

## *GRANT WOOD'S MARCH*

A Lithograph from the Collection of American Art at  
the Mair Museum of Art at Randolph College

Spotlight  
Tour Script  
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ARTH2286A:  
ART &  
LANDSCAPE  
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Hi, my name is Emilie Bryant, and I am a Senior at Randolph College majoring in Museum and Heritage Studies and Art History. In this video, I will be discussing a work of art from the permanent collection of the Maier Museum of Art at Randolph College. I chose



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to highlight Grant Wood's *March*, created in 1939. *March* is a lithographic print on paper. I selected this piece as my focus because Grant Wood is an iconic American Regionalist artist who created one of the most iconic works of the twentieth century, *American Gothic*.

Although Grant Wood is most commonly known for this famous painting, it does not accurately represent the seriousness of Wood's work overall. *American Gothic* has become a satirical portraiture of rural America and historically used in clever cultural interpretations, Wood's work is more often nostalgic for midwestern values and romanticizes the pristine rural landscape where he grew up.



Grant Wood



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was born in Iowa in 1891 to a midwestern farming

family. The family was middle-class, practical, and Grant Wood had a typical midwestern boyhood.



But do not let Wood's overalls fool you; he was a well-educated artist. After high school, Wood attended the Minneapolis School of Design and Handicraft, University of Iowa, and, eventually, Chicago's Art Institute. Unfortunately, soon after arriving in Chicago, he returned home to care for his financially struggling mother. To make ends meet, Wood built homes and became a decorator. Later, after joining the military during World War I, Wood was a camouflage designer for military vehicles. After the war, between 1920 and 1925, Wood became an art teacher and would take time off to study abroad in France and Italy. He even attended the Académie Julian in Paris.<sup>1</sup>

Why was Wood so captivated with the everyday lives of rural Americans? In the 2018 catalog for Whitney Museum of American Art's exhibition titled "Grant Wood: American Gothic and Other Fables," author and art historian Barbara Haskell remarks on what Wood

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<sup>1</sup> "Grant Wood Biography, Life & Quotes," The Art Story, accessed November 13, 2021, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/wood-grant/life-and-legacy/>.

said when he returns from France. He told his friend, Journalist William Shirer, "my neighbors in Cedar Rapids, their clothes, their homes, the patterns on their tablecloths and curtains, the tools they used. I suddenly saw all this commonplace stuff as material for art."<sup>2</sup> Spending time in Europe encouraged Wood's love for his simple rural American life.

Due to Wood's art focus on everyday American people's lives, he, in turn, became the artist of rural America. Wood took the theories and techniques he learned through his studies, and while traveling in Europe, he developed them into his unique style. This style would be known as Regionalism. The Art Colony he founded in Stone City, Iowa practiced Regionalism. The aim of the new style was described by Wood and published in the *Archive of American Art*. Wood said, "If American art is to be elevated to the stature of a true cultural expression it cannot remain a mere reflection of foreign painting... It is our belief that a true art expression must grow up from the environment itself. Then an American art will arrive through the fusion of various regional expressions based on a thorough analysis of what is significant to these regions. Stone City has this for its objective."<sup>3</sup> With that focus on regional environments, we can see why Wood depicted the people and landscapes of the American Midwest.

With an influence by the Ash Can School artists, Grant Wood delighted in depicting the daily lives of Americans. However, Wood's style also featured clean lines, geometrical

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Haskell, "Grant Wood: American Gothic and Other Fables by Whitney Museum of American Art - Issuu" (Whitney Museum of American Art, February 22, 2018), [https://issuu.com/wmaa/docs/grant\\_wood\\_web\\_preview](https://issuu.com/wmaa/docs/grant_wood_web_preview). Pg 16

<sup>3</sup> "Art Colonies, Stone City, Iowa," *Quarterly Bulletin (Archives of American Art)* 3, no. 4 (1963): 1–3, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1556810>. Pg 3

designs, and gentle curves, similar to the Art Deco style famous in France in the 1920s, around the time he visited.<sup>4</sup> Like the work of Norman Rockwell, American art during this time was highly illustrative according to a reviewer, Ruth Pickering, who wrote about Wood in a 1935 article for *The North American Review*, title "Grant Wood, Painter in Overalls."<sup>5</sup>

*Associated American Artists*



Fig. 8. Advertisement for Associated American Artists. From *American Artist* 4, no. 9 (November 1940): 29. (Norlin Library, University of Colorado.)

