

The Adventures, Adversity, and Astonishing Art of Walter Anderson (1903-1965)

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Adventures:

- Europe, Summer of 1927
 - caves at Les Eyzies, Mont-Saint-Michel, Chartres, the Louvre, the Prado
 - Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, directed by Armenian visionary George Ivanovich Gurdjieff
- Canoeing the Mississippi:
 - 1925—returns home from art school in Philadelphia by canoeing down the Mississippi
 - 1934—attempts second canoe trip down Mississippi (starting on the Ohio River); trip cut short in Arkansas due to illness
- Bike trips
 - 1945: to western Texas, where he sketches the landscape
 - April 1953: train and bike trip to Philadelphia and New York
 - August 1953: to Memphis
 - December 1960: to Florida
- China, August-September 1949: goal was to reach Tibet to see murals
- Costa Rica, Summer, 1951: sketches, paints, and gathers orchids and other plants.
- Chandeleurs: island trip in 1948 to observe nesting Pelicans
- Horn Island...his true home...endures Hurricane Betsy in 1965

Adversity:

- Nearly drowned in 1920 (as a teen)—his “death” was actually reported in the newspaper. His parents read the article before his arrival home.
- Mental Illness
 - 1937...enters Henry Phipps Psychiatric Clinic at Johns Hopkins University, following Death of father (February) and psychotic episode (March). Diagnosed with hypothymergasia (depression in which the patient displays feelings of guilt and inadequacy and the desire to harm himself). Discharged after 18 months of treatment.
 - 1939...admitted in February to Mississippi State Hospital at Whitfield; diagnosed with “dementia praecox, catatonic type. Escapes in April. Admitted in May to the Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital in Baltimore; diagnosed with schizophrenia. Escapes on July 1. Returns to Shearwater in October, and is readmitted to Whitfield. Escapes again and lives with mother in Jackson.
 - 1955...hospitalized for a month at De Paul Sanitarium in New Orleans (September)
- Physical Illness
 - 1934: Stricken with malaria while canoeing with Sissy down the Mississippi
 - 1936: Undulant fever

- Stolen Passport, 1949—while traveling alone in China, his belongings and passport are stolen, forcing him to end his trip early, before reaching his destination of Tibet.
- Rejection
 - 1936: mural designs for Jackson, MS, post office and courthouse competitions are rejected. Also—submitted designs for PWA mural for Indianola, MS, post office; unable to complete due to mental illness.
 - Not everyone embraced his Community Center mural; some were outraged by it and wanted to paint over it with white.
- Snake Bite, 1962: bitten by a water moccasin (copperhead?) on Horn Island

Astonishing Art...an inadequate summary of a lifetime of creative engagement:

- Ceramics
 - Decorative surface work : incised pieces, sgraffito work, underglaze decoration
 - 1931: began designing “Widgets” (“Negro figurines”)
 - Functional and decorative pieces: vases, lamp bases, bookends, animals.
- Drawings: pen & ink, pencil, and crayon
 - 1941: *Calendar Drawings* (a visual journal of daily life at Oldfields, Sissy’s family home); *Alice in Wonderland*, *Hamlet*, *Homer’s Iliad*, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, *Faust*, *Don Quixote*, *Bullfinch’s Legends of Charlemagne*, *Dante’s Divine Comedy*, *Darwin’s Voyage of the Beagle*, and Coleridge’s “Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner.”
- Watercolors
 - Thousands, often produced on 8½” by 11” typewriter paper.
- Carvings
 - 1928: saints, *Nativity*, copies of African/Polynesian art, early furniture designs.
 - 1948: *The Swimmer*, carved from a tree blown down in 1947 hurricane; also carves series of animals.
 - 1950: *The River* (group of wood sculptures, which includes *Father Mississippi*)
- Murals
 - Spring 1934: paints mural entitled *Ocean Springs: Past and Present*, in auditorium of Ocean Springs Public School, on commission from the Public Works of Art Project
 - 1937: W.P.A. Mural for Post Office in Indianola, Mississippi, never completed due to illness
 - 1951: Ocean Springs Community Center murals, executed for the sum of \$1.
 - 1951?-1953?: paints mural in the “Little Room” oh his cottage at Shearwater.
- Block Prints
 - 1934: *Tourist Cards*, *Alphabet*, nursery rhymes, *On the River*, *Valkyries*, *Butterfly Book*, and scenes from Shearwater.
 - 1940: *Robinson: The Pleasant History of an Unusual Cat*
 - 1945: large block prints of fish and animals, birds, clouds, trees. Land, wildflowers, fairy tales, nursery rhymes, myth, *Arabian Nights*, and more.
- Hooked Rugs (1929-early 1940s)
- Furniture (designs and builds), set designs & costumes for home plays, puppet shows, etc.

