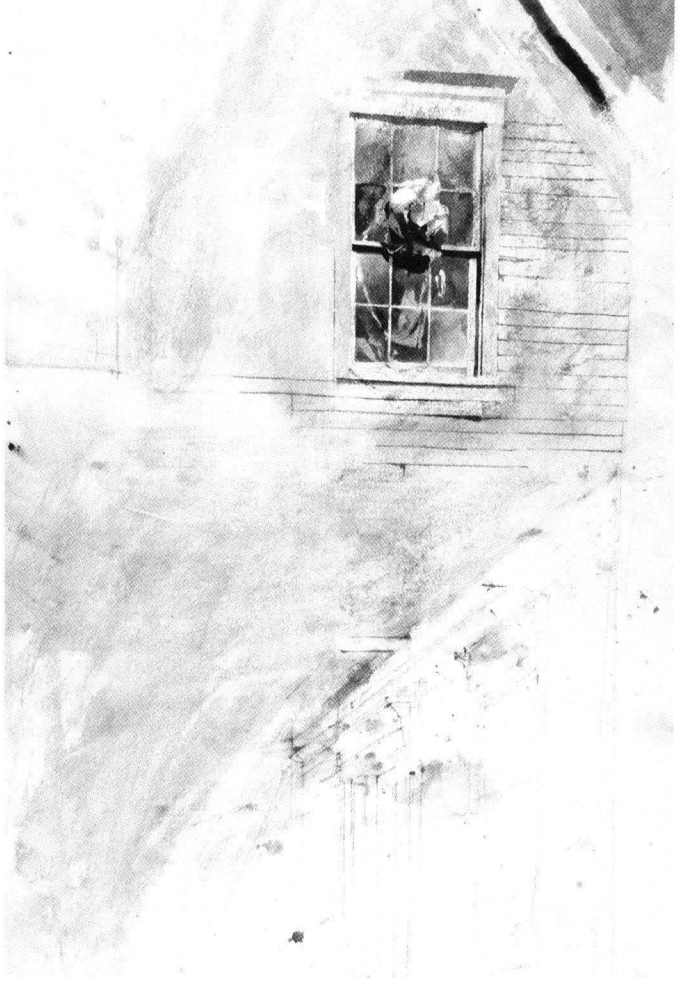
"I knew once they were gone that place would change. I wanted to do a portrait of that house . . . the windows are eyes or pieces of the soul almost." Each window expressed a period of Christina's life — the torn curtain in her bedroom where she had been unable to go for several years, down to the sitting room with the hanging lamp. All these things were a history of the Olson family to Wyeth. He actually counted and studied every one of the clapboards. One of the most moving passages of the painting is the section on the right-hand side, near the window where the cloth is stuffed into the broken pane. There one sees a couple of white pieces of wood which

Andrew Wyeth, *Logging Scoot,* 22 by 30½ inches, watercolor on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

Wyeth was fascinated by the clothes Alvaro stuffed in a broken pane of a window on the top floor, so the cold wind wouldn't blow through. He made many studies of it and even used binoculars to study the window from afar, to be truly intimate with it. "Those rags all meant something at one time. It fascinated me how they bulged out and the colors."



Andrew Wyeth, *Pre-study for Weather Side*, 30¾ by 22⅜, pencil on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth



Andrew Wyeth, *Pre-study for Weather Side,* 27½ by 18¼ inches, pencil and watercolor on paper, The Holly and Arthur Magill Collection of Works by Andrew Wyeth

Wyeth explains with pride that those are from his own house. Alvaro needed them to repair the clapboards, when Wyeth was repairing his own home.

There were more studies for the portraits of the house than for practically anything else that Wyeth painted of the Olsons. He was intrigued with the structure of the building. "I knew the house couldn't last. I did it purely for myself. I had this very deep feeling that it would not be long before this fragile, crackling-dry, bony house disappeared."

In 1967, both Alvaro and Christina died and the Olson paintings were to come to an end. Alvaro died on Christmas Eve in 1967 after slipping out of the nursing home where he had been taken after experiencing memory loss and failing health. He was found in a snowstorm on his way back home to his sister and died the next day. Eleven days later Christina died in her sleep. When asked why she died, it has been said that doctors told Betsy Wyeth that she died "of a broken heart."

Wyeth painted the *End of Olsons* after Christina and Alvaro were dead. It was the last picture he did of the Olson place. The chimney seen through the third floor window where Wyeth spent so many hours sketching and painting, held significance to the painter.

"The chimney to me was the ear of the house." He could hear the activities of Christina and Alvaro in the lower floor often through the chimney. Like a funnel, it brought their world into his.

Christina's World was Christina's favorite painting of herself. Once when Betsy asked her why and she responded, "Andy put me where he knew I wanted to be. Now that I can't be there anymore, all I do is think of that picture and I'm there."

With the death of the Olsons and Karl Kuerner, Wyeth has turned to many other inspirations as subjects for his painting. His work has encompassed a great many people and places in Pennsylvania and Maine. Wyeth's work has always attracted attention. From his first exhibition, he has been followed by curators, collectors and dealers. The permanent importance to American art of this regional painter has become clear. The universal appeal, however, is his broader view of the human condition.

For Andrew Wyeth, the thousands of images he has produced are part of a tight web of related experiences. A sudden observation appears related to a moment in his past and sparks a new work of art.

Wyeth is a painter, offering his view of the world.

PETER RINDISBACHER

Colonist and Earliest Painter of North American West.

BY ANNE MORAND

The artist Peter Rindisbacher was one of the earliest chroniclers of the North American West, preceding others such as George Catlin and Karl Bodmer with his sketches and paintings of Indians and western scenes. Unlike Catlin and others who traveled in the wilderness out of desire to see the strange lands and people who live there, and then returned to eastern studios to paint from sketches made in the field, Rindisbacher went to the West as a result of colonization and painted his surroundings as a resident. Events set in motion long before his birth in 1806 resulted in his family leaving their native Switzerland to settle first in western Canada, then later in St. Louis, Missouri.

