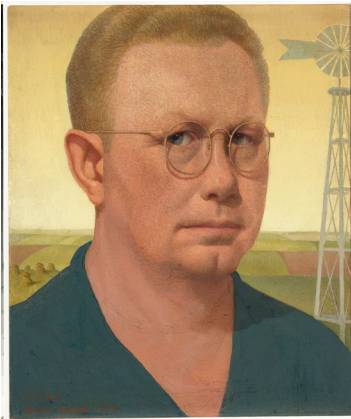


Grant Wood



Grant Wood,
Self-Portrait, 1932
Oil on Masonite panel,
14 3/4 x 12 3/8 inches
Figge Art Museum

Grant Wood was born on February 13, 1891 to Francis “Maryville” and Hattie Weaver Wood and was raised on a small farm near Anamosa, Iowa. Wood started drawing as a child using whatever he could find; charred sticks from the stove served as his medium, brown bags, his canvas, and trees, barns and chickens, his subjects.

When Wood was quite young, his father suffered two heart attacks and less than a year later passed away. Grant’s mother packed up the family and moved them to the flourishing city of Cedar Rapids. While in high school, he knew the style in which he wanted to paint, however Impressionism was the popular style his teacher wanted him to explore. Immediately following graduation, Wood headed to Minneapolis, Minnesota to attend the Handicraft Guild.

Wood eventually moved to Chicago to attend night classes at Chicago’s Art Institute. When he returned to Cedar Rapids he used the last of his money to buy a piece of land near Indian Creek. There he built a small cabin and planted a garden. This was a good summer home for him and his mother, and in the winter they lived

in a friend’s shack that had a wood stove to keep them warm.

During World War I, he enlisted in the Army and was stationed outside of Des Moines at Camp Dodge. He used his art skills to earn money by creating portraits for the men. Eventually, he was transferred to Washington, D.C. for a somewhat more creative assignment as a camouflage artist. And on Christmas Eve 1918, Wood returned home to Iowa.

In 1919 the principal of Jackson Junior High School hired him to be an art teacher. He was an unconventional teacher in that he didn’t use lesson plans. The summer after his first year of teaching, Wood and his old high school friend Marvin Cone journeyed to Paris. While there they painted on the streets with other artists or visited the Louvre to study the paintings. With a trip to

Paris fresh on his repertoire, patrons now sought out Wood for commissions. He would eventually return to Paris again to study at the art school, Académie Julian.

Funeral home owner, David Turner, became one of his best patrons. This included providing him a studio and living space free of charge. Wood, along with his mother, moved into their new home at 5 Turner Alley in 1924. By using his creative skills to decorate his home, he added interior decorator to his resume and helped a number of people enhance their homes’s interior.

Wood was awarded a commission in 1927 for the Veteran’s Memorial Building to create a memorial stained-glass window. He enlisted the help of a team of craftsmen located in Munich, Germany, to produce the window. Local members of both the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and the American Legion made it clear that they did not approve of the stained-glass window being manufactured in a country that was recently an enemy of the United States.

Once back in Cedar Rapids, after this controversy had seemingly settled though unresolved, he focused on his style that was strongly influenced by the artworks of 15th and 16th century German and Flemish masters he observed while in Munich. He had connected with what he saw in the artworks such as the severe nature of their poses.

His diligence with this style of painting paid off with an Iowa State Fair prize for the portrait called *Woman with Plants* in which Wood’s mother was the model, and it was also featured at an exhibition at The Art Institute of Chicago.

Two paintings he created in 1930 became very popular. He showed *Stone City, Iowa* at the 1930 Iowa State Fair, and they awarded him the top prize for landscapes. A small farmhouse inspired the other painting. He remembered seeing similar



Marvin D. Cone and Grant Wood
at The Art Institute of Chicago,
January 1916. Photograph by
Arthur W. Hall (1889-1981).



Grant Wood
American, 1891-1942
Stone City, Iowa
1930

oil on wood panel, 30 1/4 x 40 inches
Gift of the Art Institute of Omaha



Grant Wood, *Study for Stone City*, 1930
Oil on Masonite panel, 13 x 15 inches
Figge Art Museum

When limestone was discovered in 1850, the small town of Stone City transformed into a vibrant town centered on the quarry industry. Lead by prominent quarryman John A. Green’s vision of a town completely made of stone, an ambitious number of structures were erected. Eventually though, the cement industry surpassed stone as a cheaper construction alternative, and the town became quiet when the quarries shut down. A few decades later Stone City had a brief rebirth when it became the setting for the Midwest’s first art colony. Wood seems to have rendered the town as it was before the big boom of the limestone quarry industry. This painting depicts a place with a tranquil and soft landscape from a bird’s-eye perspective.



