Christina's World Bibliography.pdf
Jan Comfort, Clemson University
Christina Baker Kline lists a number of resources in her book. I enjoyed the book so much that I decided to track them down, and to make it easier for others to do so. I was inspired to add additional resources to the list as well, tailored to particular parts of the story that might interest other readers. I selected primary sources where available, particularly when considering the lives of Andrew Wyeth and Christina Olson. Much has been written about Andrew Wyeth’s art, so I deliberately excluded exhibit catalogs. Except for a book from the Greenville (SC) County Museum of Art, and Wyeth’s autobiography written for a retrospective in Kansas City which was cited by the author. All works cited by the author are noted with an asterisk *.

**Christina’s World**


The Metropolitan Museum of Art purchased Christina’s World shortly after it was completed in 1948 for the sum of $1,800. It quickly became one of their most popular works, and has indeed become one of the most familiar American paintings of the 20th Century. It also made Andrew Wyeth a celebrity. In spite of—or perhaps because of—his popularity, there is deep division about his work.


Hoptman (who is a curator at the Museum) presents a concise discussion of arguably the most iconic painting of the 20th Century. Illustrated with reproductions of Wyeth’s paintings and photos of the artist.


More than just a transcription of several days of in-depth and intimate interviews with the artist, this book captures his personality and puts it in context with his art, and the two places he calls home. It is illustrated with plates of drawings and paintings from Wyeth and others.
*Komanecky, Michael, and Otoyo Nakamura, editors. *Andrew Wyeth, Christina’s World and the Olson House.*
William A. Farnsworth Library and Art Museum, Rockland ME; in conjunction with Skira Rizzoli, New York, 2011.

This book was published to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the gift of the Olson House to the Farnsworth Library and Art Museum. It features a large collection of drawings and watercolors from a surprising source: the Marunuma Art Park in Asaka, Japan. It is a beautiful book, and a perfect companion to the novel. It includes a number of unique photographs of the house and its interior, interspersed with reproduced articles from local newspapers and magazines. It is also loaded with color plates of Wyeth’s drawings and watercolor paintings from the collection. If you only want to read one book, this is the one.


[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNuGbKloUds&feature=](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNuGbKloUds&feature=)

This exceptional video breathes life into Christina’s World as only moving images can. Highlights include a quick tour of the Olson House, and a demonstration of making tempera. Other highlights include interviews with the artist, some family members, and several of his models. One surprising revelation is that Andrew Wyeth is buried in the Olson family graveyard. Christina and Alvaro’s nephew John Olson (see entry below) recounts the experience of choosing his gravesite.


Betsy Wyeth displays her own artistry in the selection of 105 pre-studies, 128 four-color illustrations of paintings, and details of paintings broadly related to Christina’s World. The book also chronicles her intimate friendship with Christina, containing 28 photographs from the family’s personal collection. All punctuated with Betsy’s own narrative and text from some of Christina’s letters to the Wyeths.
Andrew Wyeth


A treasure trove of information, including an extensive bibliography of sources.


Art historian Thomas Hoving asks the reader/viewer to set aside considerations of fashion, schools, and movements and just consider everything that the artist has accomplished with his art. In his view, Andrew Wyeth is one of America’s most important and innovative painters of the second half of the 20th Century. The book also includes an essay written by Andrew Wyeth as a tribute to his father N.C. Wyeth.


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdHnR0sFS8k

Andrew’s son Jamie is a well-known and well-respected artist in his own right. Here he shares a glimpse into his artistic world.


In the essay “Andrew Wyeth’s Language of Things,” Knutson posits that Wyeth does not simply illustrate everyday objects from his life, but instead the things he paints “function as symbols, giving shape to intangible memories.” In “Betsy’s World,” Christopher Crosman describes Betsy Wyeth’s life and offers insight into her relationship with her husband.
The chapter on Christina’s World is a delightful, folksy, account of the author trying to track down the artist in Cushing (pronounced Cushin’ by the natives) and encountering some Olson family members instead. Other chapters that describe other Wyeth models and family members are equally as entertaining.


The author was an editor with Life Magazine, and has written extensively about Wyeth – in fact Andy and Betsy Wyeth chose him to be their biographer. He became a trusted confidant, and promised to write a tough, honest book, which Andy promised not to read. The first chapter provides a detailed and compelling account of the artist’s state of mind and the artistic process of creating Christina’s World.


As noted, there are wildly differing views about the art of Andrew Wyeth, from over-the-top positive to excoriating. Weinberg cuts across this controversy to focus on the landscapes, which he places at the heart of Wyeth’s work. He supports his alternative view that the importance of the models has been overstated.