The Rindisbacher family was part of the hard-won Red River colony established in present day Manitoba by the Fifth Earl of Selkirk, Thomas Douglas. The colony, established in 1812, was Selkirk's attempt to start an agricultural colony which would provide homes for immigrants and eventually produce food and provisions for the fur trade in that area. To appreciate the complexity of the establishment of this colony, it is necessary to consider events which date back at least to 1670, the year of the founding of the Hudson's Bay Company.

The Hudson's Bay Company was established by charter, under which 18 subscribers were incorporated in the name of the "Governor and the Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Bay." The company was granted by the King of England "sole Trade and Commerce" and the subscribers were made "true and absolute Lords and proprietors" of the region which today encompasses most of Canada. This region known as Rupert's Land, had been granted by King Charles I to his kinsman, Prince Rupert. Prince Rupert was also one of the original 18 subscribers of the Hudson's Bay Company.

The company, founded to establish fur trading in North

Above, Peter Rindisbacher, *Canadian Indians and Artist,* detail, 8 by 7 inches, watercolor on paper

Anne Morand is curator of art for the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art.

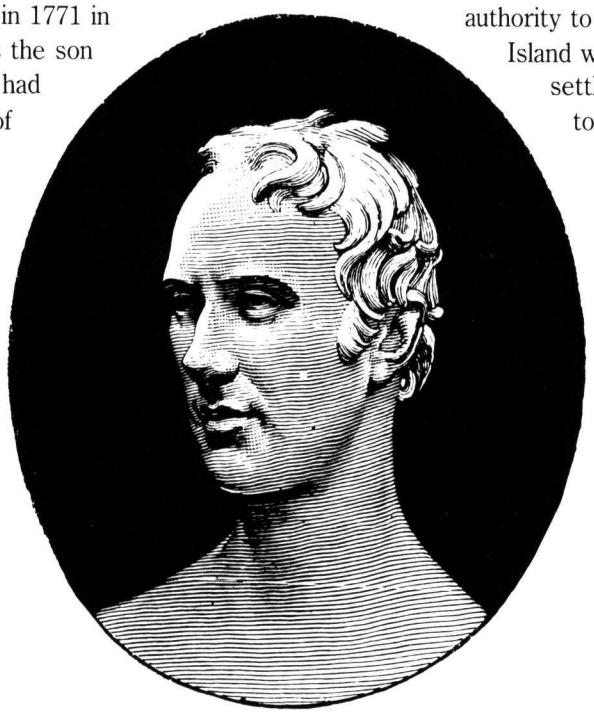
America for Britain, had difficulties from its inception. By the beginning of the 1800s, struggles and strife, inadequate financial resources, uncertain objectives and weak managers led to the near demise of the Hudson's Bay Company. The more powerful North West Company was competing strongly and cutting into profits of the Hudson's Bay Company so much that by 1809 the dwindling dividends of earlier years were not paid at all. Just as the company was about to be lost in a defeatist withdrawal from the area, new blood and new ideas came to the management.

A powerful triumvirate eventually took control of the company. Beginning in 1809, Andrew Wedderburn, known after 1814 as Colvile, developed and persuaded the company to adopt what he called his "Retrenching Plan." It called for efficiency, economy, and incentive on the part of Hudson's Bay in North American operations. Colvile was joined first by John Halkett, and later the Earl of Selkirk, both of whom were his brothers-in-law. Colvile and Halkett were extremely shrewd businessmen, and with Selkirk's financial power and political clout (he had bought up much of the depressed stock of the company between 1808-9) made a remarkable team. By 1810 Selkirk was ready with his own plan, which fit smoothly with the "retrenching" policy. His plan was for a settlement colony.

Selkirk, born Thomas Douglas in 1771 in Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland, was the son of the Fourth Earl of Selkirk. He had been educated at the University of Edinburgh and influenced by the Enlightenment and the Scottish "common sense" school of philosophy, which held that thought should come from scientific evidence and that a man should be virtuous, benevolent and accountable for his deeds.

Upon completion of his formal education, the young Thomas astounded his family by working on the family farms as a laborer. During that time he began to ride into the Scottish highlands where he was confronted with the plight of the Scottish crofters who had been driven out of their homes as a long-term result of the defeat of the clans of Culloden (see "A Fearful Innocence" by Peter C. Newman, pages 36-7, *The Beaver,* October-November 1987). Peasants who had for generations maintained small family farms were moved off their ancestral lands to make way for huge sheep farms and pastures. From 1811 to 1820, fifteen thousand people were evicted from what became just one farm. The young Thomas, having seen this and feeling a tremendous sense of guilt, became obsessed with the idea of finding a remedy. Immigration was one option, but was not a new idea. Between 1760 and 1808, at least 42,000 people fled Scotland. He was saddened over the loss, not only to Scotland, but to the British Empire. Removing these people to British North America, and to Canada, might be a possibility.

In 1799 at the unexpected death of his father, the 28-year-old Thomas became the Fifth Earl of Selkirk and was able to begin to implement his plans and dreams for the peasants. He first used his vast wealth and authority to purchase land on Prince Edward Island where, in 1803, he successfully settled 800 Scots. Selkirk next began to investigate ways to acquire even larger tracts of land for his purposes, and through his wife's brother, Colvile, saw an almost perfect situation — the large, (as he perceived it) unused vastness of the western



LORD SELKIRK.

territories. After becoming firmly entrenched in the fortunes of the Hudson's Bay Company, he was ready by 1810 to make a formal proposal which would be in keeping with the restructuring which was under way. He wanted to establish an agricultural colony in the area of the Red River, on 116,000 square miles of land. The colony would do three things:

1. Establish a colony to take care of the Scottish peasants.
2. Establish Hudson's Bay Company firmly in western Canada in competition with the rival North West Company.
3. Establish a provisioning colony to provide for the company's employees in the West.

How well the colony succeeded in these things is a matter for speculation. What Selkirk's scheme did accomplish without question was to draw the attention of the British Colonial Authorities in London to lands which would have otherwise gone to the United States by default.

It was not that Hudson's Bay Company was unaware of the area, but they had been unconcerned with it. It had been for generations a trading and meeting area for several groups of Indians. Also the Metis, half-blood French and Indians, had been farming the area for some time. The company's only interest prior to 1810 was the land's proximity to the buffalo hunting plains to the south.

