

Unknown Terrain: The Landscapes of Andrew Wyeth (A Whitney Museum of American Art book)

Beth Venn, Adam D. Weinberg, Andrew Wyeth, Michael G. Kammen

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Andrew Wyeth is considered America's most popular living painter, and his work is acclaimed by art lovers around the world. This fully illustrated volume accompanies the first major exhibition to focus exclusively on Wyeth's exquisite landscape paintings, on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, from May 28 to August 30,1998. Organized by Adam D. Weinberg and Beth Venn, Permanent Collection curators at the Museum, both book and exhibition span Wyeth's entire career, from his formative years in the late 1930s to the present. Andrew Wyeth, born in 1917, became associated with the group of artists known as the American Scene painters, among them Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, Reginald Marsh, and Edward Hopper. Rejecting the extremes of European modernism, and propelled by a nationwide impulse to create a modern idiom that expressed the uniqueness of contemporary American life, these artists worked in a variety of realist modes, largely inspired by pre-20th-century painting. Based on experience and close observation of his immediate environment, Wyeth began making paintings inspired by the landscape, architecture, and people in two locales: Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, and Cushing, Maine. He developed a highly subjective art that still represents a distinctly American voice. Focusing on Wyeth as a painter rather than as a storyteller, Unknown Terrain: The Landscapes of Andrew Wyeth reveals the artist's love of painting as process and material, underscores his technical prowess, and examines the abstract modernist underpinnings of his landscape compositions. In the process of selecting the more than 125 works -- in watercolor, tempera, drybrush, and oil -- allbeautifully reproduced in color, Weinberg and Venn have uncovered a large number of previously unknown watercolors. These fluid, expressionistic works perfectly capture the intensity and emotionalism of Wyeth's painting over the last 60 years. Despite Wyeth's enormous appeal, there has been little critical or art historical consideration of his career during the past quarter century. Now, this book brings together essays by a new generation of curators who investigate Wyeth's work both within the tradition of landscape painting and from a broader art historical perspective. They also explore Wyeth's career as a whole, his relationship to other abstract and realist painters, discuss why he continues to be of great interest today, and how he fits into the greater context of 20th-century art.

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