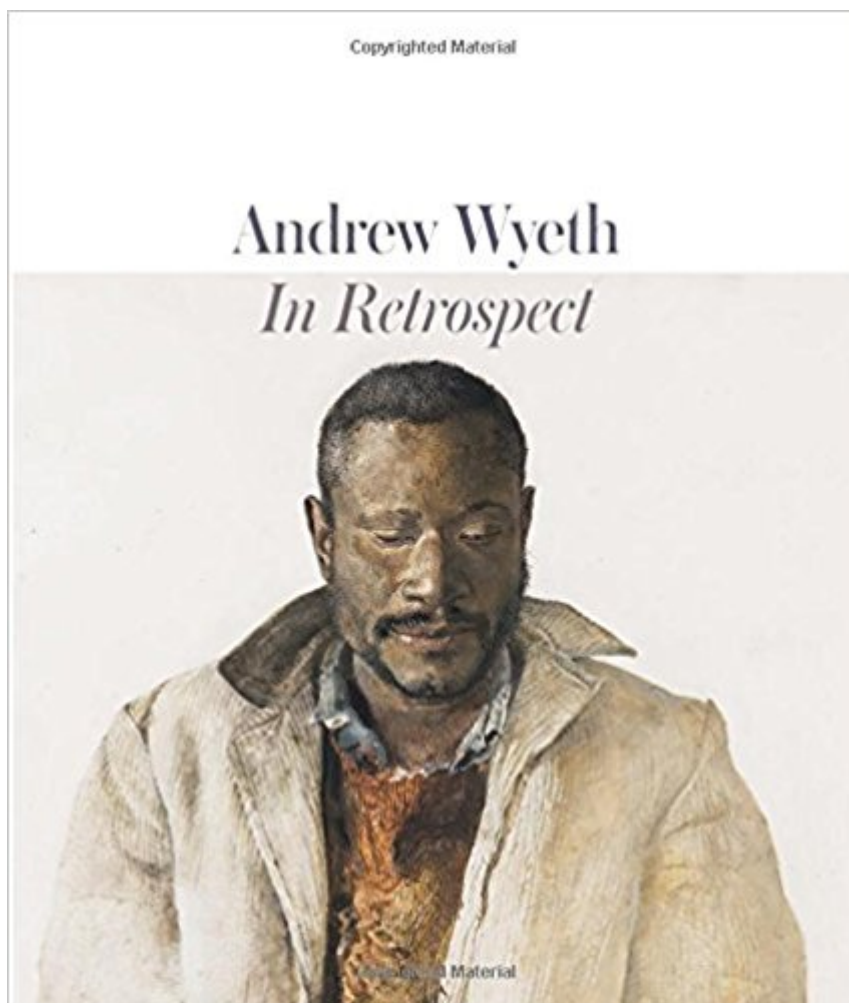


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# Andrew Wyeth: In Retrospect



## Synopsis

An insightful and essential new survey of Wyeth's entire career, situating the milestones of his art within the trajectory of 20th-century American life. This major retrospective catalogue explores the impact of time and place on the work of beloved American painter Andrew Wyeth (1917-2009). While previous publications have mainly analyzed Wyeth's work thematically, this publication places him fully in the context of the long 20th century, tracing his creative development from World War I through the new millennium. Published to coincide with the centenary of Wyeth's birth, the book looks at four major chronological periods in the artist's career: Wyeth as a product of the interwar years, when he started to form his own "war memories" through military props and documentary photography he discovered in his father's art studio; the change from his "theatrical" pictures of the 1940s to his own visceral responses to the landscape around Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, and his family's home in Maine; his sudden turn, in 1968, into the realm of erotic art, including a completely new assessment of Wyeth's "Helga pictures" - a series of secret, nude depictions of his neighbor Helga Testorf - within his career as a whole; and his late, self-reflective works, which includes the discussion of his previously unknown painting entitled Goodbye, now believed to be Wyeth's last work.

## Book Information

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History

## Customer Reviews

Reexamining Andrew Wyeth's work one hundred years after his birth, this publication situates the milestones of his art and life within the trajectory of 20th-century America.

Patricia Junker is the Ann M. Barwick Curator of American Art at the Seattle Art Museum. Audrey Lewis is curator at the Brandywine River Museum of Art.

