N.C. WYETH: STORYTELLER

September 10 – October 25, 2019

Menconi + Schoelkopf

Wash Day on the Maine Coast, 1934

Oil on canvas
48½ × 52 inches
Signed at lower right: NC WYETH
Inscribed on label on verso: *WASH DAY* on the / MAINE COAST / by N.C. WYETH

PROVENANCE
The artist; to
Private collection, Greenville, Delaware, as a gift from the artist, in 1942; to
Private collection, Chadds Ford, Delaware, by gift, in 1958 to their son, until the present

EXHIBITED
Twenty-First Annual exhibition of work by Delaware Artists, Wilmington Society of the Fine Arts, Wilmington, Delaware, 1934, no. 38, as *Harbor, Monday Morning* // Brandywine River Museum, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, 2003

RECORDED
"Paintings of Pyle Pupils Listed for Exhibition," *Wilmington Morning News*, Nov. 5, 1934, p. 18 // "State Artists Show Work in 21st Exhibition," *Journal Every Evening*, Wilmington, Delaware, Nov. 5, 1934, p. 9 // "Art Lovers See New Display of Canvases," Wilmington, Delaware, *Journal Every Evening*, Nov. 6, 1934, p. 10 // Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), L.182, p. 760

By the 1930s, Newell Convers Wyeth had long since made his name as one of the great American illustrators and was gaining acceptance as the fine artist he had always considered himself. His work in illustration had propelled him beyond the long shadow of his teacher, the master of the Golden Age of Illustration, Howard Pyle. In 1941, the National Academy of Design welcomed him to its ranks, his works beginning to dot the walls of museums and private collections. While he had a lifelong contempt for the "money men" of the advertising world "who want to buy me piecemeal," he continued to take commissions, even as a new generation of artists and illustrators sprang up around him. Among these were Norman Rockwell, twelve years Wyeth's junior, and Wyeth's own son Andrew, himself only a few years away from contributing one of American art's most iconic images with 1948's *Christina's World*.

N.C. Wyeth's family dated back many centuries in New England, but N.C.'s first real taste of the Maine coast came in 1910. Along with another Pyle student, Sidney M. Chase, Wyeth travelled by steamer along the coastline from Portland to Rockland, stopping in Port Clyde. Nearly a decade later, in 1919, Wyeth wrote to Chase of his "feeling of utmost necessity that we must get back to New England" [Betsy James Wyeth, ed., *The Wyeths, The Letters of N.C. Wyeth,* 1902–1945, 1971, p. 618]. Ultimately, he did; buying property in Port Clyde, formerly owned by one Captain Norris Seavy. Wyeth saw a show of Winslow Homer's watercolors in 1925, and wrote, again to Sid Chase, "Homer alone has risen above locality (yet sacrificing none of it!) and has presented the sea, land and sky for everybody and all time" [Ibid., p. 707]. The family didn't move in until another decade had turned, however. In 1930, Wyeth hung a reproduction of a painting by Homer, that most "Maine" of Maine painters. The picture gave the name to the house: *8 Bells*. The stormy scene of Homer's 1886 masterpiece exhorted the Wyeth family to attend "real reverence and cherish the charm and historic appeal of the little storm-beaten homestead" [Ibid., p. 652]. The family inarguably maintained that reverence, and the property remained in the family for generations.

The present work was painted only a few years after family started coming to Maine with regularity, in 1931. It is the very opposite of every aspect of Homer's Maine masterpiece—except for location, and transcendence of it. Where Homer's scene is stormy and ominous, Wyeth shows the peace of Monday morning, sunlight and breeze lapping the morning wash. The upward gaze of *8 Bells* denotes the anxiety of the men

in their raincoats; Wyeth's washerwoman looks earthward, and we join her tranquility as the view wanders down to the sun-dappled bay. The picture is nonetheless perfectly "Maine" and could be nowhere else—but it reaches a level of categorical sublime that does, as Wyeth said of Homer, succeed at transcending any place in particular.

Along with a four or five other works, *Wash Day* represents Wyeth's greatest paintings of Maine. The finest of these—including *Island Funeral* and *Dark Harbor Fishermen* share a common perspective: namely, the artist looks down on the scene, with the horizon high above. Notably, this is the same compositional device that Andrew Wyeth employed in *Christina's World* a decade later: by allowing the earth (and sea, in some cases) to fill the frame of the picture, the environment envelopes the figure. In *Christina's World*, the subject's upturned gaze evinces her yearning to escape those enclosing environs. In N.C.'s best Maine pictures, however, the figures look down, not up. As in *Wash Day*, his subjects are engrossed in their work—not stifled by their environments, but living sturdily through them. *Wash Day*'s billowing clothesline completes this effect, as if the wind blows right through the picture.

If N.C.'s figures look down and Andrew's look upward, Winslow Homer's masterwork is the keystone that joins them. One watchman looks upward, pensively to the swelling sea; the other, downward at his notes. These two attitudes summarize the broader Wyeth treatment of life in Maine: the figures are engaged by the elements but toil onward nonetheless. *Wash Day*, while a decidedly happier picture than *8 Bells*, has the same effect of allowing the environment of the scene to breeze through the picture. You can almost taste the sea-salty air as it fills the clothes on the line.

When the work was exhibited in 1934, the *Wilmington Morning News* wrote of the event. The article mentions the title of the present work as "*Harbor, Monday Morning*, N.C. Wyeth" [Ibid.]. While this exhibition title is poetic and evocative, we have deferred in titling to the Brandywine Museum's scholarship, as discussed below.

In a letter to John McCoy, the artist referred to the present work as "Washday, Port Clyde (underlined)" [to John McCoy, Aug. 9, 1935, Wyeth Family Archives]. The painting was exhibited in 1934 with the title *Harbor, Monday Morning.* The Brandywine Museum observed:

> The painting presents a good example of the difficulties in establishing titles for N.C. Wyeth's work. The authority for the title of the painting rests with a card in the artist's hand stapled to the stretcher, "*Wash Day on the Maine Coast.*"

In 1934, when it was exhibited in Delaware, the *News Journal* referred to the work by the name under which it was exhibited (*Harbor, Monday Morning*). It singles out the present work, writing, "N.C. Wyeth . . . displays a strikingly interesting exhibit in *Harbor Monday Morning*" [Ibid.].

The review also makes note of one new development. N.C. Wyeth in this exhibition shows alongside three of his children. The authors note that "two of his other children, Mrs. Peter Hurd and Miss Carolyn Wyeth, won places in the exhibit" [Ibid.]. But they point out, "Most noticeable of these newer exhibitors is the work of Andrew Wyeth, son of N.C. Wyeth and Mrs. Wyeth of Chadds Ford, Pa., the youngest of all the exhibitors. Though only 17 years old, his water color entry takes an important place in the water color smaller show of this medium" [Ibid.].

This is one of the earliest known exhibitions by young Andrew—a notable feat, even among a family of artist genius. But this showcases a concern that would dog N.C. Wyeth all his life. On the one hand, living in the midst of the shadow of his mentor, on the other hand, he lived to be out-shined by his own children. His relationship with the former was embattled but ultimately resolved after Pyle's death. His relationship with his children was close, and he was made no secret of his pride in their work—and their inclusion in this exhibition is proof that he did everything possible to support their careers. Nonetheless, as Andrew, in particular, won accolades, it highlighted to N.C. the brass ring he was never able to achieve: to be admired as a painter of fine art rather than as an illustrator.

