

Christina's World

by Andrew Wyeth

Print Facts

- Medium: Tempera on gessoed panel
- Date: 1948
- Size: 32 ¼ x 47 ¾ inches
- Location: Museum of Modern Art
- Style: Realism (or Magic Realism)
- The woman in this portrait was Wyeth's neighbor, Christina Olsen. She suffered from polio and was paralyzed in her lower body.
- Wyeth was inspired to paint this artwork when he spotted Christina in the field from a window in the house.
- Christina was 55 at the time this painting was created (the subject looks younger because Wyeth used his wife Betsy to model for this painting, and she was only in her 20's).
- Wyeth explained, "The challenge to me was to do justice to [Christina's] extraordinary conquest of a life which most people would consider hopeless."
- He recorded the arid landscape, rural house, and shacks with great detail, painting minute blades of grass, individual strands of hair, and nuances of light and shadow.
- The house in the painting is the Olsen's house in Cushing, Maine. It has been preserved and renovated to match its appearance in Christina's World. It is open to the public as a part of the Farnsworth Art Museum.
- When the artist painted the painting, he separated the barn from the house and changed the landscape.
- Wyeth's father and nephew were killed when their car stalled at a railway crossing in 1945. Some say Christina's World shows Wyeth's grief at the loss of his father.
- This painting is painted with egg tempera, which requires the artist to constantly mix and monitor the paints, but allows him greater control.

Artist Facts

- Pronounced (Wl-eth)
- Born July 1917 in Pennsylvania
- Died January 2009 (age 91)
- Wyeth was the youngest of five children.
- He had frail health as a child and was home-schooled.
- Wyeth loved music and movies, and said that they influenced his art.
- Wyeth's father was an artist and illustrator. He was an attentive father, fostering each of the children's interests and talents.
- Wyeth started drawing before he could read. By the time he was a teenager, his father brought him into his studio for the only art lessons he ever had.
- Although creating illustrations was not a passion he wished to pursue, Wyeth produced illustrations under his father's name while in his teens.
- In the 1920s, Wyeth's father became a celebrity and celebrities often visited their home

including F. Scott Fitzgerald and Mary Pickford.

- At age twenty, Wyeth had his first one-man exhibition. The entire inventory of paintings sold out.
- Wyeth painted mostly the people and land that were around him.
- Wyeth usually completed dozens of studies in pencil or watercolors before actually attempting a painting.
- He was skilled at handling the media of egg tempera and watercolor. Wyeth avoided using traditional oil paints.
- This painting is painted with egg tempera, which requires the artist to constantly mix and monitor the paints, but allows him greater control and that's how he was able to paint with such detail.
- Egg tempera: often only the contents of the egg yolk is used. The white of the egg and the membrane of the yolk are discarded. The paint mixture has to be constantly adjusted to maintain a balance between a "greasy" and "watery" consistency by adjusting the amount of water and yolk. As tempera dries, the artist will add more water to preserve the consistency and to balance the thickening of the yolk on contact with air. Once prepared, the paint cannot be stored.
- Wyeth's artwork was featured on many magazines including American Artist and the Saturday Evening Post
- He had a son, Jamie, who also was an artist, becoming the third generation of Wyeth artists.

Key Principle of Design to Teach

- **Emphasis** establishes the order of importance for the visual components of a design. Artists may call attention to specific parts of an artwork by using a combination of elements and principles to draw the viewer's eye to a particular part of the work. The center of interest, or focal point, is the area that first attracts attention in a composition. This area is dominant because it is more important when compared to the other elements in a composition.

Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach Emphasis

- What is your eye drawn to in this painting? (The woman)
- What do you notice when you first look at the painting? (The house or place she seems to be longing to get to.)
- Do you see a triangle? (It is implied – see if they can find it connecting the house the barn and Christina.)
- How does the artist emphasize Christina? (Her dress is a lighter value and a red hue so it moves forward. She is also bigger and in the foreground.)
- How does the artist use line to keep the viewer involved in (and to emphasize) the house? (Her body is pointing at the house, but also a line is implied in the direction she is looking. We want to see what she sees. There are lines from something driving through the field to the house and the fence line leads to the house. The horizon line also leads to the house from both sides.)

Keywords

- Emphasis, Space, Balance, Texture, Shape

Other Possible Questions and Suggestions

- What do you see in this picture? Lots of objects or just a few? (It is very simple.) What might this tell you about the subject of this painting?
- Would you say this painting is balanced? Why or why not?
- What colors do you see in this painting? How would you describe them? Bright, muted, strong, dull?
- What details do you see in this painting? Can you differentiate blades of grass or individual hairs? How do you think the artist does this? (Partly because of the use of egg tempera as a medium that allowed him to paint minute details.)
- What shades of yellow do you see in this painting? What would you call them?
- What colors do you see in the sky? What time of day does it seem to be?
- What is the woman doing? (Talk about the struggle she would have had to get anywhere in life with her handicap.)
- Why do you think the artist changed the position of the barn and the house a bit? (to help achieve balance and because artists can choose to paint things how they want them to be rather than how they exactly are.)
- What season is it in this painting? How can you tell? (It is probably late summer when green grass has dried out and turned yellow.)
- What is the mood of this painting? (woman yearning for something.)
- If you could see her face, what do you think her expression would look like?
- How does it make you feel?
- Is it a shady or sunny spot? How can you tell?
- What time of day do you think it is? (Look at the shadows. It has to be early morning or late afternoon.)
- Would you like to spend an afternoon in this spot?