



221 Andrew Wyeth

1917 – 2009 American

Blizzard

watercolour and gouache on paper, signed, 1966
19 × 27 ¾ in, 48.3 × 70.5 cm

PROVENANCE

M. Knoedler & Company, New York
Private Collection, Oregon, 1968
The Collection of Torben V. Kristiansen, Vancouver

LITERATURE

The Wonder of Andrew Wyeth: Temperas, Watercolors, Dry Brush, Drawings, 1939 – 1966, Oklahoma Museum of Art, 1967, reproduced page 18

EXHIBITED

Oklahoma Museum of Art, *The Wonder of Andrew Wyeth: Temperas, Watercolors, Dry Brush, Drawings, 1939 – 1966*, December 3 – 24, 1967, catalogue #13
Heather James Fine Art, Palm Desert, *Art of the Wyeth Family*, January 30 – June 15, 2017, traveling to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, July 1 – September 30, 2017

BETSY WYETH PERFORMED many roles in Andrew Wyeth's life. She was his wife, the mother of his two sons, his muse, his business manager, his promoter, his protector. She introduced him to frequent model Christina Olson and tolerated his secret life with Helga Testorf. She was also the architect of his environments, in Pennsylvania and in Maine. Betsy scouted, bought, and preserved the homes and islands they owned. Then she filled those homes with antiques and artifacts and sculpted their environments, paying attention to small details and the largest, grandest of her visions.

Evidence of her influence on the twentieth-century master presents itself in the watercolour *Blizzard*, from 1966. The centerpiece of the painting is a large, snow-covered wooden state seal of Pennsylvania carved by the regional itinerant folk artist Wilhelm Schimmel, who specialized in eagles. A unique piece by a beloved local artist, the seal once hung on a courthouse in Harrisburg. Betsy bought it in the Lancaster county borough of Lititz, likely to protect it. The Wyeths mounted the seal on the end of the Millhouse, part of a historic grist mill in Chadds Ford that they preserved and where they lived. The seal was later restored and given to the Brandywine Museum of Art.

Using a winter palette of grey, brown, black and white, Wyeth renders *Blizzard* harsh and cold, lifeless. Framed between two upper windows of the Millhouse, the seal cradles pockets of snow as the wind whips a blizzard of sideways squalls. The pitched roof holds dense layers of snow, and leafless tree branches bend beyond the roofline, bleeding into the border of the paper.

But with Wyeth, nothing is ever as it seems. His paintings are layered with meaning, hidden metaphors, and autobiography that includes nostalgia and loss. This is especially true of his winter paintings, where he often reflected on and anguished over his father's death (*Winter 1946*, 1946, North Carolina Museum of Art, and *Snow Flurries*, 1953) or visited ghosts and characters from his past and present (*Snow Hill*, 1989). In *Blizzard*, he may be reflecting on his admiration of a dedicated local artist who was true to his calling, on the cultural and natural legacy of the Brandywine Valley, or, more likely, his complicated and enduring appreciation for the love of his life, Betsy, about whom he told his biographer Richard Meryman, "She made me see more clearly what I wanted."¹

That clarity of vision was vital to Wyeth when he made this painting in 1966. It was then that he faced some of his harshest criticism for holding firm to realistic interpretations of familiar places as his peers bounded towards abstraction. But critics often misinterpreted his paintings, and Wyeth contended in an interview with *Life* magazine that the subjects of his work possessed "an excitement that's definitely abstract. My God, when you really begin to peer into something, a simple object, and realize the profound meaning of it—if you have an emotion about it, there's no end."² In that context, *Blizzard* can be interpreted as yet another portrait of Betsy.

Rarely on public view, *Blizzard* was exhibited for the first time in 1967 at the Oklahoma Museum of Art. It went on view again 50 years later in the traveling exhibition *Art of the Wyeth Family* at Heather James Fine Art in Palm Desert, California, and Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

It has been in private hands since 1968, most recently those of Canadian collector and gallerist Torben V. Kristiansen (1930 – 2023). He formed a friendship with Wyeth, who was one of the few American artists whose work Kristiansen collected. He owned two Wyeth winter watercolours; *Under Snow* (lot 222), a companion piece from Chadds Ford, is also available in this sale.

We thank Bob Keyes, writer and art historian with a specialization in American visual arts, for contributing the above essay. Keyes has spent more than 20 years writing about arts and culture for Colby College, the *Portland Press Herald* and *Maine Sunday Telegram* and has written extensively on the Wyeth family.

1. Richard Meryman, *Andrew Wyeth: A Secret Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 161.

2. Richard Meryman, "Andrew Wyeth: An Interview," *Life*, May 14, 1965.

The Andrew & Betsy Wyeth Study Center of the Brandywine Museum of Art confirms that this object is recorded in Betsy James Wyeth's files.

ESTIMATE: \$60,000 – 80,000