Though Selkirk was powerful, it was not an easy task to acquire this land. Encompassing more than 74 million acres, the tract stretched north and south from Lake Winnipeg to the height of the land between the Red and the Missouri river drainage basins, and east to west from within 50 miles of Grand Portage, almost to the sources of the Assiniboine and Qu'Appelle rivers. The land was part of the original Rupert's Land grant to Hudson's Bay Company giving them sole rights to the area. However, most of the activities of the company had not pressed this far west. Selkirk originally asked the company to fund the colony, but after a year's deliberation, the board of managers turned him down due to the still weakened economic status of the company. When he then offered to underwrite the cost himself, they readily agreed, giving him the land in fee simple for the sum of 10 shillings.

The competing North West Company officials were furious and tried to block the action, saying that Hudson's Bay Company had no right to the area, that the Rupert's Land grant was no longer valid. They had had operations in the area, built several trading forts, and had established good trading relationships with the Indians and the Metis. Prior to Selkirk, the North West Company had been trying to take control of Hudson's Bay Company, but had failed. They were now concerned for the first time with the real possibility of competition if Hudson's Bay Company moved into what they had considered their territory. An agricultural colony to supply the employees of Hudson's Bay Company, to make them less dependent on imported provisions, and to interrupt the supply route to the North West Company would be a major problem.

North West Company fought back, first in the general court of the Hudson's Bay Company, second in Scotland where Selkirk had begun to recruit settlers, and third in the colony itself. North West Company published pamphlets describing the territory as a primeval solitude, not suitable for human habitation. They also brought legal suit, making the point that the land should have been made available for public sale. The suit was dropped because Selkirk's action had effectively reaffirmed the validity of the Rupert's Land grant.

When approval for the colony came in 1811, Selkirk was ready. He had sent agents into the Scottish highlands to begin to recruit colonists. His agreement with Hudson's Bay Company stated he was responsible for establishing 1,000 families on the site within 10 years, and that the colony must supply at least 200 men each year to the company's fur trade operations. The first group which included 150 crofters was to pave the way for future colonization by building the first settlement. What should have been a successful expedition was not, due to the inexperience of the crofters and the isolation of the colony. It was a tiny settlement in the middle of the continent, 1,500 miles from the nearest city to the east.

For the privilege of settling in the Red River colony, the Scots were required to pay 10 pounds per person for transportation to Red River and a year's provisions. It was promised each family was to be given 100 acres of land at 5 shillings an acre, and that the colony would have a school and a church with a Gaelic speaking Presbyterian minister.

A map from *The Substance of a Journal During a Residence at the Red River Colony*, 1824

The advance party left under Miles MacDonell, a Scot and a former captain in the Loyalist Canadian Volunteers. MacDonell would prove to be an inadequate leader. The voyage over was horrible, and in fact a few deserted when they saw the poorly outfitted ship on which they were to sail. Those who went spent 61 days in passage, with less than adequate provisions and space.

Many were ill, and the trip had taken so long that the overland journey from York Factory, the port on Hudson's Bay was delayed until the following Spring. The people stayed in makeshift tents through that winter and there was not enough food so that those who had not been taken ill earlier on the voyage were stricken with scurvy. By the next Spring, only 22 of the people were able to leave. The overland trip to Red River took two months of hard travel, ending on August 30 of 1812 when they arrived at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. Here there existed a small Hudson's Bay Company establishment and also the older Fort Gibraltar of the North West Company. MacDonell set up the new Fort Douglas one mile from Fort Gibraltar, holding a "Seizing of the Land" ceremony as the first of many events which served to further embitter the Indians, the Metis and the servants of North West Company. Oddly enough, though, had it not been for the generosity of the Indians and North West Company that winter, the first settlers would have starved. It is supposed that they believed eventual failure of the colony was inevitable and that nature alone was a bad enough enemy. However, over the next four years, 220 more Scottish settlers would arrive.

Although the Indians had helped the settlers, the Metis did not. These mixed blood peoples had given up the nomadic life of their Indian ancestors and had begun to settle the land themselves. They deeply resented "their"

Detail from the map, *Vereinigte Staaten Von Nord-America*, 1828

land being taken, and open hostility began in 1813 when they had to watch as the foreign surveyor began to lay out homesteads using the river lot system common to Canada. This system of carefully laid out narrow strips of land which fronted on the river meant that the families could live in close proximity to their neighbors.

Although the Scots were determined in their efforts to survive, they were unsuited to the severe climate or the task of farming. In the following years MacDonell found it necessary to confiscate (actually steal) supplies from the provisioning trains of the North West Company, doing so in the name of the government. As can be imagined, this action served to escalate the hostilities growing between the two groups — the Hudson's Bay Company and Scottish settlers on one side, and North West Company, Metis, and Indians on the other. By 1815-16 the fighting was considered full-scale war. Trade was brought nearly to collapse. Selkirk himself, who had not previously visited the colony, was forced to come in a policing action, using a regiment made up of 100 members of a Swiss mercenary unit which had fought for the British in Canada during the War of 1812. The regiment, called the Du Meurons, came in under the guise of colonists. With their help, Selkirk supervised the orderly reorganization of the colony. He convinced those who were actually leaving to stay, and brought in more settlers from the Scottish highlands. The colony finally seemed to be on a stable track, and the colonists began to build more permanent homes and finally to plant crops. Unfortunately, an enemy Selkirk could not subdue by force was nature. The crops of the insuing years were overrun by locusts. The first normal harvest did not come until 1820.

Then there came an almost abrupt ending to the political and economic strife. In 1821, Selkirk died at the age of 49 after suffering long with incurable tuberculosis, probably weakened by all the conflict. His death allowed the immediate merger of the two companies, worn out from long warring, under the name of the Hudson's Bay Company. While Selkirk had lived, reconciliation had not been possible, due to his offended sense of honor. That year also came renewed efforts toward colonization which had been initiated by Selkirk before his death. The new colonists were Swiss.