Grant Wood, *Daughters of Revolution*, 1932
Oil on Masonite panel, 20 x 40 inches
Cincinnati Art Museum, The Edwin and Virginia Irwin Memorial

a biography

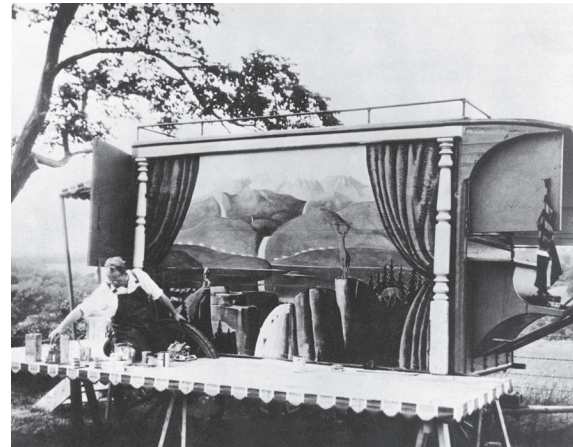
Gothic style windows in the grandiose European churches. Wood found it humorous that this type of window could be found on a small home in Iowa, and then he realized this was our “American Gothic.”

Consequently, during the Great Depression, Wood continued with his optimistic and nostalgic view he reflected on his canvas. His artworks did not epitomize the current economic situation; rather they tended to exhibit a tranquil world with ordered splendor.

In the year after closing his Stone City Art Colony, Wood was named the state director of Iowa for the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) and when the office moved from Cedar Rapids to Iowa City, he also relocated. Wood joined the art department faculty at the University of Iowa.

Months after he met singer and actress, Sara Maxon, they married on March 2, 1935. During his marriage to Sara, he painted very little. Rather he traveled and entertained numerous guests in their home. Unfortunately their extravagant lifestyle caught up with them, and with the stress of financial problems, they ultimately ended the marriage in 1939.

When Wood returned to the University after a year’s leave of absence, he was awarded a special chair: a University Professor of Fine Arts. Unfortunately, in the fall of 1941 he was diagnosed with liver cancer and was unable to continue teaching. He passed away on February 2, 1942. Nine months later, the Art Institute of Chicago held Wood’s first museum exhibition. Though Wood had many ventures that suffered due to his weak business skills, it is important to note that he was one of the first artists to copyright his artworks.



Grant Wood; on decorated wagon used as a home at Stone City Art Colony, 1932.
Unidentified photographer.

Stone City Art Colony



The Stone City Art Colony faculty, Summer 1932.
Photograph by John W. Barry (1905-1988).

Grant Wood wanted a place for students to develop and hone their artistic skills. At the time, art colonies were popular places to accomplish such an endeavor, and Wood decided that it was time for the Midwest to have this opportunity available for aspiring artists. Wood liked what the art colonies in Woodstock, New York and Taos, New Mexico were doing so he modeled his after those successful colonies.

The site for Wood’s art colony would be Stone City, Iowa, the now abandoned quarry-centered town. Quarryman John A.

Green’s mansion stood vacated, and Wood remodeled it into classrooms and sleeping quarters for the students. An ice house located on the property transformed into the gallery and frame shop. Ice wagons were converted into living quarters for Wood and some his fellow teachers.

Wood convinced a group of art teachers, including Marvin Cone, to volunteer their time as instructors for the students starting the summer of 1932. He now had a venue to spread his developing regionalist theory and to promote the arts in the Midwest.

Students were encouraged to paint outdoors which was different from other art schools where students painted in studios. As part of his desire to advocate the arts, Wood ensured the colony’s artwork was shown at weekly Sunday open houses. Attendance even reached a thousand eager visitors at times.

Iowa Artists Club, the Little Gallery and Coe College provided some financing for the art colony, but it was not enough to keep the art colony out of debt. After two summers, the Stone City Art Colony closed, but its legacy of endured as a number of the colony students formed the core of artists for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects.

Daughters of Revolution

Grant Wood used *Daughters of Revolution* as a satirical view of the group Daughters of the American Revolution. He felt the group was comprised of “people who are trying to set up an aristocracy of birth in a Republic.”

His disdain for them went back to the controversy over his stained-glass window for the Veteran’s Memorial Building in Cedar Rapids in the late 1920s. The local DAR chapter condemned him for allowing the window to be fabricated by Germans who were once America’s enemy. Their claim was that by doing this, the window in turn would dishonor the veterans it was to commemorate. Finally in 1955, almost three decades after the window was started and thirteen years after Wood passed away, the memorial window was dedicated.

Upon initial examination of this painting, one first notes the “soft-focus haze” in which Wood chose to render the women. This can project a more comfortable feeling of them, but as one further inspects the canvas, certain aspects weaken that tone.

Explore their faces and see how Wood’s feelings are reflected in them. Start at the women’s beady eyes and move to their tightly closed lips. And finally, analyze the arrogant and haughty nature of their poise; see how it projects the austerity of their persona.

Look at the hand holding the teacup. It seems to be more detailed and not under the soft focus. Notice she is not wearing a wedding ring telling the viewer that this woman is an old spinster. See how the long thin fingers seem claw-like; her hand is similar to the claws of one of Wood’s chickens.

Behind them is *Washington Crossing the Delaware* by Emmanuel Leutze. This painting, important to American history, was actually painted in Germany and German soldiers were used as models. Such irony is a worthy backdrop of this satirical artwork.

This was such a popular painting it was featured on souvenir postcards in Pittsburgh. It was also displayed at the Carnegie International Exhibit at the Whitney Museum in New York.

Timeline

Featuring Grant Wood