Walter Inglis Anderson

“Decorator”

Born September 29, 1903, New Orleans

Died November 30, 1965, New Orleans

Personal:

- Parents
 - **George Walter Anderson** (“Walter”) , 1865-1937
a New Orleans grain dealer
 - **Annette McConnell Anderson** (“Mere”), 1867-1964
taught her sons that everyone has a capacity for art: “Real artists are just people who are on the right track. The track is there for anyone to use.”
- Siblings: 2 brothers
 - **Peter Anderson**, 1901-1984
 - **James McConnell Anderson** (“Mac”), 1907-1998
- Marriage
 - April 29, 1933...marries **Agnes “Sissy” Grinstead**, sister of Peter’s wife, Patricia Grinstead (met in 1929)
- Children
 - **Mary** (b. December 8, 1937)
 - **William Walter** (b. October 25, 1939)—“Billy”
 - **Leif** (b. May 23, 1944)—named for Leif Eriksson
 - **John Grinstead** (b. March 12, 1947)
- Education
 - small private school
 - 1914-1915...attended M. Lusher Public School, New Orleans
 - 1915...enrolled at St. John’s School, Manlius, New York
 - 1919-1922...Isidore Newman Manual Training School, New Orleans.
 - 1922-23...Studied commercial art at **New York School of Fine and Applied Art** (now known as **Parsons School of Design**) In addition to studio work, reads voraciously; frequents the American Museum of Natural History, the Hispanic Society of America, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
 - 1924-28...Studied at the **Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts**, Philadelphia
 - 1924 ...Recipient of President’s Prize, Packard Competition for Animal Drawing
 - 1925...2nd Prize, Packard Competition
 - 1927...Cresson Traveling Fellowship; traveled through France and Spain

Classroom Inspiration...

Teach the 7 motifs to your students. Teach students to look for the motifs when studying works of art; encourage them to consciously utilize the 7 motifs when creating works of art through drawing, painting, printmaking, and more.

- ❖ Use the 7 motifs to create single-color marker drawings, filling the page with arrangements of the motifs working together to echo and complement each other and fill the paper in the most interesting of ways. Some of the motifs should demonstrate growth.
- ❖ Use the 7 motifs to build decorative border designs. Divide a paper into bands using a ruler or straight edge; teach the students how to repeat a motif all the way across (as a single line or a series of them) and then elaborate on either side to develop unique, interesting, and complex border designs that can be used in future artworks.
- ❖ Paint an interesting composition of the 7 motifs on dark construction paper using only white paint (tempera or acrylic—good coverage is desired). The following week, use water-soluble oil pastels (Portfolio Series by Crayola) to add color only on top of the white painted lines, and blend them with water, keeping the colors and the water used to blend them on top of the white painted lines. I did this with some of my students using tree images inspired by Best-Maugard's book. I have also done it after the students had returned from a trip to the symphony...they used lines to describe what they remembered about the music and its rhythm, and added color later.

Have the students paint from observation. Seashells are a great for this. Since I cannot bring wildlife into the classroom, I brought lots of plastic figurines to be used as models: frogs, turtles, sea life. Silk flowers can substitute for real. While shapes and lines that describe forms should be based upon actual objects, colors can be personal—allow students to have freedom from assumed colors!

- ❖ Black paint can substitute for pen and ink. (I use Alphacolor Biggie tempera cakes.) Free students from pencils that carry the burden of an eraser!
- ❖ In discussing Walter Anderson's work, I point out the white of the paper between his colors and brush strokes in his watercolors. This keeps his lines from getting fuzzy and his colors from getting muddy—but in other areas, he deliberately does not leave a little bit of paper between colors, and in those areas, colors do blend in very interesting ways. I explain that he did not just outline his subjects and fill it in like a coloring book. I emphasize the rhythm of his lines, the repetition/echoing of lines and sets of lines that describe objects and their surfaces and contours. We look at how the entire paper is “activated” with color/brushstrokes that all seem to fit together like puzzle pieces and work in harmony.

Walter Anderson's block prints might inspire your students' printmaking efforts. Perhaps a class could create their own Alphabet book or illustrate a story, a group of poems, nursery rhymes, or fairy tales.

