



BRANDYWINE RIVER MUSEUM  
BRANDYWINE CONSERVANCY

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### **Andrew Wyeth**

Chadds Ford, PA January 16, 2009--Andrew Wyeth, often referred to as America's most famous artist, died in his sleep at his home in Chadds Ford, surrounded by his family early this morning, after a brief illness. Wyeth, 91, was painting until recently, with some new works exhibited at the Brandywine River Museum in 2008.

Wyeth ignored the preferences of the art establishment during the heyday of abstract expressionism but nonetheless won international acclaim with exhibitions throughout the world, received many awards, and inspired countless imitators. His work brought some of the highest prices for a living American artist. His painting, *Christina's World* (1948), is one of the best-known images of the 20th-century.

"The world has lost one of the greatest artists of all time," said George A. Weymouth, a close friend and chairman of the board of the Brandywine Conservancy.

Andrew Newell Wyeth was born in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania on July 12, 1917, a son of the internationally renowned painter and illustrator N.C. Wyeth and his wife Carolyn Bockius Wyeth. Theirs was a creative family: Henriette Wyeth Hurd, Carolyn Wyeth and Andrew were painters; Ann Wyeth McCoy was a composer; and son Nathaniel was an engineer and inventor with many patents to his credit.

At age 15, Wyeth began his academic training in his father's studio. In that year, on one of his boyhood walks, he discovered the Chadds Ford farm of Karl and Anna Kuerner. Wyeth was intrigued by Kuerner, a German immigrant and World War I veteran, developing a close relationship with him over the years. Wyeth has found subjects in the Kuerner farm's people, animals, buildings and landscapes for hundreds of works of art over more than 75 years.

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Andrew Wyeth  
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The Wyeth family spent summer months in Maine, and Andrew Wyeth's early watercolor landscapes, much influenced by the work of Winslow Homer, met with enormous critical acclaim at his first one-man show at the William Macbeth Gallery in New York City in 1937. An exceedingly self-critical artist, this immediate success did not reassure him. Feeling that his work was too facile, he returned to his father's studio for further concentration on technique.

Wyeth soon began working in egg tempera, a technique introduced to him by his brother-in-law, the painter Peter Hurd. Tempera became his major medium. He said that it forced him to slow down the execution of a painting and enabled him to achieve the superb textural effects that distinguish his work. His other mediums were watercolor and drybrush watercolor.

In 1940, Wyeth married Betsy James, whom he had met in Maine the previous summer. It was Betsy who introduced Wyeth to her long-time friend Christina Olson, who had been crippled by polio. Olson's character represented "old Maine" to him, and she became his model for many works of art, including *Christina's World*.

Wyeth caused a sensation in 1986 with the revelation of a large collection of paintings featuring German immigrant Helga Testorf, a Chadds Ford neighbor. The paintings were first exhibited at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, the following year, and were then exhibited internationally and seen by millions.

In 1987, the exhibition *An American Vision: Three Generations of Wyeth Art*, featuring 117 works by N.C., Andrew, and Jamie Wyeth, traveled to the Soviet Union and to nine cities around the world.

In addition to his wife, Wyeth is survived by two sons, Nicholas, a private art dealer in Maine, and his wife, Lee; and Jamie, also a very well-known painter, and his wife, Phyllis; and granddaughter Victoria Browning Wyeth.

Wyeth received many awards during his lifetime. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy named Wyeth the first artist to receive the Presidential Freedom Award, the country's highest civilian award. In 1970, he was the first living artist to have an exhibition at the White House. Wyeth's other tributes include the gold medal for painting from the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1965), several painting and watercolor

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awards and numerous honorary degrees. In 1977 he made his first trip to Europe to be inducted into the French Academy of the Fine Arts, becoming the only American artist since John Singer Sargent to be admitted to the Academy. The Soviet Academy of the Arts elected him an honorary member in 1978. He received the Congressional Gold Medal in 1990. Most recently, he was awarded National Medal of Arts in 2007. He also received numerous honorary degrees.

One-artist exhibitions of his work routinely broke attendance records at major museums, including the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, the Baltimore Museum of Art; the Whitney Museum of American Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Art Institute of Chicago; and the Museum of Fine Arts, San Francisco. His work was also exhibited at museums throughout the world, including the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo; the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg; the Palazzo Reale in Milan; and the Academie des Beaux Arts, Paris, among many other museums. He was the first living American artist to have an exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. An exhibition of his work at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2006 drew 177,000 visitors in 15 1/2 weeks, the highest-ever attendance at the museum for a living artist.

His work is included in many major American museums, including The Museum of Modern Art in New York City and the National Gallery of Art, as well as the Brandywine River Museum in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania and the Farnsworth Art Museum in Rockland, Maine, to name only a few.

Services will be private. A celebration of his life and work will take place at the Brandywine River Museum at a date to be announced. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to the Brandywine River Museum and the Farnsworth Art Museum.