The Swiss regiment, the Du Meurons, had led the way

for future Swiss colonization. Many of the members of the regiment had stayed and settled the area. Captain Rodolphe Du May and Lieutenant Friedrich von Graffenried von Burgistein convinced Selkirk to provide additional Swiss colonists to be neighbors for the Du Meurons. So in 1819 Du May was sent as Selkirk's agent to recruit. Painting a picture of a land of milk and honey — a warm, tropical paradise — he recruited 57 adults and their families from Neuchatel, Vaud, Geneva and Berne. They were led to believe, by the sin of omission, that they would be going to the region of the Red River of the South, in present-day Louisiana. Each family was promised 100 acres of land, seeds and tools, to be paid for within five years or more by 500 bushels of wheat. In the Spring of 1821, 165 persons — including the 15-year-old Peter Rindisbacher and his family — were loaded on barges at Basle and taken down the Rhine to Dordrecht, the port from which they would leave for Hudson's Bay. The group included a musician, clock maker, pastry cook, mechanic, schoolteacher, merchant, dentist, veterinary surgeon, apothecary and some riff-raff, most of whom were quite unsuited to the rigors of an agricultural colony in the bitter North — but in all fairness, did not know what was expected of them.

They sailed for the New World on a three-masted English ship, the *Wellington,* which like so many of the ships before, was under-provisioned for the number of travelers. The long sea voyage was made even more difficult by the cold. The icebergs and ice fields encountered were the first clues that things might not be as had been promised. Though the ice caused delays and hardships, it offered the young artist, Peter Rindisbacher his first opportunity to chronicle the journey. All through the hardships, by virtue of his youth and temperament, the young artist seemed to be able to see beyond the reality and took joy in recording the events. During the trip he made at least 40, 6 by 8 inch sketches which are now in

Peter Rindisbacher, *Red River Carts,* 6 by 9⅞ inches, pen and ink on paper

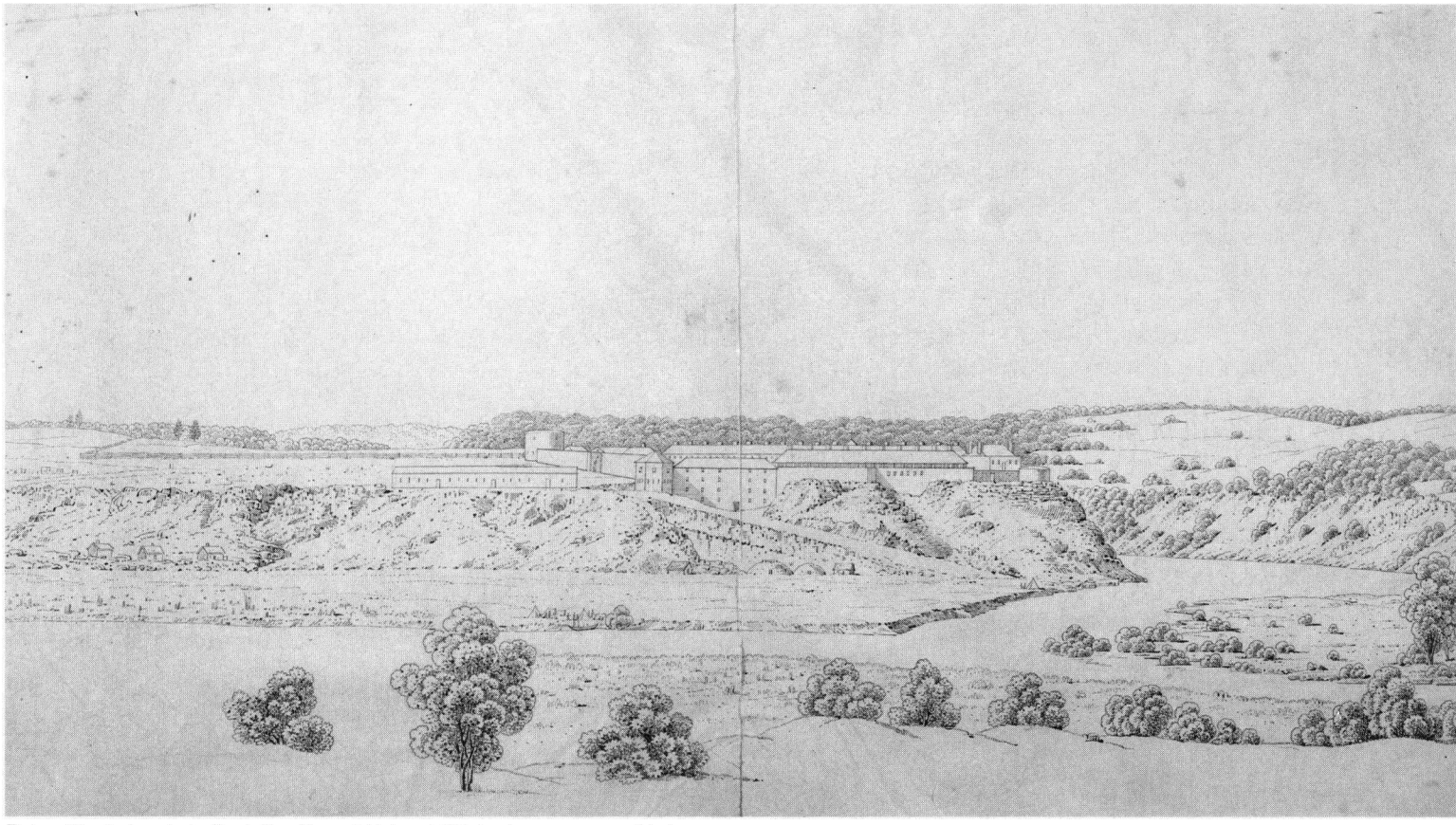
the Public Archives of Canada. These sketches and others which he completed during the time the Swiss were settling at Red River are the earliest documentating western settlement and the only ones depicting Selkirk's colony.