The present work crystallizes this tension in a single picture. It was not conceived as an illustration, but shows all of N.C.'s virtues as a painter, draftsman, composer, and colorist—all in the service of depicting a beautiful Maine morning that every painter of Maine, from George Bellows and Rockwell Kent to Marsden Hartley and John Marin, would have admired. The composition is deftly managed, with a modern composition device of looking downhill towards the bay. The square canvas is patterned by planes of color—the billowing laundry and simple frame houses. Form is communicated by value rather than tone, a tool from the Impressionist tool-bag, and the brushstroke mottles transitions of light, as the blue passage in the upper right corner. Particularly brilliant is the mottled treatment of the trunk of the tree in the foreground, which evinces a post-impressionist boldness, not unlike works by Édouard Jean Vuillard. In short, it is an earnest and entirely successful attempt at synthesizing many strands of early-20th century art into a single composition.

The work is a brilliant piece of modernist painting of the American scene. It is illustration only by association with the oeuvre of the artist, a distinction Wyeth himself was deeply interested in shaking. In many ways, it compares more with the late pictures of George Bellows, and perhaps certain works by Thomas Hart Benton. During just the years that N.C. Wyeth was first venturing to Maine, the state was becoming a mandatory destination for American painters. Robert Henri and George Bellows blazed a vivid new pictorial path through the craggy shoreline that had been the haunt of Homer, and a generation of painters eagerly followed. Modernists like John Marin and Marsden Hartley vied for the mantle of Maine's poet laureate, and later, Rockwell Kent and Fairfield Porter left their own marks upon the state's collective self-image. While these interpretations are as varied as their makers, they underscore a common vision —an attraction to the raw nature of Maine's coastline. The present work, an exemplar addition to this proud lineage, demonstrates as well as any that Maine is American Art's Mecca, where rock, sea, and wind meet.

The strong family traditions that emanated from the Wyeth family continue with this painting: N.C. Wyeth himself gave it to family friends in Delaware in 1942, in memory of their recently deceased son. In 1958, another son of the collectors graduated from Yale University, and, in commemoration of that auspicious moment, the couple gave the painting to the new graduate. It has remained in his family's collection ever since.

Moose Hunting (Moose Shooting; Moose Hunters),
1910/1915

Oil on canvas
42⅛ × 32 inches
Signed at lower left: N.C. WYETH

PROVENANCE
The artist;
[Knoedler Galleries, New York, 1957;
[Judy and Alan Goffman, Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, by Feb. 1983];
[Frank E. Fowler, Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, 1986];
Private collection, in 1986; to
Private collection, by descent in the family, until the present

EXHIBITED
M. Knoedler & Company, New York 1957, *Exhibition of Paintings by N.C. Wyeth,* 1882–1945, no. 43, as *Moose Shooting* // William A. Farnsworth Library and Art Museum, Rockland, 1966, *An Exhibition of Paintings from the World of N.C. Wyeth*, no. 9 // Hunter Museum of American Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee, *Chattanooga Gems: Artwork from private Collections*, 2005, as *Moose Hunters*

RECORDED
"N.C. Wyeth Show Termed Highlight of Summer Art Season in United States," Rockland Maine *Courier-Gazette*, July 24, 1966, illus. // Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), vol. II, p. 643, no. c.16 (1086)

In 1909, N.C. Wyeth wrote to his family, "Did I tell you that i went into a competition for a powder advertising picture and won out? We simply submitted rough sketches" [as quoted by Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), vol. II, p. 641].

The rough sketch that evidently won Wyeth the bid was among the first of several illustrations for firearms and munitions that he executed between 1909 to 1914. All of these works are sporting pictures, and many of them put the protagonists in harms way as the hunted the most dangerous North American game. There is a kinship between these pictures, which Wyeth deeply enjoyed painting, and the sporting pictures by Winslow Homer. The solitary and manly pursuit that Homer captured at the turn of the century was augmented in Wyeth's works by the modern firearms. These are rendered so clearly that models of gun and even shell can be identified, which made these pictures attractive as advertisement illustrations for gun manufacturers. Many of these were indeed used to advertise the long guns they depicted, but not all: it seems that Wyeth executed several very complete pictures they were either not commissioned or were not ultimately used in print. In other cases, works were used additional times in magazine contexts. This highlights the extraordinary level at which Wyeth was working. Rather than merely illustrating the product, it is placed in a narrative of excitement, danger, and comradery. The present work is from the heart of this "series" (although the group of pictures was never conceived as serial), and in fact has a near partner in a very similar composition of just the same time period. The partner depicts the same two hunters, in much the same configuration, except instead of a startled moose, they hunt a snarling black bear. The 1972 catalogue of Wyeth's work identified the protagonist of Man and Bear (as Wyeth referred to the composition in a letter to his family) as none other than Theodore Roosevelt. The same could be said of the present work, but the authors of the catalogue raisonné expressed gentle skepticism about that speculation, writing, "Allen and Allen 1972 identifies the foreground figure as Theodore Roosevelt, but this is based on resemblance only [Ibid.]. It may be a coincidence, but it can't have hurt the pictures' success to share a "resemblance only" with America's most famous sportsman.

The present work was exhibited at Knoedler's in 1957 as an illustration for an ad for Winchester Rifles. This is not an unreasonable inference, given the similarity in composition to other works that have been confirmed as advertisements for that manufacturer. However, as the catalogue raisonné notes,

> The Cody Firearms Museum Research Project (Herbert Houze and Jennifer Houze, 1996-1997) did not find any evidence of its reproduction [Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), vol. II, p. 643, no. c.16 (1086)].

Further, they note that "the Ketterlinus Lithograph Mfg. Company made printing plates for many of Wyeth's paintings" [Ibid.]. There is a label from Ketterlinus on the verso of the painting, suggesting the work was later produced for a popular audience as a lithograph, rather than a firearm illustration.

Caribou Hunters, 1909

Oil on canvas
38⅛ x 25 inches
Signed and dated at lower left:
N.C. WYETH / 09
Inscribed on verso at upper left:
(illegible) / Popular

PROVENANCE
The artist; to
Private collection, Chadds Ford,
as gift, until 1966;
Private collection, Wilmington,
Delaware, 1968–2000;
Private collection, Wilmington,
Delaware, 2000–2002;
[Frank E. Fowler, Lookout Mountain,
Tennessee, 2002]; to
Private collection, in 2002, until the present

RECORDED
Popular Magazine, vol. 15, no. 2, Feb. 1909, illus. on cover // Douglas Allen and Douglas Allen, Jr., *N.C. Wyeth, The Collected Paintings, Illustrations and Murals* (1972), p. 269 // Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), vol. I, pp. 78, 196–7 p. no. I.273 (301)

As I pose as an artist of western pictures I've got to have Remington's drawings in for reference of costume, etc. —N.C. Wyeth.

A young N.C. Wyeth was writing to his mother, asking her to send his old copies of the Frederic Remington's illustrations from *Century* magazine. N.C. was studying with Howard Pyle at Chadds Ford—still not yet a member of Pyle's inner circle, and far from arriving as a professional illustrator. The work he produced was nonetheless received as the work of a professional by the editors of *The Saturday Evening Post*—Wyeth's *The Bronco Buster* graced the cover of the Feb. 21, 1903 issue. Derivative though it may have been, it was a major coup: this was arrival at the only destination that mattered for a young illustrator. And importantly, Wyeth achieved this extraordinary feat by making himself over in Remington's model. Western art was the first finished art Wyeth ever made, and he was an adept of its most prized techniques.

The present work was painted after Wyeth had been initiated into Pyle's world and was fast becoming one of America's most sought-after illustrators. The cachet that came with the Pyle seal of approval helped confirm what was manifest from the young painter's talent—his works had the drama, light, and energy to sell magazines. This prestige also sent Wyeth's work directly to the cover, and Wyeth found that he could command much higher prices for full-color covers than for interior-page black-and-white illustration, which nonetheless demanded much the same effort. In later years, Wyeth understood that he could repurpose his imagery for less prestigious applications, using studies for stand-alone canvases to create illustrations and other iconographic work. His interest in painting the rugged frontiersmen of the untamed west, as here, also lent itself to new commercial applications. In years later, imagery like this was recycled as advertisements for Winchester Rifles. The shrewd young painter even recycled that initial bit of Remington-worship for a second life as a Cream of Wheat ad. This early work is germinal in this way: while Wyeth may have returned later to its stark composition, it was a first for him at the time. The grizzled figures are back-lit against a glowing yellow sky. The elements bite at their snow-shoed forms, and the hunt's stakes are acutely felt, with survival in the balance.