Most people have mentioned the poor reproductions but the idiocy of the essays made my mouth fall open in disbelief. Sadly, the worst is by a professor at Penn! Art historians in general have little knowledge of how a painter actually crafts a painting, and even less knowledge of the thought process. They could ask, but that would get in the way of their theories. The writer of Black Paintings essay is just trying to make her bones but it is unconscionable that someone is trying to make a name for themselves by falsely accusing another. She's not just out of her depth (she seems to be a scholar with only one answer to any question); this is dishonest, cruel, misleading appraisal to the point of defamation. These paintings are honest, sympathetic portraits of people he cared for. To quote another reviewer, who said it all better than I, "Andrew Wyeth never made portraits of black people or white people. He made portraits of human beings. To fail to perceive this is to fail to perceive the greatness of Wyeth's art altogether." People will generally want to buy the catalogue for reproductions more than the text. I've only mentioned the most egregious entry. In short, you could save your money and find one of the better books on Wyeth unless you just want a souvenir of your visit. But, seriously, they couldn't get better essays than this - this is what they wanted? Odd. When people try to do a project and add relevance as an icing, it is doomed to fall flat. Andrew Wyeth did more to honor people of color in America than this essayist did. And the reproductions do no honor to Mr. Wyeth.

I attended the opening of the "Andrew Wyeth: In Retrospect" exhibit at the Brandywine River Museum, purchased this book about the works in the show from the gift shop, and read it in a day. So I now own 20 books about Andrew Wyeth and have read most of them. Each book I've read adds more details to my understanding of the artist and his works, and this book is no exception. The artist lived a long and productive life, and his work is complex and layered, so it seems there's always more to say about them. For example, Wyeth's last tempera painting, "Goodbye," appears for the first time with a nicely detailed description of, and explanation for, its various elements. This book's illustrations were for the most part nicely reproduced, though it's too bad a few long paintings were printed across the fold. The chapters are well-written and informational rather than overly intellectualized, as I was afraid they would be from what I read in another review. The one exception was the chapter titled "Andrew Wyeth's Black Paintings," whose author had a political

rather than an aesthetic agenda. (One could as easily argue that Wyeth had an unequal and potentially exploitative relationship with ALL of his usual subjects, and he certainly used them all as objects for his own imagination, to recombine with other elements.) However, this weakness is offset by other solid contributions from other authorities. And who can be an artist of any kind without a certain amount of controversy? Henry Thoreau wrote "I have traveled a good deal in Concord." Similarly Andrew Wyeth traveled a good deal in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania and along the coast of Maine. His paintings display the same kind of psychological depth, attained only by long familiarity with his subjects. This kind of artistic achievement has its parallels with Monet's paintings of his gardens in Giverny or Cezanne's paintings in Provence. They are not just illustrations of the artist's own life and perspectives, but explorations of the people, things, and places around him as well. In such a way, an artist enriches the lives of those around him (or her) while teaching others how to appreciate the details of their own lives as well.

I was expecting an art book celebrating 100 years of Andrew Wyeth's birth but this book is just an academic review of Wyeth's work from a politically correct point of view. I was suspicious before ordering the book when I saw that it was published in association with Yale University because, sadly, American universities seem to have become temples of intolerance and dogmatism where some students appear to be a new generation of red guards who, instead of adoring the mass murderer Mao Zedong, now worship the fraud and mediocrity of political correctness. The book has a chapter called "Andrew Wyeth's Black Paintings". I was puzzled by the title as there is no chapter called "Andrew Wyeth's White Paintings". It is the longest chapter in the book despite the fact that the so called black paintings represent a small part of Wyeth's work. The chapter ends with a critic of Wyeth because he removed the figure of a black woman from the painting "Dryad", stating "By the late 1960s racial power relations in the United States had begun to shift. If black bodies could no longer be controlled in the same way as they once had been their blackness could still be placed like a costume atop wherever the artist wanted it to be. Or, in the case of "Dryad", black bodies could be eliminated entirely." I looked at the original painting and the changed one, where the woman had been removed and could clearly see that the painting without the woman representing a nymph had more impact. There are many examples of Wyeth changing a painting and removing people from it. Wyeth many times used objects and elements of nature to represent people. The original Dryad painting, showing a woman inside a tree, looks rather kitsch to me and it would make no difference if the woman was black, white or