After 79 days at sea, including 19 days adrift in an ice-field, the Swiss arrived at York Factory, Hudson's Bay Company's big fur depot on the west shore of Hudson's Bay. Staying only long enough to recover from the sea voyage, they proceeded inland via established trade routes to Lake Winnipeg and the Red River. It was a long and grueling trip, made worse by the fact that they were forced to abandon almost everything they had brought. Had the Indians and earlier settlers not helped them through the first winter, they would not have survived. There was now no question but that the Swiss had been misled. They complained to George Simpson, the company's governor in Rupert's Land, who in turn wrote to Andrew Colvile, the trustee of the Earl's estate and responsible for the Red River colony, describing the printed notice issued in Switzerland as "highly colored" and indicating he believed the settlers had been deceived into thinking "there was more than could be realized." So with sympathy from the government, but little else, the Swiss tried with optimism to make a home there. They were industrious, good tempered, physically beautiful and became well-liked and an accepted part of the colony. However, they faced starvation as had their predecessors, the Scots, who still weren't doing well themselves. To survive they were forced to migrate to the buffalo plains to the south for four years. Unprepared for frontier life as they were, they couldn't even hunt for themselves, but served the hunters in return for meat. Peter Rindisbacher, whose reputation as an artist must have been growing, was able to help support his family to some extent by selling sketches at the trading forts, receiving goods in exchange. The sketches tend not to illustrate the hardships, but the excitement, the zest and spirit of the young artist. He was fascinated with the people and events he witnessed, and his sense of adventure outweighed the hardships. Moreover, who of any of those living such a hard life would have wanted illustrations of the harsher side of colonization? He painted individuals, white and Indian, their activities and sporting scenes. He also came to the attention of the Hudson's Bay Company officials and was commissioned to produce copies for them on several occasions.

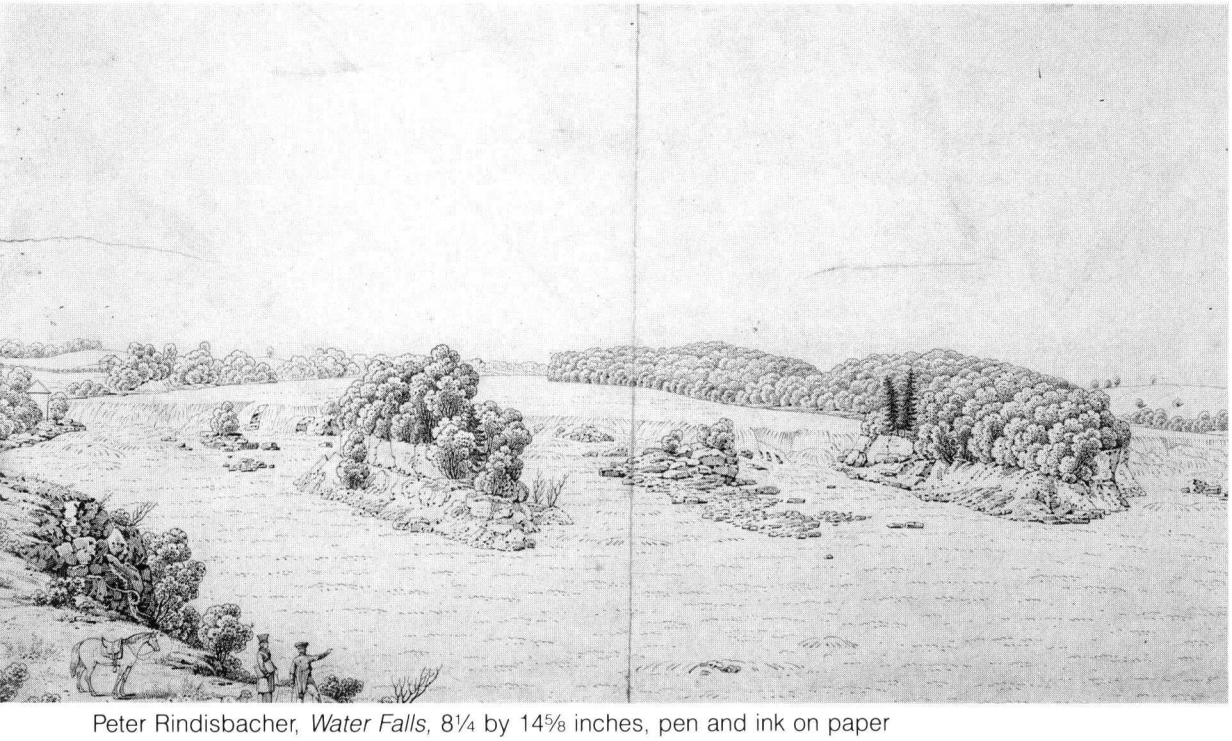
Finally, after a five year succession of calamities, culminating in the tragic flood of 1826, the last of the hardiest of the Swiss succumbed and left. This flood, probably the worst in recorded history, came about as a result of one of the longest and most severe winters. A tremendous amount of snow fell early and lay on the ground until May 1826. The river ice, four-feet-thick, held firmly until May and with the beginning of the thaw, was lifted nearly to the level of the bank by swollen water below. Further complicating matters, the rivers flow from south to north there, so that warmer water flowing from the south hit the ice and aggravated flooding. On May 1 the thaw began. In two days the river rose six feet and climbed steadily, inundating the area, until May 20. People had taken refuge at any high point of land, but the huge blocks of ice which were freed from the river smashed into everything, reducing the trees and buildings to shambles. On May 20 the river began to recede, but not until June 12 was the Red River within its banks again. Nearly everything had been lost, including many lives.

The Swiss settlers had been leaving in small groups from the beginning of their colonization. Five families left just after they arrived in 1821. Thirteen more had left in 1823, heading for Missouri where stories of better weather, grazing and crops drew them. The final exodus of the Swiss occurred after the flood, and with them went the Rindisbacher family. Disheartened they left for the Red River of the South in Louisiana, although most never made it that far. With his family, Peter left with a portfolio of sketches, the only positive production of the time. Peter's father had been one of the strongest proponents for staying with the colony, but even he finally had to admit defeat. Like those who left before them, they traveled by the St. Peter's River to Fort Anthony (now called Fort Snelling). The Rindisbachers then went by steamboat from Fort Snelling down the Mississippi River to the mouth of the Fever River and settled at Gratiot's Grove, which is present-day Galena, Illinois. The Rindisbachers built a home and prepared to farm.