The catalogue raisonné also singles out the present work as an exemplar of Wyeth's working methods early in his career. The work retains its original stretcher-key corners: designed by Aaron Draper Shattuck, the metal keys allow for the easy expansion of the corners with gentle taps of the hammer. These allow the canvas to be tightened or loosened at ease.

Wyeth's work for *Popular Magazine*, in these very early years of his career, were uniformly more painterly than even the greatest of his peers—Leyendecker and Pyle included. Many of these were scenes of adventure, as with this present work: polar bear hunting figures in several, and other views of frontiersmen abound. But there are also agrarian scenes fit for Millet, executed in scumbled impasto and subtle tonalist palettes. In this regard, Wyeth rapid ascent to the cover of the magazine was crucial: the cover wasn't required to explicitly illustrate the contents of the magazine, and so many of these paintings stand ably on their own as iconic canvas in the canon of American art.

Two Hunters and Canoe, 1911

Oil on canvas
46¾ × 37¾ inches
Signed and dated at lower right:
N C WYETH / 1911

PROVENANCE
The artist;
Private collection, until 1970
[Bruce M. Gilbert Antiques, Woodbury, Connecticut, in 1970]; to
Collection of William B. Ruger, 1970 to 2002;
Private collection until the present

EXHIBITED
Southport, Connecticut, Pequot Library Association, *Collector's Choice*, 1975

RECORDED
Adrienne Ruger Conzelman, Linda S. Ferber, and Peter H. Hassrick, *After the Hunt: The Art Collection of William B. Ruger* (2002), p. 84, illus. p. 85, p. 194, no. 186 // Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), vol. II, p. 643, no. c.20

The authors of the catalogue raisonné note,

> A reproduction of this painting has not been located; it may have been done for a gun or munitions company, or it may be the painting referred to in a letter of April 17, 1911 that mentions a commission "for a private party (a sportsman) in Connecticut" (Betsy James Wyeth, ed., *The Letters of N.C. Wyeth,* 1901–1945, Boston: Gambit, 1971, p. 381). [Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), vol. II, p. 643, no. c.16 (1086)].

Further, they note that "the Ketterlinus Lithograph Mfg. Company made printing plates for many of Wyeth's paintings" [Ibid.].

There is a label from Ketterlinus on the verso of the painting, suggesting the work was later produced for a popular audience as a lithograph, rather than a firearm illustration. Whatever the specific origin of the work, it demonstrates the layers of craftsmanship with which the artist approached even the simplest subject. The scene is rendered with a ruddy tones in foreground and glowing gold in the sky, but these passages are not laid in flatly, but mottled and blended on the canvas. The broken stroke with which he treated the foliage in the background show the influence of impressionist painting techniques on the painter even at this young age. Perhaps the most interesting evidence of the artist's labor is the way the trees have been painted out. Either for dramatic effect or for compositional structure, it seems that Wyeth painted over an earlier design in which the upper branches reached to the very top of the composition. These are the sort of determinations that concerned painters beyond the work of simple illustration commission: the crafting of an image that would withstand the test of time. In this way, works such as the present obscure what has historically been understood as a bright line between illustration and fine art.

The Decoy, 1913

Oil on canvas
33 × 24¼ inches
Signed at lower left: NC Wyeth

PROVENANCE
Street and Smith Publications; to
Condé Nast Publications, Inc., New York; to
[James Graham & Sons, Inc. New York]; to
W. H. Middleton, New York; to
J. Bruce Bredin, Wilmington, Delaware; to
[Berry-Hill Galleries, Inc. New York]; to
William B. Ruger, New Hampshire; to
The present owner by descent in the family

EXHIBITED
James Graham & Sons, New York, 1964, *N.C. Wyeth*, no. 10, as "*Two Men in Tree, Shooting*"

RECORDED
Frank Blighton, "*The Decoy,*" *New Story Magazine,* Feb. 1913), illus. on cover // Douglas Allen and Douglas Allen, Jr., *N.C. Wyeth: The Collected Paintings, Illustrations and Murals* (New York, 1972), p. 25, p. 267 // Adrienne Ruger Conzelman, *After the Hunt: The Art Collection of William B. Ruger* (2002), p. 194 // Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), 1.444, p. 262

Perhaps more important to Wyeth than the subjects of the Frontier was his desire to capture action. From the first Bronco Buster image on the *Saturday Evening Post,* Wyeth exhibited a dynamism rarely scene in oil paintings. Even colleagues in the Golden Age of Illustration erred on static compositions, producing friezes or heraldic images rather than bodies in motion. The present work is a perfect reason why: capturing scene, mood, likeness, and drama together in one picture has been a feat for painters since the middle ages. Adding to this a sense of motion, of capturing the decisive moment, is an extraordinary leap to add to this accomplishment. *The Decoy* manages this exceptionally, sketching in the pistol's shot so that it joins the low-angled light to paint subjects' faces with suspense. The subject matter was the pulpy stuff that has been forgotten by literature while Wyeth's memory has only grown in the art world. Frank Blighton, the author of *The Decoy*, wrote a series of action-minded short stories for *New Story* as well as *The Black Mask*, and pulps. *New Story*, which ran from 1911 to 1915, offered readers what they craved: action, adventure, and, notably, a *new story* every issue. Among several stories by Blighton, *New Story* serialized Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Return of Tarzan*. The magazine lasted until World War I, when it was renamed *All-Around*, and folding after 52 issues.

Wyeth's work for *New Story Magazine*, in these very early years of his career, were uniformly more painterly than even the greatest of his peers—Leyendecker and Pyle included. Many of these were scenes of adventure, as with this present work. But there are also agrarian scenes fit for Millet, executed in scumbled impasto and subtle tonalist palettes. In this regard, Wyeth rapid ascent to the cover of the magazine was crucial: the cover wasn't required to explicitly illustrate the contents of the magazine, and so many of these paintings stand ably on their own as iconic canvas in the canon of American art.

Menconi + Schoelkopf

From the Stern to the Pilot House they Danced and Struck and Howled, 1915

Oil on canvas
25 × 34⅛ inches
Signed at lower left: Wyeth

PROVENANCE
The artist; to
Mrs. N.C. Wyeth, in 1945; to
Andrew Wyeth, in 1949; to
Private collection, in 1949, as gift; to
[Frank E. Fowler, 2005]; to
Private collection, by descent,
until the present

EXHIBITED
Roy Norton, "Captain Bill," *Collier's Weekly*, vol. 56, no. 23, Feb. 19, 1916, p. 10

RECORDED
Douglas Allen and Douglas Allen, Jr., *N.C. Wyeth, The Collected Paintings, Illustrations and Murals* (1972), p. 256 // Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), I.581, p. 311

"Captain Bill stared at him with his indolent gray eyes, then put his hands behind his head, yawned widely, and shook his head sadly" —thus did Roy Norton set the scene which N.C. Wyeth would illustrate for a 1916 issue of *Collier's Weekly*. Readers of "Captain Bill" in *Collier's* wanted action, and Three-Fingered Charley delivered:

> Three-Fingered Charley stood aghast for a moment, then made a mad lunge for Captain Bill's throat, but the latter saw it coming and was prepared. From the hogchains that vibrated on their side stanchions aft until they almost fell overboard, and from the stern forward to the back of the pilot house they danced and whirled and struck an howled—Three-Fingered Charley yelling venomously, Captain Bill whooping with gleeful vehemence—and then came to final stop because Charley was no longer in a position to continue, having been knocked flat on the deck and with Captain Bill cheerfully seated on his chest and pinioning him helplessly.

