

HURD PANEL LABELS

PETER HURD: EARLY CAREER

Peter Hurd was born and raised in Roswell, located in southeast New Mexico, and his childhood experiences in the Southwest were formative to his artistic interests and sense of self. The eldest of two children, Hurd shared his mother's love of horsemanship, while his father, an attorney specializing in land and water rights, introduced him to Southwest ecology. He became fluent in Spanish through his friendships with Roswell's Hispanic residents, learned to sing and play traditional folk songs on the guitar, and developed a lifelong passion for New Mexico's Spanish culture. Yet he was also familiar with the Northeast, having spent the summers with his father's relatives in Boston, and as a young adult would fit in easily among the Wyeth family's social circles.

Hurd demonstrated an interest in drawing from a young age, but initially aspired to a military career, enrolling at West Point Academy in 1921. After two years he left West Point to pursue the arts, briefly attending Haverford College in Pennsylvania. Hurd met N.C. Wyeth after expressing his admiration for the illustrator to Charles Beck Jr., of the Beck Engraving Company, who arranged a meeting between them in 1923. Wyeth initially encouraged Hurd to take formal art classes rather than seek out an apprenticeship, but the young artist's persistence impressed him, and he accepted him as a student in 1924. By the late 1920s, Hurd began taking on his mentor's overflow assignments, and he had grown close with the family, especially Henriette Wyeth. When he proposed to her in 1927, he appeared set to become a permanent member of the Wyeth circle.

Despite his admiration for N.C. Wyeth, Hurd wanted to develop an artistic voice that set him apart from his teacher. In 1928, his concerns about his personal and professional life intensified when N.C. expressed doubt about his engagement, believing that the younger artist needed to spend time alone in personal reflection before committing to marriage. Although initially hurt by the recommendation, Hurd returned to Roswell, embarking on a separation that lasted until 1929. During this time Hurd began painting the region around him, and concluded that his artistic voice lay in New Mexico. After he and Wyeth married in June 1929, however, they settled in Chadds Ford after their New Mexico honeymoon. Hurd would not return west until 1933, and for the remainder of the decade, he divided his time between the Northeast and Southwest. Although he appreciated the beauty of Pennsylvania and the camaraderie of the Wyeth family, New Mexico remained his primary artistic interest.

PAINTER OF THE SOUTHWEST

The time that Hurd spent in Roswell between 1928 and 1929 proved seminal to his artistic development. Though he and Wyeth returned to Chadds Ford after their honeymoon, he recognized that painting southeastern New Mexico enabled him to embrace the teachings of N.C. Wyeth while asserting a distinct creative identity. In the early 1930s, Hurd made another creative breakthrough when he discovered egg tempera, a translucent, quick-drying medium that uses egg yolk instead of linseed oil as a binding agent. Tempera paint is traditionally applied in small, cross-hatched strokes on wooden panels coated with a white ground called gesso, and enables artists to paint with great detail. A technique that had been popular during the Middle Ages and early Italian Renaissance, egg tempera experienced a revival in the United States during the 1930s. For Hurd, it became the ideal means to capture New Mexico's distinctive light, and allowed him to assume the role of teacher to the Wyeths, as he would introduce it to both N.C. and Henriette's youngest brother, Andrew.

Having discovered the medium that would define his artistic career, Hurd found an opportunity to return west in 1933, when he received a mural commission at the New Mexico Military Institute in Roswell. In 1934, he took another step toward settling permanently in the Southwest when he purchased Sentinel Ranch, a property located about fifty miles west of Roswell in the village of San Patricio. The ranch became the site for a way of life that revolved around the geography and cultures of New Mexico, and helped to establish Hurd's reputation as a painter immersed in the Southwest. He regularly painted the San Patricio area, as well as the people who lived there, and prepared some of his own pigments from the soils he harvested on Sentinel Ranch, sharing them with N.C. and Andrew Wyeth. In 1939, *Life* magazine bolstered Hurd's national presence when it began to publish his work, introducing his New Mexico scenes to readers around the country. That same year, Henriette Wyeth decided to relocate to Sentinel Ranch permanently, making Hurd's ambition to live and work full-time in New Mexico a reality.

While Hurd continued exhibiting in New York and other northeast locales through the 1940s, his artistic visibility lessened there as his prominence in New Mexico increased. He also continued his illustration work and portrait commissions, traveling to Saudi Arabia, Hawaii, and other places around the world. New Mexico always remained his first artistic passion, however, and through his art, writings, and public image, he secured his reputation as a definitive painter of the Southwest.

WORLD WAR II CORRESPONDENT

During World War II, Hurd became involved in the Allied effort by working as an art correspondent for *Life* magazine, documenting its activity through his egg tempera paintings and watercolor sketches. Hurd had already established a working relationship with *Life*, as the magazine had previously published his work in 1939, and he had become friends with its executive editor, Daniel Longwell. Concerned about the escalating crisis in Europe, Hurd had wanted to contribute to the war effort, and *Life* offered a way for him to do so through his art. In 1941, the magazine hired Hurd and six other artists to paint national defense preparations, and the success of this commission led to the formation of the magazine's artist-correspondent program during World War II. Wartime restrictions presented an opportunity for artists, who, unlike photographers, could omit censorable or confidential information from their canvases. Given his success with the national defense preparations, Hurd was a natural choice for the correspondent program.

Hurd completed two assignments as a war art correspondent. The first one took him to England in 1942 to cover the Eighth US Army Air Force. He painted a wide range of subjects, from portraits of US airmen to daytime bombing runs, to views from inside bombers. He completed these paintings in egg tempera, adapting to wartime circumstances by using dehydrated egg powder from the Commissary. These works would appear in *Life* magazine, and beginning in 1943 the publication showcased his paintings in traveling exhibitions. In 1944, Hurd embarked on a second assignment, this time covering the Air Transport Command, the US Army Air Forces' worldwide air transport system. This assignment took him across the globe to places as diverse as Puerto Rico, Trinidad, British Guiana (now Guyana), Brazil, Africa, and India. Due to the extensive travel required for this second undertaking, Hurd adapted his artistic practice by using the more portable watercolor in lieu of egg tempera, a medium that he would continue to use regularly after the war for both sketches and finished paintings.

By the end of his second project, Hurd was ready to return full-time to Sentinel Ranch. Despite the physical and emotional challenges that often accompanied his wartime assignments, Hurd's artistic interests remained constant. Even in the midst of war, he discerned moments of beauty, whether in the brilliant skies behind the bombers, in the varied topographies, or in the people he encountered along the way.