Looking at a painting and trying to see it through different critical lenses

<http://arthistory.about.com/od/famous_paintings/ss/andrew_wyeth_christinas_world.htm>

### About Christina's World

[Andrew Wyeth](http://arthistory.about.com/cs/namesww/p/wyeth_a.htm) painted this in 1948. His father, N. C. Wyeth, had been killed at a railway crossing just three years earlier, and Andrew's work underwent a significant change after the loss. His palette became muted, his landscapes barren and his figures--if present--seemed plaintive. Christina's World epitomizes these traits, and conveys the impression that it is an outward expression of Wyeth's inner grief.

### Inspiration

Anna Christina Olson (1893-1968) was a lifelong resident of the Cushing, Maine farm pictured in Christina's World.

She had a degenerative muscular disorder (undiagnosed, but sometimes identified as polio) that took away her ability to walk by the late 1920s. Eschewing a wheelchair, she crawled around the house and grounds.  
  
Wyeth, who had summered in Maine for many years, met the spinster Olson and her bachelor brother, Alvaro, in 1939. The three were introduced by Wyeth's future wife, Betsy James (b. 1922), another long-term summer resident. It's hard to say what fired the young artist's imagination more: the Olson siblings or their residence.

### Models

We have three here, actually. The figure's wasted limbs and pink dress belong to Christina Olson. The youthful head and torso, however, belong to Betsy Wyeth who was then in her mid-20s (as opposed to Christina's then-mid-50s).  
  
The most famous "model" in this scene is the [Olson farmhouse](http://architecture.about.com/cs/housetours/a/wyeth.htm) itself, on the National Register of Historic Places since 1995.

### Technique

The composition is perfectly asymmetrically balanced, though parts of the farmhouse were rearranged by artistic license to accomplish this feat.

Wyeth painted in egg tempera, a medium that requires the artist to mix (and constantly monitor) his own paints, but allows for great control. Notice the incredible detail here, where individual hairs and blades of grass are painstakingly highlighted.

### Critical Reception

Christina's World was met with little critical notice after its completion, mainly because (1) the Abstract Expressionists were making most of the arts news and (2) the founding director of MoMA, Alfred Barr, snapped it up almost immediately for $1,800. The few art critics who commented at the time were lukewarm at best. During the ensuing six decades the painting has become a MoMA highlight and is very rarely loaned. The last exception was to an Andrew Wyeth memorial show at the Brandywine River Museum in his native town of Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania.  
  
More telling is how large a part Christina's World plays in popular culture. Writers, filmmakers and other visual artists reference it, and the public has always loved it. 45 years ago you'd have been hard-pressed to find a single Pollock reproduction within 20 square city blocks, but everyone knew at least one person who had a copy of Christina's World hanging somewhere on a wall.

### Where to See It

[The Museum of Modern Art](http://www.moma.org/), New York