Our hero: "Captain Bill Smith, recruited from the headwaters of the Missouri River, ran the palatial trading steamboat *Louisy Ann*." Alaska was "a thousand miles from anywhere. It was a fine country for . . . murderers, because there was no law and not the slightest inquisitiveness among those wanderers who dwelt and roved thereinches"

In short, it was just the stuff that N.C. Wyeth best liked to illustrate. Loners of bravery and sometimes moral laxity, drinking, hunting, and fighting to stay alive on the edges of the American frontier.

The United States had purchased the Alaskan territory in 1867, and by the 1890s the same sort of gold rush that helped settle California also drew adventurers and prospectors toward the Yukon. The result was a mild case of Alaska Fever, and the pulp magazines rushed to satisfy the appetite. Magazines like *New Story*, which promised just what the masthead ordered, put polar bear fights on their covers while stories of ice-floe fisticuffs filled their pages. N.C. Wyeth, still at a young age and one of the most sought-after illustrators in the countries, rose his paintbrush to the challenge.

Lest we give the impression that the tale of Captain Bill and his odd-digited foe was exclusively one of dust-ups, the story has a healthy mix of frontier dialect and a Tom Sawyer-esque vindication of wits. Three-Fingered Charlie, hoping to keep his gold discovery entirely to himself, begs a ride from Captain Bill on his ship, the *Louisy Ann*y, and cries poor to gain passage for free. Captain Bill outsmarts Charlie, lifts the loot, and finally gives back a healthy portion to the defeated prospector, having taught him a lesson more valuable than gold dust. While the pivotal moment of the story turns on manly combat, it is nonetheless a classic American short story of winning justice through wits, in a line with Mark Twain, Uncle Remus, and O. Henry. Wyeth, for his part, captures all the action, showing us the wildmen of the North, parrying in much the same feints and lunges as the dueler swordsmen that Wyeth often painted in the same years. The *Louisy Ann*—funny name for a ship that's made its way all the way up the Missouri to the Bering Strait—is on clear view, as is the captain's fallen hat and Charlie's besotted dressing gown. But take care and count the fingers—I suppose Three-Fingered Charlie was lying about that, too.


LOUISY AN

The Lightning Blazed Out, 1916

Oil on canvas
40¼ × 32¼ inches
Signed at lower right: N.C. WYETH

PROVENANCE
The artist; to
Mrs. N.C. Wyeth, until c. 1966; to
Private collection, West Chester,
Pennsylvania, until the present

EXHIBITED
Wilmington Society of the Fine Arts, Delaware, 1946, *N.C. Wyeth, N.A.,* 1882-1945, *Memorial Exhibition*, no. 42, as *Satan* // Cardigal Mountain School, Canaan, New Hampshire, 1970, *Second Annual Art of Northern New England*, no. 110 // Brandywine River Museum, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, 1976, *Romance and Adventure with Pictures by N.C. Wyeth*

RECORDED
Mark Twain, "*The Mysterious Stranger,* Part II," in *Harper's Magazine*, June 1916, 132 no. 793, p. 41 // Mark Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger: A Romance*, 1916, p. 21 // Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), no. I.636 (263), p. 333

In 1897, over a decade after *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and twenty years after *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Mark Twain set to work on a work of biting satire centered around the adventures of a puckish young magician known by the moniker "No. 44," among other names. Twain seems not to have ever finished the work, but did make three or more fragmented versions which were cobbled together by his estate into a whole narrative. The first of the three drafts is set in the town of St. Petersburg, Missouri, a fictionalization of Twain's own Hannibal, Missouri. A later draft, also set in St. Petersburg, features Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn as No. 44's childhood accomplices. In two other versions, the action is set in late 15th century Austria, Tom and Huck replaced by local Austrian children. And notably, in these drafts, the titular Mysterious No. 44 is given the name Satan. The character reveals himself to be not the fallen angel himself, but a young nephew of the Prince of Darkness. Young Satan inherited the name from his famous uncle along with certain magical powers, but tries to distance himself from the family business. He leads his young chums on fantastical adventures, often deploying the same sort of mischievous deceptions that Tom Sawyer deployed.

In any event, when Twain died in 1910, the work was not finished. A final version was cobbled together and published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1916, and *Harper's* joined America's favorite writer with America's favorite illustrator, tasking a young N.C. Wyeth with the commission. While Wyeth came from good, God-fearing family, but the diabolical subject matter was entirely up his alley. Much of Wyeth's illustration work was devoted to adventure stories and fabulous imagery just like Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*: voyages of discovery, fantastical people and places, stories of trickery and serpentine morality. Wyeth never illustrated *Gulliver's Travels*, but he considered other scenes of diabolical intrigue, from giants in the clouds to Wotan's *Fire Spell* from Wagner's *Ring of the Niebelungen*. In short, it was a perfect marriage of subject matter and artist, and the painter rose to the occasion.

The scene depicted captures the essence of the tale. Like Goethe's *Faust*, the young heroes are offered god-like powers of life and death as an instrument of their play. They make a toy castle, with miniature men and horses to play at war. Young Satan brings the Liliputians to life, and then shortly thereafter, brings on a miniature thunderstorm to terrorize the tiny scene. The destruction is a macabre display in miniature as mini-man and mini-beast are destroyed before the boys' eyes. "Our hearts were broken; we could not keep from crying." But Satan consoles them, "Oh, it is no matter; we can make plenty more" [Ibid.].

The Nephew of the Prince of Darkness is right, and this is just the beginning of his mischief. But the boys are repulsed by the scene, and begin their own education about the awful responsibility of creation and destruction. There's a moral baked into the scene, both about the responsibilities of power and the responsibilities of fantasy. The boys had fantasies about war, but seeing it come to life, even in the consequence-less world of Satan's playthings, sickened them to their cores. Twain's entire career was built on the awful consequences of blending fantasy and reality in his stories—perhaps viewing himself as kinship with the young magician. N.C. Wyeth, picture-maker and master fantasist, contemplated these grave responsibilities as well. While illustrations such as these were ignored by the fine art world for a generation, Wyeth knew instinctively that there is no such thing as a "mere" fantasy.