Thomas Hoving tells the story of Andrew Wyeth’s life using Wyeth’s own words. He (Hoving) chose comments taken from conversations through their long association to accompany the drawings and paintings in this retrospective exhibition. Several works featuring the Olsons and their farm are included. The introduction gives a thorough explanation, and the book includes a personal chronology of important events in the artist’s life.

In 1979, Holly and Arthur Magill acquired the complete Wyeth collection of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph E. Levine, the movie producer who owned the Olson House (see Stoner article below). Includes color plates with notes on the 27 featured works, including *Weather Side, Christina’s Teapot, Hay Ledge,* and *End of Olsons.*


Although this brief essay focuses on several of Wyeth’s vaguely supernatural images, his description of the artist’s “painterly verisimilitude” also applies to Christina’s world: “Wyeth’s paintings are not, as the misinformed may believe, solely about skill, attachment to the past, or a commitment to appearance. They represent, rather, a passionate desire to objectify, give significance to, and share profoundly private feelings and intuitions he believes to be of value and interest in the most efficient and convincing manner possible.”


This book is built around a collection of some 1200 letters saved by N.C. Wyeth’s mother (Andrew Wyeth’s grandmother) and passed down through various friends and family members. Betsy Wyeth became fascinated with the collection when she read several while preparing for a retrospective of N.C. Wyeth’s work in 1965. Betsy Wyeth has all the makings of a fabulous archivist; the collection is meticulously researched and organized. The selection of letters that form the “Andrew Wyeth’s Father” chapter show his wonderful devotion to his son. Overall, the letters highlight Andy’s close relationship with his father, and the profound effect of his father’s death on his life and work. Illustrated with family photographs and color plates of some of the artist’s work.
Christina Olson


Based on observational evidence and discussions with Christina’s niece, the author concludes that the evidence supports a diagnosis of Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease. He provides a description of the disorder as well as additional medical references.


This is a documentary of Bernadette Scarduzio, who was born with Charcot-Tooth-Marie (CMT) syndrome. It affects 1 in 2,500 people, including (it is now believed) Christina Olson.


This essential book about Christina (and her brother Alvaro) Olson was written by their niece to “present a completely factual, tasteful account of these folks’ lives.” Carefully researched over more than 20 years, it includes a number of family photographs not published elsewhere.


This book adds a few details to the story of the creation of Christina’s World and the artist’s relationship with Christina Olson. She quotes Andy Kopkind, who mentions that it is Christina’s voice that makes the strongest first impression – that of a practical country woman without self-pity. “She has the force of character that would make any condescension to her paralysis an insult.” Illustrated with color plates of several paintings of Christina, and a drawing of her gravesite.

Griffen presents an enlightening interpretation of the artist’s depiction of Christina, with extensive notes supporting his views.


This Emmy winning documentary includes some memorable interviews with friends and Olson family members. Although it is sometimes difficult to understand those being interviewed due to their distinctive Maine accents, it is well worth the extra effort. Those who knew her describe Christina’s fierce pride (stubbornness?), and her strong, stoic, personality. The original copyright date is 1973, just as the Olson House was being refurbished and opened to the public.


John Olson is the nephew of Christina and Alvaro, the son of their brother John. He and his wife Jean were proprietors of the restaurant noted in the previous entry, and are featured in the documentary. The author writes a bit about living on the property and his interactions with fans of the painting.


Claire Danes was a serious dancer before she took up acting. For this full-length piece called "Christina Olson: American Model" she collaborated with choreographer and family friend Tamar Rogoff. The show ran for 12 weeks, and begins with Danes posing in front of the painting, then shows a video of her dragging herself across a street and ascending the stairs of a building.
The Olson House and Rural Maine


This brief article shows Apple Computer CEO John Sculley and his wife holding a scale model of the Olson House, which they purchased in 1986 for $200,000. They later donated it to the Farnsworth Art Museum.


For those interested in learning more about the common objects that were part of the Olson’s simple life.


The author describes living in the Maine woods with no plumbing and only a woodstove for heat.

*Smith, Glenna J. Old Maine Woman : Stories from the Coast to the County. Islandport Press, Yarmouth ME, 2010.*

The author is younger than Christina, having been born in 1920 when Christina was 27 years old. But the country life in rural coastal Maine had not changed much, and her stories recall a simpler time.


The Olson House is the first house to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places based on being the subject of a painting. It was purchased in 1969 by movie producer Joseph E. Levine for $300,000. After extensive renovations supervised by Betsy Wyeth, the house opened to the public in 1971. But it closed in 1973 after community concerns about noise and traffic. When the Farnsworth Art Museum reopened the house in 1992, it was furnished only with the wood stove in the kitchen (which also heated the house), and a few remaining original pieces. Reproductions of the paintings of the house and its occupants hang in the relevant rooms, allowing visitors to experience the power of the house with few distractions.