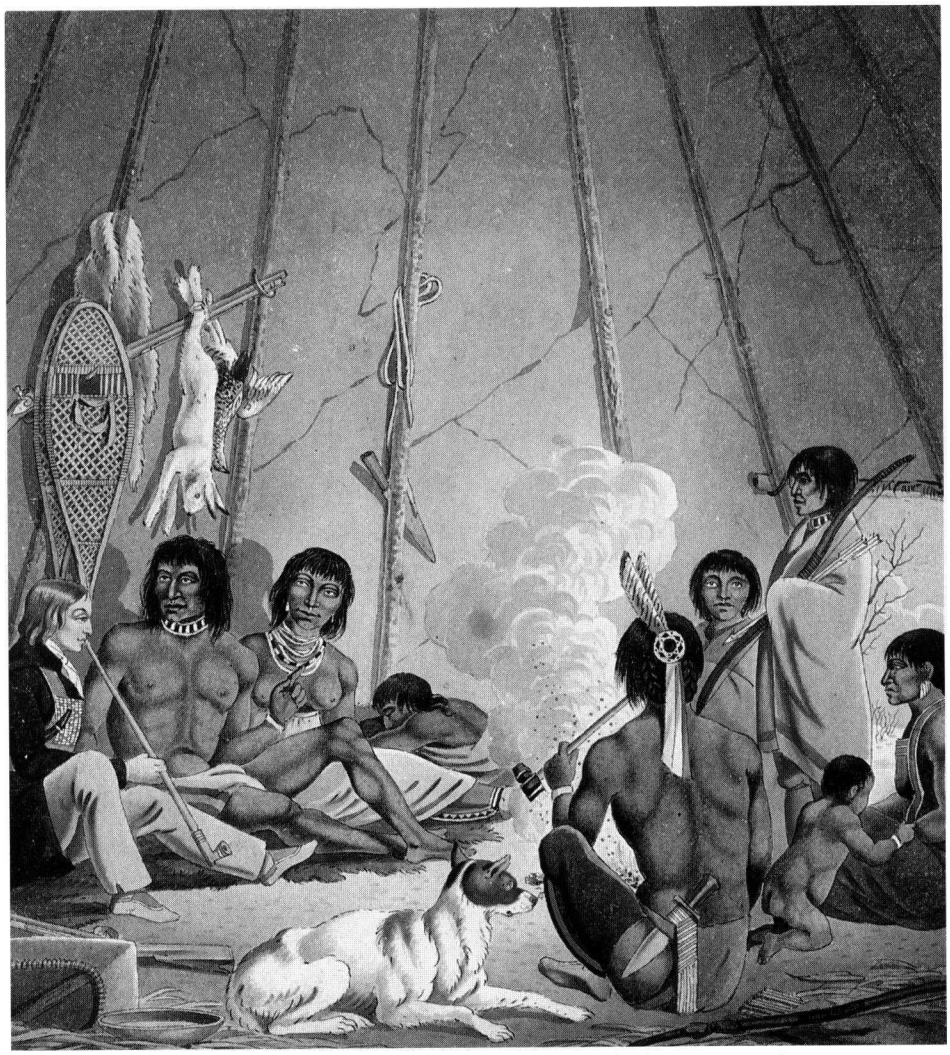
Although the Red River colony was severely crippled, it continued to limp along. In the last decade of the 1860s, it was still a primitive community. Finally, change came in 1870 when Manitoba was created a province and Hudson's Bay Company sold all of Rupert's Land to Canada. This



Peter Rindisbacher, *Fort Snelling,* 8⅛ by 14¾ inches, pen and ink on paper



Peter Rindisbacher, *Water Falls,* 8¼ by 14⅝ inches, pen and ink on paper



Peter Rindisbacher, *Canadian Indians and Artist,* 8 by 7 inches, watercolor on paper

area which contained what someday would prove to be very fertile agricultural land, with a self-contained water system and good grass for grazing, encompassed the area extending into present-day Minnesota, North Dakota and the southeast corner of South Dakota. Unfortunately, between 1812 and 1870, it was the scene of poorly prepared colonists and poor management, especially in view of the grand plans and high hopes held by Selkirk for his land and his people. In fairness, Selkirk probably never understood the problems he caused for the North West Company and for the immigrants. He saw the land as a huge, underused virgin territory. If the North West Company was active there, what difference could several miles make either way? And for the people, he felt any home was better than no home.

The dreams of the Swiss did not die but were altered as they sought a new haven. The young artist stayed with his family in Gratiot's Grove until 1829 when he left for St. Louis. His reputation preceeded him and he was busy with commissions until his untimely death in 1834.