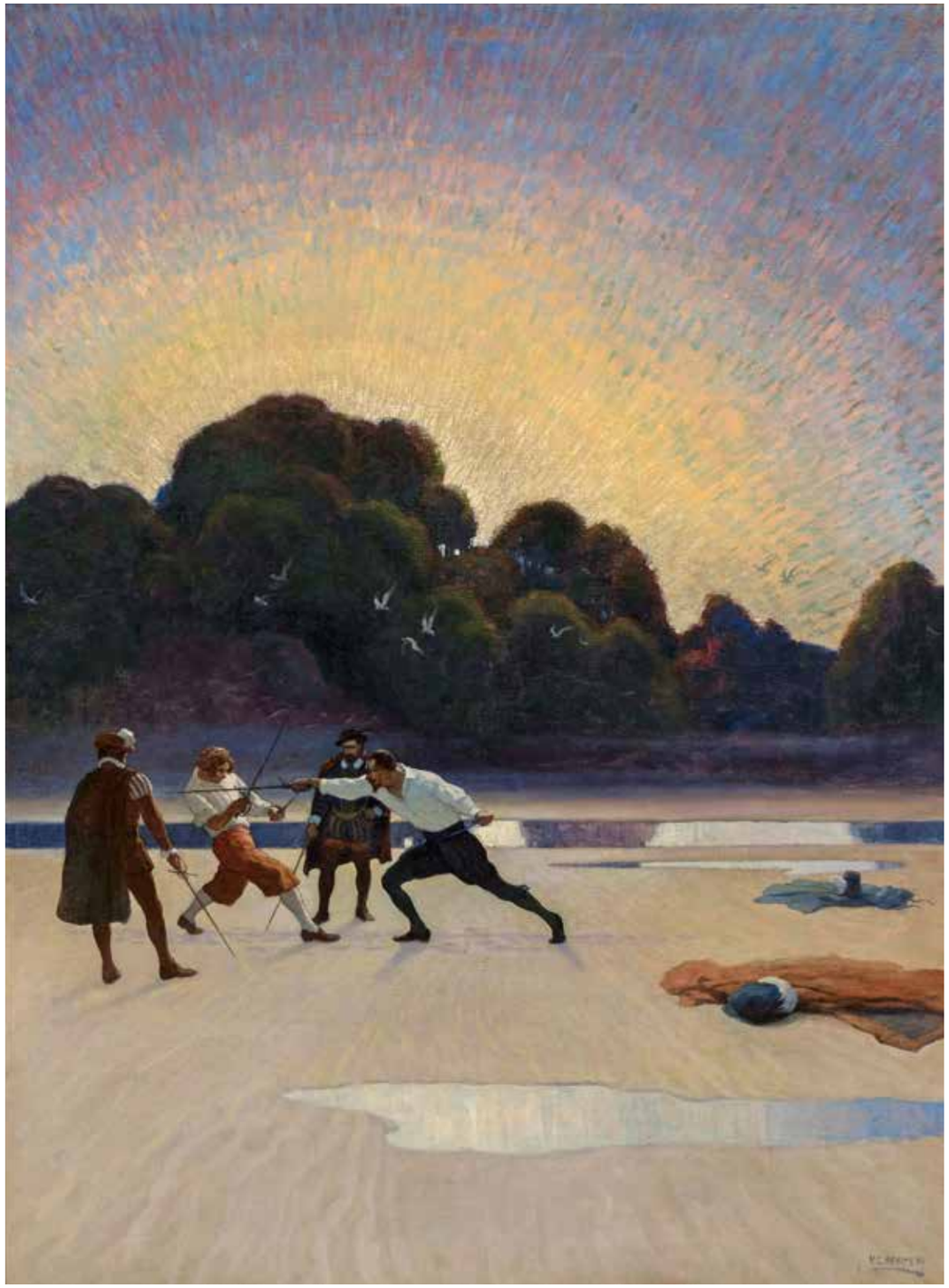
The Duel on the Beach, 1920

Oil on canvas
40½ x 29¾ inches
Signed at lower right: NC WYETH

PROVENANCE
The artist; to
[Philadelphia Art Alliance exhibition, Oct. 1921]; to
Mr. August von Bernuth;
[David & David, Philadelphia, 1965]; to
Private Collection, Greenville, Delaware;
Private collection, Chadds Ford, Delaware, by descent in the family

EXHIBITED
NC Wyeth, Philadelphia Art Alliance, Philadelphia, 1921

RECORDED
Charles Kingsley, *Westward Ho!, or the Voyages and Adventures of Sir Amyas Leigh, Knight* (1920), facing p. 158 // Douglas Allen and Douglas Allen, Jr., *N.C. Wyeth, The Collected Paintings, Illustrations and Murals* (1972), p. 209 // David Michaelis, *N.C. Wyeth, A Biography* (1998), illustration in color after p. 244 // Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), I.834, p. 412



The present work was designed as an illustration for Charles Kingsley's, *Westward Ho!, or the Voyages and Adventures of Sir Amyas Leigh, Knight* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920). Kingsley (1819–1875) was an English clergyman of the 19th century. He was a friend of Charles Darwin, and wrote many novels, along with his published sermons, short-stories, and fairy tales. Of these, *Westward Ho!* was the best received, spawning many reprints in his lifetime and in fact the naming of a town after its title. Westward Ho!, a village in Devon, England, has the distinction of being the only English town with an exclamation point as part of its official name. It was only natural that the most celebrated illustrator of his generation grace the pages of this most celebrated adventure novel when Scribner's did its own printing in 1920.

In preparation for this commission, the artist read and annotated an edition of *Westward Ho!* Kingsley's text reads:

> Cloaks and doublets are tossed off, the men placed, the rapiers measured hilt and point; Sir Richard and St. Leger place themselves right and left of the combatants, facing each other, the points of their drawn swords on the sand. Cary and the Spaniard stand for a moment quite upright, their sword-arms stretched straight before them, holding the long rapier horizontally, the left hand clutching the dagger close to their breasts. So they stand eye to eye, with clenched teeth and pale crushed lips, while men might count a score; St. Leger can hear the beating of his own heart; Sir Richard is praying inwardly that no life may be lost. Suddenly there is a quick turn of Carry's writs and leap forward. The Spaniard's dagger flashes, and the rapier is turned aside; Cary springs six feet back as the Spaniard rushes on him in turn. Parry, thrust, parry—the steel rattles, the sparks fly, the men breathe fierce and loud; the devil's game is burn in earnest [Charles Kingsley, *Westward Ho!, or the Voyages and Adventures of Sir Amyas Leigh, Knight* (1920), p. 158].

This "decisive moment" is captured perfectly in the illustration. We see the "Cloaks and doublets . . . tossed off" on the sand. We have exactly the moment when "the devil's game is begun in earnest," as "Cary springs six feet back" and "the Spaniard rushes on him." The picture is masterful in its composition, condensing these narrative elements into a dynamic frieze worthy of the Parthenon or the operatic stage: heroes alive with "instant death a short six inches off from those wild sinful hearts of theirs."

The subject was symbolic for Wyeth's son, Andrew, as well. Late in life, Andrew would produce his own masterpiece on the theme, simply entitled *Duel*. *Duel* has no people, expressing, perhaps, the absence of his father. The picture is set at the seashore, with a pair of oars standing in for the fencing foils in N.C. Wyeth's works.

The present work is a masterpiece by a genius of American illustration of narrative art. A tender document of a singular moment in human history, it transcends the humble goals for which it was initially commissioned, to a higher place in the firmament of American painting.

Suddenly the Restful Quiet of the Morning was Broken,
1925

Oil on canvas
32 × 32 inches
Signed at lower left: NC Wyeth
Inscribed on verso: to CAROLYN / from / Papa

PROVENANCE
The artist; to
His daughter, Carolyn, by gift;
["Clothes Line Sale," Hotel du Pont, Wilmington, Delaware, late 1930s];
Russell D. Ketcham, to 1969;
[Country Store Gallery, Austin, Texas, in 1969];
[Peterson Galleries, Beverly Hills, California, by 1973, as *Bucking Horse*];
[Spanierman Gallery, New York, 1998];
Private collection, Wilmington, Delaware, and Camden, Maine;
[Frank E. Fowler, Lookout Mountain, Tennessee]; to
Private collection, until the present

RECORDED
Harold Bell Wright, "*A Son of His Father*," in *McCall's*, 52, no. 11, Aug. 1925, p. 16 // Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), vol. II, p. 487, no. I.1021 (1276)

When, in 1925, Wyeth was commissioned by *McCall's* for a series of double-page spread illustrations, he returned to this initial moment of inspiration. *McCall's* was printing a story by Harold Bell Wright, whom *Atlantic Monthly* called the "country's most popular author" in 1918 [as quoted by *Literary Digest*, March 2, 1918, p. 32]. Wright's "light, sentimental literature" was the most popular in the world by 1920, selling "more books than any other author in the world has sold," "averag[ing] a million copies of every novel he has ever written" [Ibid.]. *A Son of His Father* was no less popular, and *McCall's* gave the serialized Western adventure the star treatment, filling spreads with enormous illustrations by America's most popular illustrator. Wyeth rose to the challenge with the same enthusiasm as that first commission. Now, two decades after that initial attempt to channel Remington, Wyeth no longer needed to pose: he had absorbed all the action and narrative power that Remington could teach him, adding a visual drama befitting the subject matter at hand. The caption to the initial illustration read:

> Suddenly the restful quiet of the morning was broken by Pablo . . . Gray paused in the middle of a sentence and with Morgan and Jo started for the gate. Bill dropped his paper and got to his feet.