green. The tree on its own is stronger and it is likely that this was the only reason why Wyeth changed the painting. As it says on page 47 of the excellent book *Memory and Magic* ( ISBN 9780847827718 ) :  
Often, when Wyeth juxtaposes people with objects, the objects appear the more specific and detailed, and even seem more animated than the figures. Sometimes Wyeth completely paints out the figure, erasing it in the final version and leaving the objects alone to speak. Wyeth himself once said, as it is quoted in this *In retrospect* on page 96, that  
The less you have in a picture , the better the picture is really. The artist also said that  
Sometimes when I do a painting with people in it I have ultimately eliminated them , much to the horror of those who pose for me, because I find really that it's unimportant that they're there. If I can get beyond the subject to the object, then it has a deeper meaning. This is on page 65 of the book *Memory and Magic*. The *duel* , from 1976, is an example of a painting where Wyeth removed a figure that was originally part of the painting. A white, blond man who had been a childhood friend of Wyeth's was in the original study but in the end he was removed. Or as it says in *In Retrospect* on page 92 of a different chapter, *Islands* :  
Wyeth had originally placed Walt Anderson sitting against the rock. But he is absent from the final picture. There is a good interpretation of *The Duel* in the book *Memory and Magic* on pages 65-66:  
This process of erasing figures from the composition and relying on objects to tell the story is common in Wyeth's art. As the figures gradually melt away, the objects themselves become intensely real and almost human. Like the granite boulder, the self reliant, persevering Anderson embodies for Wyeth the spirit of old New England. The weathered facades of both Anderson and the rock preserve marks from an earlier era, quietly recording a struggle between land and sea. Anticipating Anderson's death, Wyeth renders him already invisible, leaving the enduring rock as a memorial. Andrew Wyeth never made portraits of black people or white people. He made portraits of human beings. To fail to perceive this is to fail to perceive the greatness of Wyeth's art altogether. The poor and foolish interpretation of *Dryad* in this *In Retrospect* would not be enough to make me discard this book. Most customers never read those academic texts and prefer to concentrate on the plates anyway. I normally do the same. Unfortunately, a section with only plates is missing in this book . All the paintings are spread throughout the book together with the text and many of the printings are not of good quality because of their poor reproduction of the texture and colours of Wyeth's work . Some paintings even appear to have gone through some sort of photoshop filtering where a denoise or sharpening tool had been applied. Other paintings have a greenish/bluish tint. See photo of an old man lying in bed (*Garret Room*). I put the book *In Retrospect* side by side with the

magnificent *Andrew Wyeth*, by Richard Meryman, published in 1968 by Houghton Mifflin Company (ISBN was introduced in 1970 so there is no ISBN to help to search for this book) . The 1968 book has, indisputably, the best quality reproductions of Wyeth's work .I am also uploading other photos to illustrate this review: Dryad (from this book) The Duel (from the book *Memory and Magic*) Sea Dog, a portrait of Walt Anderson (from the book *Memory and Magic*) Hay Ledge (from the book *Andrew Wyeth* ) I was going to mention another chapter where the absence of political correctness is compensated by over interpretation of Wyeth's work but this review is already taking me too much time. I will say only this: According to a young scholar the rope in the painting *Hay Ledge* is an inscrutable construct binding the lives of Christina, her brother and the artist's lives entwined, never to be undone in the unreal, hence abstract and timeless, space of the painting. One can say that Wyeth's realism is a magic realism but this is too much magic. Just because some painter couldn't replicate Wyeth's rope, it was concluded that the rope was an abstract painting, not a realist one, and that questionable conclusion gave the ammunition for the young scholar to over interpret the painting. Now, read Wyeth's own words about *Hay Ledge*: "so he stopped lobstering - just stopped - and put his dory up in the loft. That beautiful Penobscot dory sat up in that loft in the hay the sun would come through and hit the boat. It reminded me of the phosphorescence that you get in seawater. Wonderful! This is nicer and more informative than reading too much in a painting when a critic goes to the point of spoiling a work of art. I think the whole book is a disaster. A text that many times throws Wyeth's paintings in a politically correct context which misrepresents the painting and adding to that reproductions of inferior quality that do not capture the texture and colours of Wyeth's work as other books do. I just hope that now in 2017, 100 years after Wyeth's birth, there will be other books to celebrate the date. Book or books with good quality reproductions of Wyeth's work and intelligent texts, such as the excellent essay by Anne Knutson in *Memory and Magic*. If not, then at least I have books such as *Andrew Wyeth - Autobiography*, *Memory and Magic* and the exceptional *Andrew Wyeth*, by Meryman (1968). I will watch and enjoy again the excellent BBC Documentary *Wyeth's work*, presented by Michael Pallin. It is available on Youtube. Michael Pallin made a beautiful, very informative documentary where you can actually look at some of Wyeth's painting, mainly without any intrusive and annoying zooms. Pallin says, near the end, that "Wyeth's free spirit could not be tied down". This book, *In Retrospect*, with its red guard mentality and/or its over interpretation tried to tie Wyeth's work down. They failed. They will always fail. This book is irrelevant. Wyeth's extraordinary work will

survive as long as sensible and sensitive human beings inhabit the planet.

Low quality reproductions.

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