Walter Inglis Anderson Resources

The Art of Walter Anderson

edited by Patricia Pinson (2003:
University Press of Mississippi, Jackson)
ISBN 1-57806-601-8

Approaching the Magic Hour:

Memories of Walter Anderson

by Agnes Grinstead Anderson; edited by
Patti Carr Black (1989: University Press
of Mississippi, Jackson)
ISBN 0-87805-803-6

Dancing with My Father

by Leif Anderson (2005: University Press
of Mississippi, Jackson)
ISBN 1-57806-722-7

Fortune's Favorite Child: The

Uneasy Life of Walter Anderson

by Christopher Maurer (2003: University
Press of Mississippi, Jackson)
ISBN 1-57806-539-9

Dreaming in Clay on the Coast of

Mississippi: Love and Art at Shearwater

by Christopher Maurer with Maria
Estrella Iglesias (2000: Doubleday, New
York)
ISBN 0-385-49063-1

The Horn Island Logs of Walter

Inglis Anderson

edited by Redding S. Sugg, Jr.; (1985:
University Press of Mississippi, Jackson)
ISBN 0-87805-168-6 cloth
ISBN 0-87805-480-4 paper

A Symphony of Animals

by Walter Anderson; Introduction by
Mary Anderson Pickard (1996: University
Press of Mississippi, Jackson)
ISBN 0-87805-909-1

Birds

by Walter Anderson; Introductory Essay
by Mary Anderson Pickard (1990:
University Press of Mississippi, Jackson)
ISBN 0-87805-472-3

Pelicans

by Walter Anderson; preface by Mary
Anderson Pickard; Afterward and Notes
by Christopher Maurer (2004: Cadmus
Editions, San Francisco)
ISBN 0-932274-63-3

Form and Fantasy: The Block

Prints of Walter Anderson

edited and with essays by Mary Anderson
Pickard and Patricia Pinson (2007:
University Press of Mississippi, Jackson)
ISBN-13: 978-1-934110-25-6
ISBN-10: 1-934110-25-6

Walls of Light: The Murals of

Walter Anderson

by Anne R. King (1999: University Press
of Mississippi and the Walter Anderson
Museum of Art)
ISBN 1-57806-128-8

A Painter's Psalm: The Mural from

Walter Anderson's Cottage

by Redding S. Sugg, Jr. (1992: University
Press of Mississippi, Jackson)
ISBN 0-87805-560-6

Walter Anderson for Children: an Art Activity Book

by the Mississippi State Historical Museum (1984: Mississippi Department of Archives and History; 2nd Edition, published by Walter Anderson Museum of Art, 1992)
ISBN 0-93896-36-3

Robinson: The Pleasant History of an Unusual Cat

written and illustrated by Walter Anderson with an Afterword by Mary Anderson Pickard (1982: University Press of Mississippi, Jackson; 3rd printing in 1988 by Realizations, LTD., Ocean Springs, Mississippi)
ISBN 0-87805-170-8

An Alphabet

by Walter Anderson (2006: University Press of Mississippi, Jackson)
ISBN 0-87805-573-8

Anderson's Alice: Walter Anderson Illustrates Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

by Lewis Carroll, with a Foreword by Mary Anderson Pickard (1983: University Press of Mississippi, Jackson)
ISBN 0-87805-188-0

The Magic Carpet and Other Tales

Retold by Ellen Douglas with the Illustrations of Walter Anderson (1987: University Press of Mississippi, Jackson)
ISBN 0-87805-327-1

The Secret World of Walter Anderson by Hester Bass (2009: Candlewick Press, Somerville, MA) ISBN 978-0-7636-3583-1 Illustrated by E.B. Lewis. Reprinted in 2014.

Walter Anderson's Illustrations of Epic and Voyage

edited and with an Introduction by Redding S. Sugg, Jr. (1980: Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville)
ISBN 0-8093-0973-4

A Method for Creative Design

by Adolfo Best-Maugard (1990: Dover Publications, New York)
Originally copywrited in 1926 by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.; renewed in 1954 by Adolfo Best-Maugard; The Dover edition it an unabridged republication of the 1927 revision of the work originally published in 1926.
ISBN 0-486-26436-X

Walter Anderson: Realizations of an Artist

Documentary; learn more at <http://www.walterandersondocumentary.com/>
(\$20 plus S&H)

The Islander

A Moving Film Portrait of Mississippi Painter Walter Anderson
Mississippi Public Broadcasting
(\$19.95)
“In his solitary refuge on an uninhabited island off the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Walter Anderson spent much of his life trying to find a synthesis between art and nature. What is ultimately discovered on that island is revealed in the half-hour film documentary.”

Websites of Interest:

www.shearwaterpottery.com

The official website of Shearwater Pottery, the Anderson family business in Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

www.dreaminginclay.com

This site is devoted to the history of Peter, James and Walter Anderson's work at Shearwater Pottery in Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

www.walterandersonart.com

This is the website of Realizations, a small shop in the historic L&N Railroad Depot in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. This shop is run by the family of Walter Anderson and is dedicated to making his artwork accessible to more people.

www.walterandersonmuseum.org

The Walter Anderson Museum of Art is dedicated to the celebration of the works of Walter Inglis Anderson.

www.chrisstebly.com

This website showcases art by Christopher Inglis Stebly, grandson of Walter Anderson.

www.andersonartgallery.com

This site features the art of James McConnell Anderson.