This was the left-page illustration; its right-side partner illustrated the cowboy tipping his hat as he rode through the yard. The right side of the illustration has not been located; it is identified in the catalogue raisonné only by its illustration. The authors of the catalogue raisonné describe present work:

> The Brandywine River museum holds a photocopy of a photograph of the reverse of the canvas, showing inscriptions visible at the time of restoration in New York prior to 1969; upper left: August — / Page 16 — / Red — (three illegible words crossed out); upper center: Page 16-17 spread / Each 7 3/8" wide 7/8" border / Both 14 3/4" wide / 15 " overall / Red; center of canvas : to CAROLYN / from / Papa (crossed through with wavy line); additional illegible markings along right edge.
>
> The 1925 reproductions shows the signature for the double-page spread in the lower right of the image. The signature in the lower left was probably added by the artist when the work was sold in Wilmington in the early 1930s [Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), vol. II, p. 487, no. I.1021 (1276)].

Iris, c. 1930

Oil on canvas
40¼ × 24 inches

PROVENANCE
The artist; to
Henriette Wyeth Hurd, San Patricio, New Mexico;
Private collection, Maine;
Mr and Mrs. Frank Fowler, 2000–2004
Private collection, in 2004, until the present

EXHIBITED
Morris & Whiteside Galleries, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, *N.C. Wyeth*

RECORDED
Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), vol. II, p. 795, no. S.31 (504)

The authors of the catalogue raisonné observe:

> An old photograph of this work (Brandywine River Museum, curatorial files) bears a label indicating that the painting was a study for a detail in "a mural in Wilmington," which must be *Apotheosis of the Family* for Wilmington Savings Fund Society (M. 46). It was unusual for Wyeth to make such large studies of botanical details and it is more likely that this painting is simply a study of irises. It is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity by Andrew Wyeth. NCW 1460 is a pencil study of an iris on tracing paper, which may be related [Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), vol. II, p. 795].

Wyeth was commissioned by the Wilmington Savings Fund Society in March of 1930. Commissions such as these were precisely the buffer that allowed the painter to weather the depths of the Great Depression relatively unscathed. The painter was at a certain liberty for these bank commissions, but, as ever, chafed under the yoke of for-hire work. His workmanship never flagged, but now, in his mature years, he was able to vent his artistic energies into the commissioned work as readily as into his "private" paintings. *Apotheosis of the Family* was one such case, and we know the painter himself selected his subject matter using Virgil as his guide to this sweeping vision of Arcadia. "I am now reading and am deeply stirred by John Dryden's translation of Virgil's Pastorals," he wrote in the mids of the massive undertaking. "I realize fully what a great force these will be in the doing of the 30 x 60 foot panel for the Wilmington bank [As quoted in the *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), vol. II, p. 620]. The resulting enormous presentation canvas and the even larger mural that it produced are testaments to the freedom of that vision: a sprawling view of an American Eden, fruitful toil in classical garb mingled with contemporary crafts like shipbuilding and barn-raising.

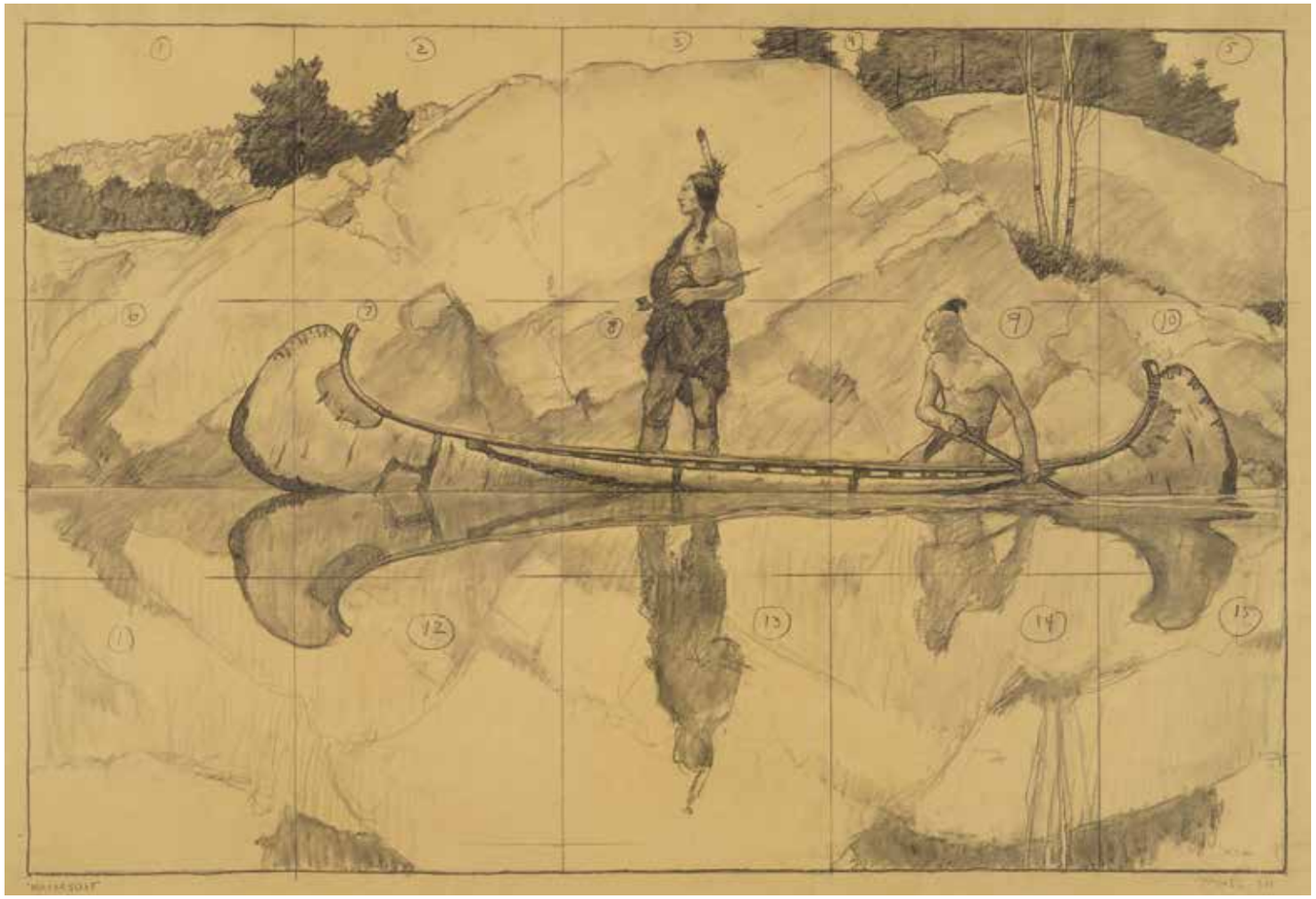
The present work is certainly scaled to fit the 1931 mural, but we follow the authors of the catalogue raisonné in the observation that Wyeth likely painted this over-sized still-life for private reasons. Of the 33 still lifes identified by the catalogue raisonné, most are of dishes and fruit. Only a few feature flowers at all, and none but the present work feature flowers so centrally and with such grandeur. Wyeth's small production of still lifes show him often in a Cézannesque mode—a clear signal that he wished these to be considered in the fine art context, rather than as illustration. The clarity of color, line, and form, in contrast to these Post-Impressionist pictures, sets the present work apart. In its slightly idealized quality, it would not be a stranger among the classicized Wilmington Mural, nor as a pendant to Georgia O'Keeffe's *Dark Iris* (1927, Georgia O'Keeffe Museum) just a few years prior.