Like the works of Norman Rockwell, Grant Wood depicted the everyday lives of American people, in particular midwestern farmers. His work is often nostalgic and romanticizes the people and landscape of his upbringing. However, unlike his satirical work, with *American Gothic*, Grant Wood's lithograph titled *March* was not satirical but a representation of life during the late winter months. The lithographs were a part of a program to bring works directly to the American people, who often struggled not only to

purchase art of their own but often were unable to see or experience famous artworks for themselves. Through the Associated American Artists, who set out to make art affordable and accessible to the American people during the Great Depression, Grant Wood created a series

<sup>4</sup> "Art Deco - Concepts & Styles," The Art Story, accessed November 13, 2021, <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/art-deco/history-and-concepts/>.

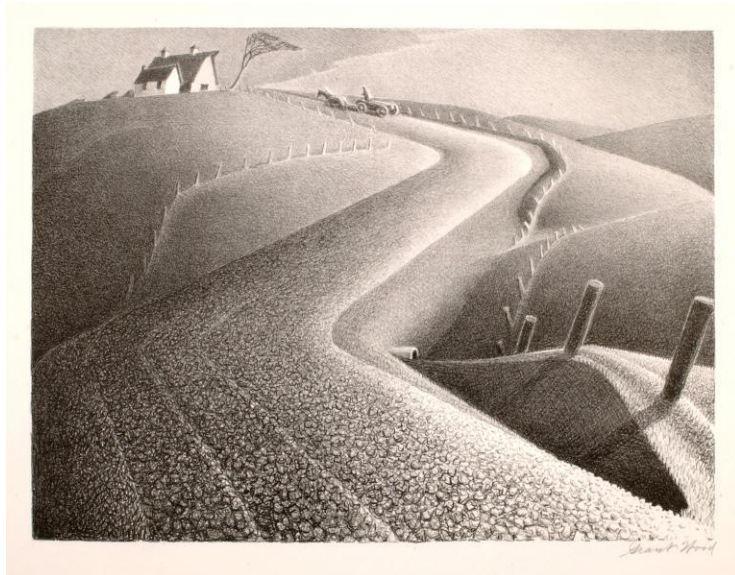
<sup>5</sup> Ruth Pickering, "Grant Wood, Painter in Overalls," *The North American Review* 240, no. 2 (1935): 271–77, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25114636>. Pg 273

of prints depicting the months of the year offered for only \$5 through a mail-order catalog. Grant Wood personally signed each after printing.<sup>6</sup>

Wood completed *March* in 1939 and is a lithograph on paper. The work features a lone figure driving a wagon behind two horses speeding along a zig-zagging road towards a stark farmhouse atop a rolling hillside. Note that the lithographic print is devoid of color, emphasizing the stark, often dreary, wintery month of March. Wood shaded and softened the hills to accentuate the undulating hillside. The intricate scoring and hatch marks make the road and the land highly texturized. These details emphasize the rocky terrain of the road and the grassiness of the land. Grant has deliberately utilized a series of fence posts to direct the eye along the road and accentuate the landscape's rise and fall. The fence posts also give us a sense of depth on this two-dimensional plane. At first, the scene feels like it only rises, but the visual clues that Wood inserts help us see that the landscape is receding into the background and rising.

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<sup>6</sup> Erika Doss, "Catering to Consumerism: Associated American Artists and the Marketing of Modern Art, 1934-1958," *Winterthur Portfolio* 26, no. 2/3 (July 1, 1991): 143–67, <https://doi.org/10.1086/496530>.



We can imagine the effort that it would take to travel this road. The figure driving the wagon pulled by two speeding horses seems to race home hurriedly in the background. We see a clue as to why when we follow the wagon's trajectory towards the house and notice the bending of the lone and bare tree. Blustery winds are pushing the tree and hinting at an approaching storm. This empty landscape does not protect people from the wind, making the barren landscape feel empty and cold.

As you can see, there is no humor or satire in Grant Wood's lithograph. Instead, it is a realistic view of the late winter months in the American Mid-West. At the time of the year when people seek refuge in their homes when food is scarce, the land is bare, and the wind howls. This lithograph gives meaning and continuity to the life of the American people. Grant Wood's work features everyday Americans and their lives, confidently displaying them as worthy of representation in art. In turn, the American people feel connected to the history of America and see Grant Wood as a hero. It is no wonder that Grant Wood is a famous and

beloved American artist, considering his ability to capture the essential qualities and memories of American life and to incorporate them into the often out-of-reach and even out-of-touch art world during that era.

Thank you for listening to my presentation. I hope you will come to visit the Maier Museum of Art at Randolph College soon!