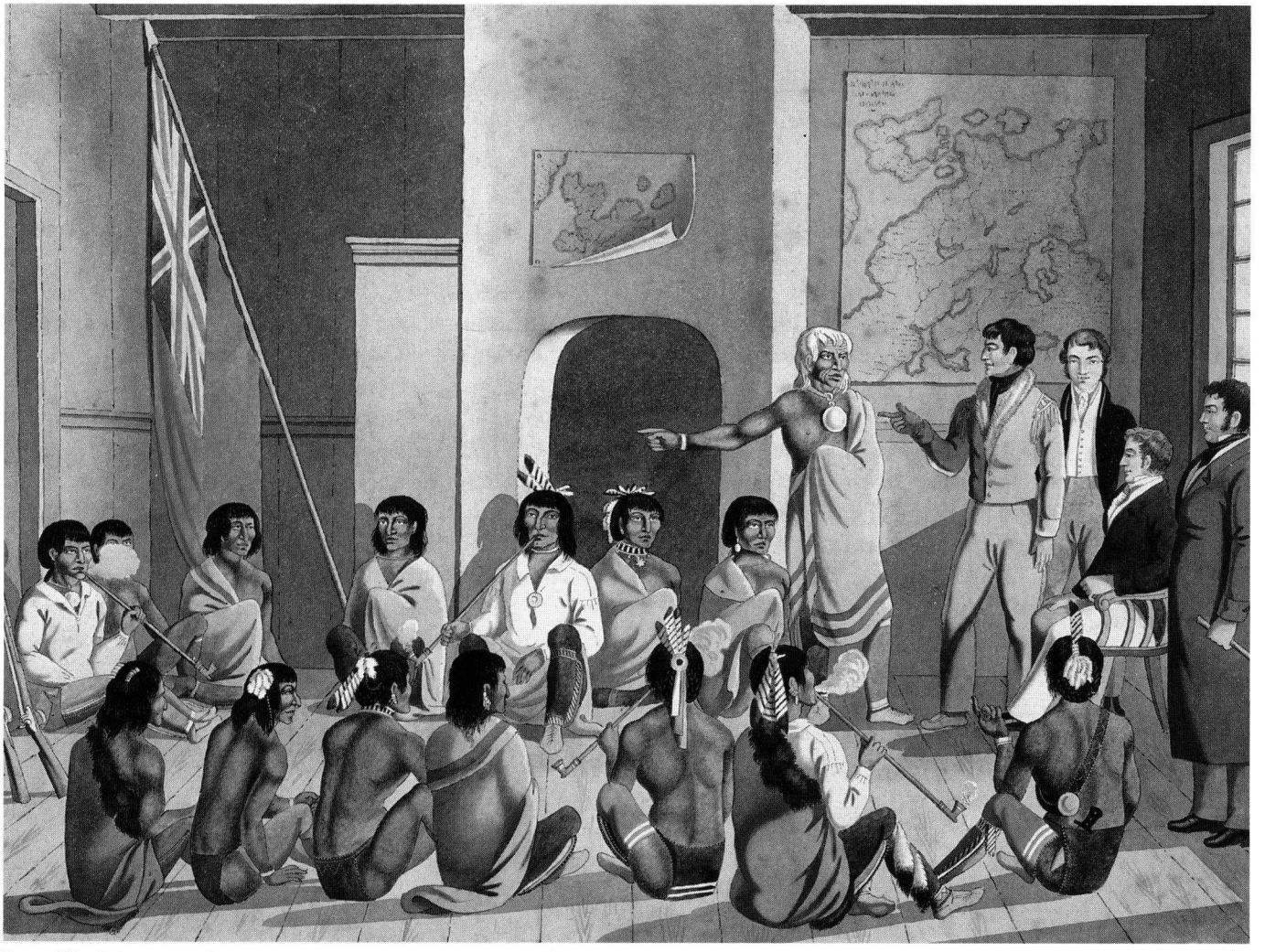
Rindisbacher had shown his potential at an early age. He was born in the valley of the Emme River, or Emmenthal in the Canton of Berne. His parents encouraged his early interest in drawing, though his only formal instruction was a summer spent sketching in the Alps with Jacob Weibel, when he was 12. Weibel, a noted miniaturist and landscape painter probably set the tone for Rindisbacher's later work which would be characterized by meticulous detail.

Rindisbacher's short career ended just as his work was attaining major recognition. His work was soon eclipsed by that of Catlin and others who followed, and only since the 1930s has Rindisbacher's work been reconsidered. The accuracy of his subjects is impressive, as is the ability he showed as a painter. Rindisbacher is considered a better painter than Catlin or J. O. Lewis, having a greater ability as a draftsman and a better feeling for composition. Had he

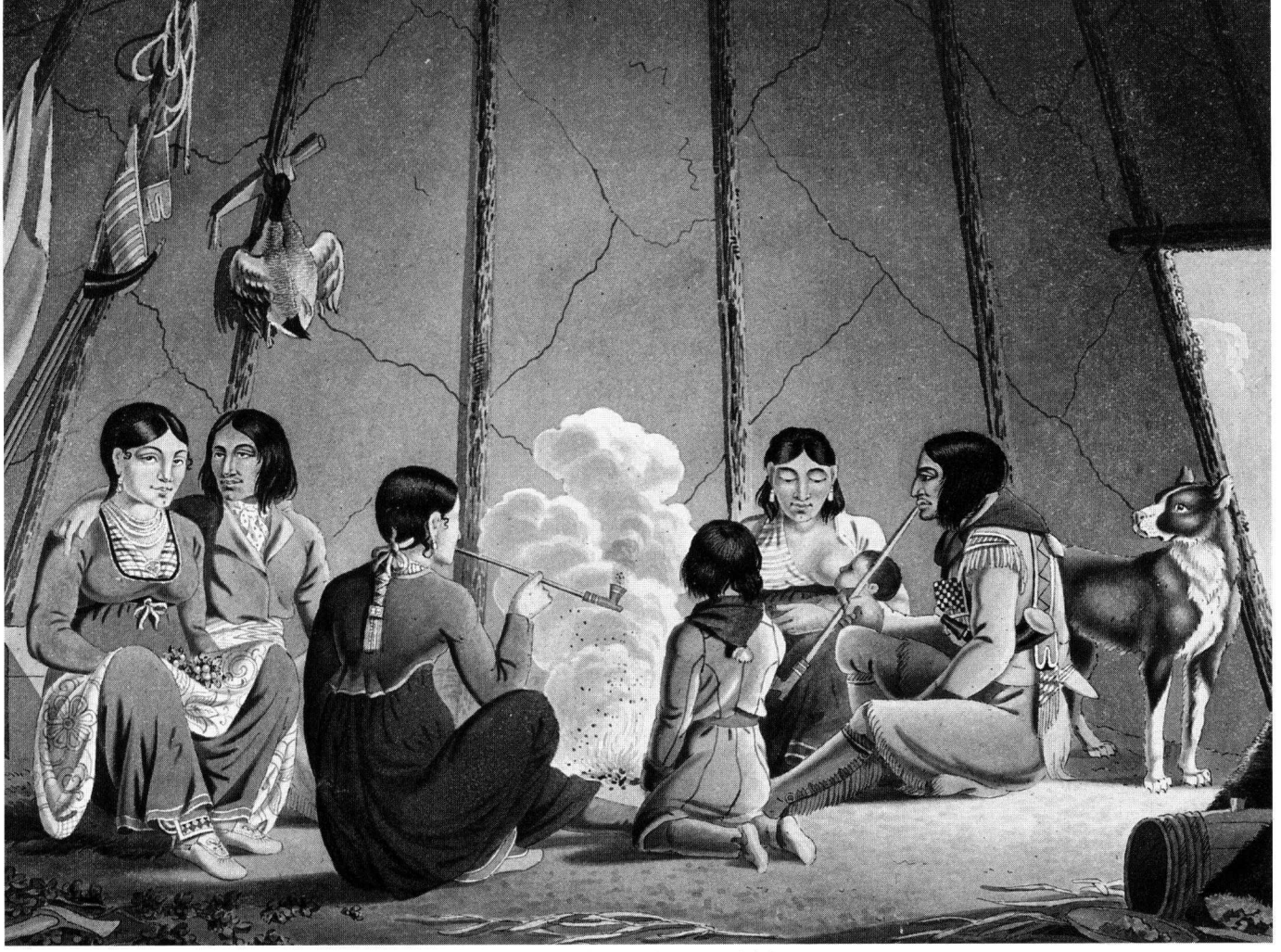
lived longer he might have matured into an artist to rival any of the nineteenth century. Even so, his work was used before and after his death to illustrate many books and periodicals relating to the American West. The publications of Thomas L. McKenney and James Hall feature his work as frontispieces for the two volumes of *History of the Indian Tribes of North America.*