Massasoit, c. 1945

Charcoal on paper
35 × 51 inches
Signed and inscribed at lower right:
N.C.W. / Panel 311
Inscribed at lower center: Massasoit
Inscribed at lower left: 15 Slides

PROVENANCE
The artist;
John and Ann Wyeth McCoy;
Anna Brelsford McCoy;
[Somerville Manning Gallery, Greenville, Delaware, 1995];
Private collection, Chadds Ford, PA;
[Christie's, New York, NY, May 24, 2007, lot no. 84];
Private collection, New York,
until the present

EXHIBITED
Somerville Manning Gallery, Greenville, Delaware, *N.C. Wyeth*, 1995



N.C. Wyeth was fifteen years old when, in 1897, he declared his intentions to be pursue a career as an artist. His father insisted he choose a vocation more useful than the "shiftless, almost criminal" artist, and suggested that manual farm labor in Vermont might disabuse his son of "this artist nonsense out of his head." His father may have thought the young man was living a fantasy, but if so, the young fantasist did not live his imaginative life through story-books. His biographer noted that Robert Louis Stevenson and James Fenimore Cooper, the boys' adventure primers of the day, were unknown to the young N.C., who spent his playtime rehearsing battles with his playmates—and, increasingly, making art.

Both his determination and his active imagination would eventually pay off. In 1911 Wyeth was commissioned to produce an "elaborate edition" of *Treasure Island*, Robert Louis Stevenson's children's book about life on a pirate island. Wyeth took the job and with its cash advance and a mortgage, he bought the land that would become the family estate at Chadds Ford.

Treasure Island changed Wyeth's life. It was commercially well received, and turned Wyeth into the go-to man for book commissions. The staying-power of this classic children's book cannot be overstated. While the *Saturday Evening Post* cover is a position of great prestige, it lacks the many-generational impact that *Treasure Island* continues to have. For millions of American, beginning in the early 20th century, it was Wyeth who created the lasting images of pirates and much more.

From this success, Wyeth was able to win commissions for murals, beginning in 1912, with murals on Native American subjects. This vaulted him to win the commission for illustrated editions of James Fennimore Cooper's novels—first *The Last of the Mohicans*, in 1919, followed by *The Deerslayer*, in 1925. These massive undertakings produced some of the most dramatic images of Wyeth's career, and if he is better known for anything than *Treasure Island*, it is his pictures of Cooper's characters. The slipcase to N.C. Wyeth's catalogue raisonné is wrapped with an illustration from *Last of the Mohicans*. More than anything, people remember Wyeth's work as cinematic, and it is a testament to this that his work so influenced Michael Mann in his 1992 film based on the book. "N.C. Wyeth!" Mann exclaimed when he recently told me about his most galvanizing influences. "That's what got me!" [Michael Sragow, January 27, 2016, Michael Mann's *The Last of the Mohicans*" in *The Moviegoer*].

It got Wyeth, too. He returned to imagery of Cooper's world of Native Americans in canoes and early European settlers throughout his entire career— right up to the end of his life in 1945. The present work was executed, certainly a study for an un-realized major painting, not long before his death. The subject is Massosoit (c. 1581–1661), a native to the Rhode Island area. He helped forge political peace with William Bradford and other early New England settlers. The subject is new in Wyeth's oeuvre, but the composition is not: it draws heavily from the poses and positions of earlier works like the 1919 painting for the dust jacket of *Last of the Mohicans*. While the image of Cooper's novel shows the settler standing above two natives, paddling dutifully, this late masterpiece features the peace-making Native American, standing, central in his narrative. Decades of movies have made it difficult to see that Wyeth's pictures without thinking of them as "cinematic." When we remember that the drama and motion of Wyeth's work predates modern cinema, we realize that the influence runs the other way. Wyeth wasn't cinematic. Movies are Wyethian.

Indian Spearman (Spearfishing), 1934

Oil on canvas
37¼ × 53 inches
Signed at lower left: NC Wyeth

PROVENANCE
The artist; to
John W. McCoy, Sr.; to
Mr. and Mrs. C. B. McCoy, 1968,
by descent;
Private collection, by descent,
until the present

EXHIBITED
St. Louis, Missouri (location and title unknown), 1934, as *Indian Spearman* (according to correspondence between N.C. Wyeth to Robert E. Treman, Feb. 17, 1934, catalogue raisonne files // Studio Guild, Inc., New York, *2nd Annual Art Display Week*, Oct. 25-31, 1936 // Wilmington Savings Fund, Wilmington, Delaware, 1968, *Tribute to N.C. Wyeth*, no. 17, as "*Spearfishing*"

RECORDED
Christine B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), p. 48, p. 822

In 1912, Wyeth was won his first "decorative" commission, in his words: a series of murals for the Utica Hotel. The hotel was built in 1910, and Wyeth was an obvious choice for this elegant retreat in upstate New York.

Notably, the murals for the Utica Hotel featured an arched top to accommodate their decorative use. Wyeth painted the panels in his Brandywine studio, before shipping them to Utica for installation. "The pictures are beautifully located, and I am wild to see them in place," he wrote his wife. "The alcoves are set very deep and quite high with wonderful chances of lighting, etc. [as quoted by *N.C. Wyeth Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* (2008), p. 597]. In 1933, however, the paintings were destroyed while the hotel was under renovation. "When they attempted to take it down," wrote Robert Treman, "the whole wall fell apart and the picture was completely lost" [Ibid.]. Treman, who had admired the murals since first seeing them in 1914, was undaunted, and reached out to the artist to try to re-create them. In 1934, Wyeth completed *Return of the Hunter*, based on the Utica Hotel panel for Treman. The painter found the process of re-creating the mural "quite exhilarating." Wyeth, wrote Treman later that same year, "The excitement of doing your canvas drove me into a new subject, *The Indian Spearman*. It's a very effective canvas and sometime I want you to see it" [Ibid., p. 822].

That "very effective canvas" was the present work. Treman not only saw *The Indian Spearman,* he borrowed it while the artist finished a second commission for Treman. When Wyeth spoke of getting back to "that type of canvas," he was evidently speaking of the same arched-top as the Utica Hotel murals. "The top of the painting was originally arched, and later squared off by John McCoy," observe the authors of the catalogue raisonné.

While the action of the moment is carefully expressed in the poised spear of the fisherman, the real genius of the picture is the balance of the figure in the canoe. Wyeth carefully observed the displacement of the water and the vector of the fisherman's lean, showing the pitch of the boat with scientific accuracy. This attention to boating goes beyond the sporting pictures of Winslow Homer, and has an equal perhaps only in the rowing pictures of Thomas Eakins. Eakins, for all his lucidity, kept his sculls flat in the water, pictures of symmetry itself. Wyeth's boat lurches out of the water, but it too sits at a perfect, mathematical balance, the product of a bolder but no less resolved geometry. The diagonal lines of light hitting the rock face beyond and the rush of the waterfall give formal and chromatic dynamism to the scene. But the subject of the picture is indefatigable in his focus. While the spear is raised, the moment is one of total stillness. The fisherman's posture unites him with his boat and his spear, a single entity both polished and primitive.

The whole scene is carefully calculated to transmit the notion of a man at total union with his environment—a part of it while also a master of it. This perspective on a Native American is perhaps a dated view, but it is undeniably ennobling and laudatory. Wyeth's saw man perfected in nature, rather than in society. The stillness of the surface of the pool is communicated by simple lines, the crisp-limned marks of the illustrator, in contrast to the soft treatment of the background. It is very much in the manner of the Western artists of the preceding decades, showing a kinship to Remington, Berninghaus, Couse, and others who captured the light of the West in just the same admixture of illustration and appropriated impressionism. In this way, the picture serves as a counterpoint to Eakins's boating pictures. It suggests the heroism of rough-hewn individual, master of the untamed wild.

The Homecoming, 1945

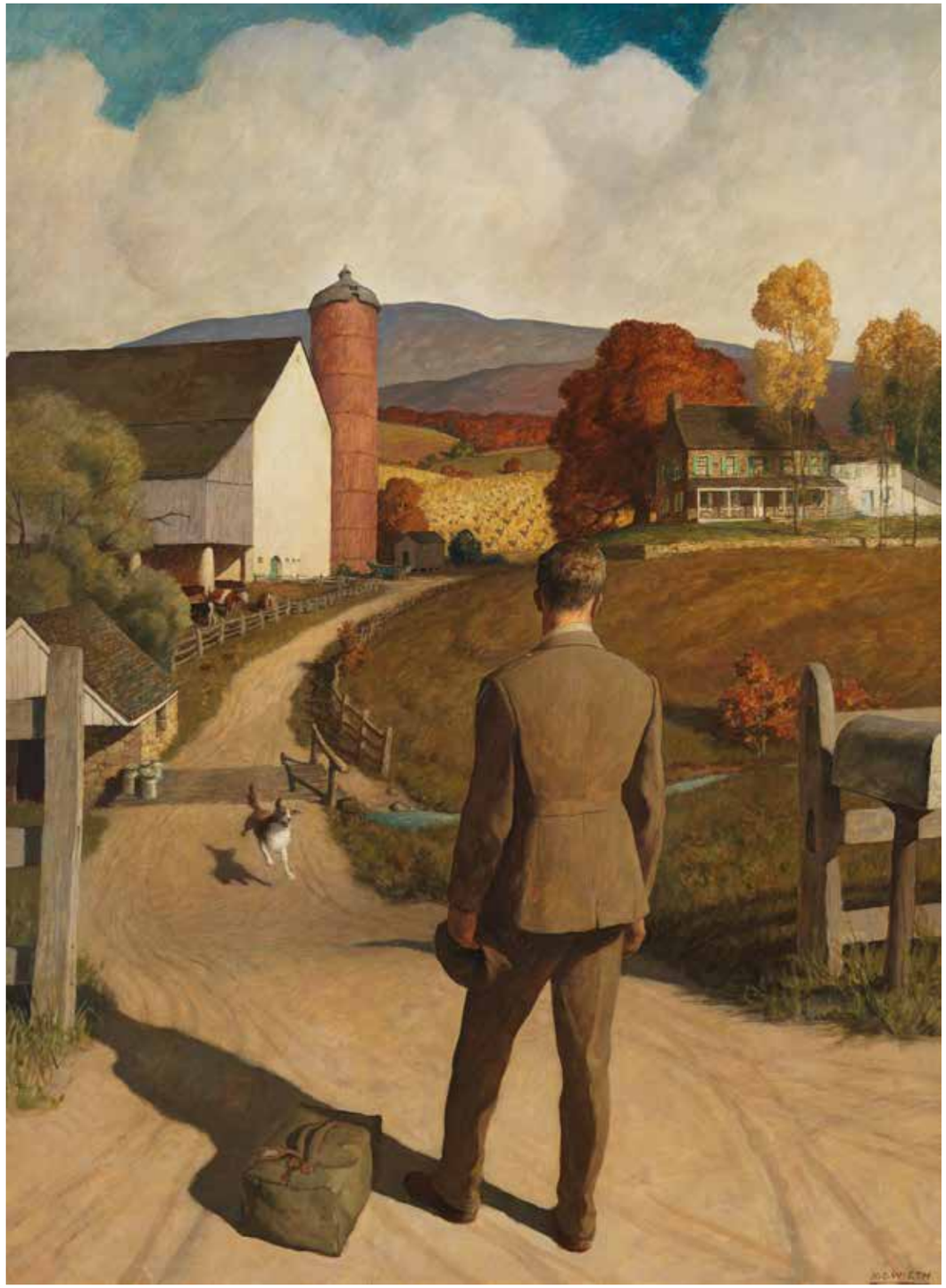
Oil on panel
35 × 26 inches
Signed at lower right: N.C. Wyeth

PROVENANCE

The artist; to
Mrs. N.C. Wyeth, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania; to
Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Lynch, circa 1950;
Bertha Guida, Wilmington, Delaware, circa 1962;
[Newman Galleries, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1979];
Private collection, acquired from the above, 1979;
By descent to the present owner

EXHIBITED

Woman's Day Magazine, November 1945, cover illustration. R. Layton, "Inventory of Paintings in the Wyeth Studio, 1950," Wyeth Family Archives, unpublished, p. 39 (as *Soldier's Return*). D. Allen, D. Allen, Jr., *N.C. Wyeth: The Collected Paintings, Illustrations and Murals*, New York, 1972, p. 279. C.B. Podmaniczky, *N.C. Wyeth: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings*, vol. 2, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, 2008, p. 593, no. I1320, illustrated (as *Woman's Day Magazine*, cover illustration)



The jubilation at the end of World War II in September of 1945 fueled a hunger for commemorative illustration, and Wyeth, along with Norman Rockwell, rose to the occasion. Rockwell produced his own picture of a GI coming home from the war for the *Saturday Evening Post*.

When N.C. Wyeth was commissioned by *Women's Day* editor Kirk Wilkinson for his own Post-war reunion picture, he adopted a similar concept, but filled the composition with his own stamp of pure Americana. The process began with an over-scale drawing in charcoal. It has been suggested that none other than Andrew Wyeth posed as the model for this composition, but, with the figure's back to us, he is rendered anonymous—any parent's son returning from war. The editors of *Women's Day* reviewed the drawing and made minor edits, suggesting the soldier appear to younger and slimmer, with a well-fitting G.I. uniform and haircut.

Adding to these changes, Wyeth also straightened his subject from the dynamic pose of bent knees and outstretched arms to a stiffer posture of resolve. In the final composition, the returning infantryman seems almost to hesitate—happy to be home, certainly, but overwhelmed, perhaps even bearing some of the weight of his time at the front. The subtle psychological layering of this posture elevates Wyeth's opus to a level of art beyond illustration. Alexander Nemerov described this subtlety:

> N.C. Wyeth, in his large drawing entitled *Soldier's Return*, also made a picture about death-in-life near war's end—one that employs the same rhetoric Rockwell used in *Homecoming GI*. The scene, like Rockwell's, is ostensibly happy. The lone soldier has come back to the family farm. His dog races to greet him, as in Rockwell's picture. The soldier has dropped his bag unlike Rockwell's weighted figure, releasing his wartime burden at the threshold of the farm so that he can accept with open arms the life he used to know. The property is still in perfect shape [Alexander Nemerov, "Coming Home in 1945, Reading Robert Frost and Norman Rockwell," *American Art*, (2004), p. 67].

An even greater difference from the Rockwell picture is Wyeth's background: arguably the true subject of the painting. Rockwell's homecomer is greeted by urban cacophony, while Wyeth's is met by rural stillness, puncuated only by the jubilant dog. With the figure's back to us, we take in the scene with his eyes, as if America itself, rather than a red-brick row-house, were welcoming us home. His America was not quite a wild one, but certainly a rural Regionalist one. The crisp, rolling hills are more akin to the work of Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood than to Norman Rockwell. The sumptuous forms and the suggestion of a nostalgic view of a bygone, bountiful America, heighten the warmth of the subject's return.

The return from wartime to farmland in particular was poignant for Wyeth. It is the subject of among the most famous American paintings of all time, Winslow Homer's *The Veteran in a New Field*. Here, too, the returning veteran stands with his back to us, surrounded by his the agrarian pursuit. Here, too, there is a stirring ambivalence in the figure's posture. Peacetime harvest is certainly a happy thing, and Homer, Wyeth, and Rockwell alike celebrated the end to their respective wars.

The present work is a masterpiece by a genius of American illustration of narrative art. A tender document of a singular moment in human history, it transcends the humble goals for which it was initially commissioned, to a higher place in the firmament of American painting.

N.C. WYETH: STORYTELLER

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