Rindisbacher's five years in St. Louis were felicitous. He spent his time in a variety of pursuits: accompanying hunting parties, and soon after his arrival, traveling with a group up the Mississippi River to Prairie Du Chien to record visually the signing of a treaty. He was also highly sought for his miniature portraits, which were called "correct likenesses" on more than one occasion. His studio was a place visited by many, and probably was seen by fellow Swiss painter, Karl Bodmer when he arrived in St. Louis in the company of Prince Maximillian in 1833.

Not only while in St. Louis but throughout his career, Rindisbacher worked in pen and ink, using that medium for sketches and preparatory work. With very fine pen point he recorded minute details of objects and landscape. His drawings are a harmony of rather stylized, repeated elements which made for very pleasant viewing. He later would copy the sketches, often many times if the subject was popular, in watercolor. While he did use oil periodically, watercolor is most characteristic. It is said he disliked oil for its "smeary" quality, but more likely the watercolor paints were easier to carry and the work was more quickly



Peter Rindisbacher, *Captain Bulger's Palaver,* 9½ by 11¾ inches, watercolor and pen and ink on paper



Peter Rindisbacher, *In the Tepee,* 7⅛ by 9 inches, watercolor and pen and ink on paper

executed than in oil. Especially, within the Red River colony, something as luxurious as oil paint was not easily found.

One of Rindisbacher's important patrons while he was still at Red River was Captain Andrew Bulger, a veteran British officer of the War of 1812. For a time, until 1823, Bulger was the governor of the Red River colony. He was fond of Rindisbacher and commissioned a number of paintings, such as *Captain Bulger's Palaver* in the Gilcrease collection. Most of the paintings and drawings by Rindisbacher in the Gilcrease collection appear to have been completed before he left Red River, with the exception of the pen and ink sketches of horses. They are some of the finest examples of the artist's work, other examples of which are included in collections in Canada and the United States Military Academy at West Point. The artist was not adverse to painting himself in certain compositions, such as *Canadian Indians with Artist,* in which he is seen to be a handsome and adventurous young man.

In such a short time, the artist gave the world some of the most important and most unusual views of the frontier. It is unknown exactly how he died, though speculation is that it was from diphtheria. More likely, it was from a heart condition. One must wonder if the hardships suffered in his earlier years at Red River led to his early demise. Few artists matured so early and contributed so much. Rindisbacher was able to transcend the brutality and the harshness of life in the infant Red River colony and leave behind pictures which capture other aspects of life in an unknown land: the often beautiful and tranquil landscape, the nobility of the native inhabitants, and the excitement of the interaction of different cultures. His art mirrors the best of his experiences, and even in the naivity of his earliest work is the essence of the West. The work is all the more important for its scarcity and its appeal.

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BACK COVER:
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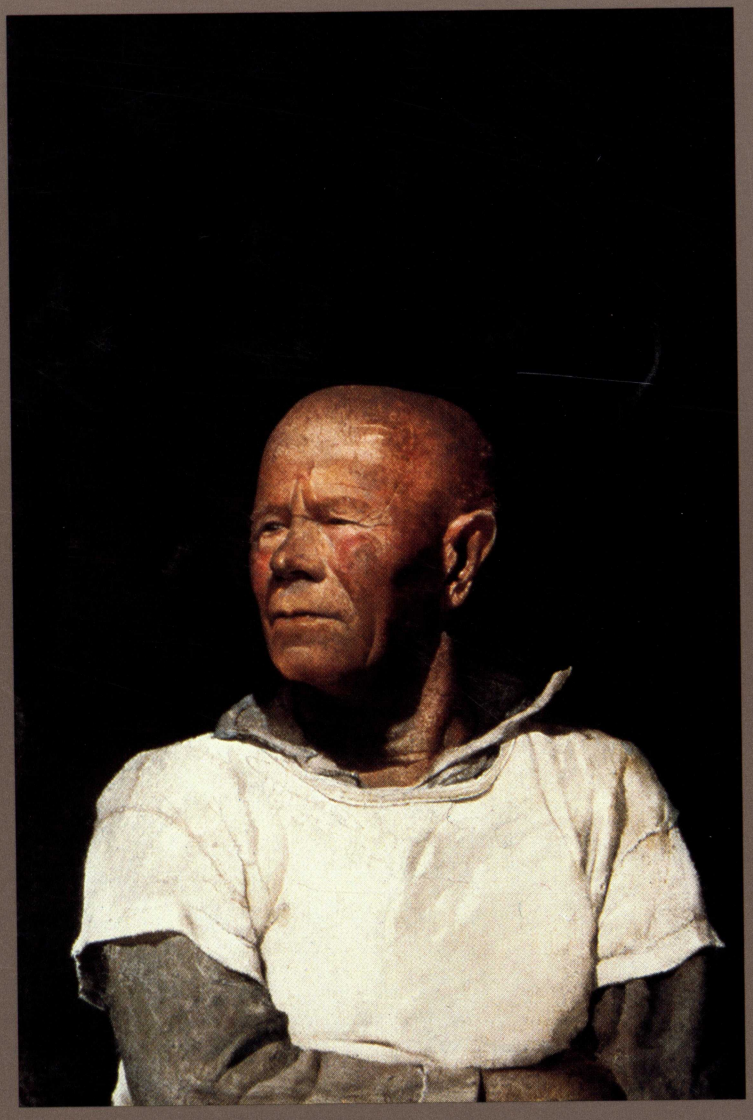

ANDREW WYETH:
Works on Paper

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