



Grant Wood
Return from Bohemia, 1935
Pastel on paper, 1996.1

Return from Bohemia



Grant Wood (1891–1942) Wood was born near Anamosa, Iowa in 1891. Wood's father died when he was 10, and Grant worked hard to provide for his mother and sister. He trained as a silversmith at the Art Institute of Chicago and studied art in Paris and Munich in the 1920s. It was during this time that he was introduced to the Realism and Northern Renaissance styles of painting, which he incorporated into his own work upon returning to Iowa.

A product of its time

Wood painted *Return from Bohemia* while spending time in Paris, France. As a strong opponent of European influence in art, Wood frequently cited his travels in France as inspiration for his renewed appreciation of Midwestern traditions and culture. In 1935, he made arrangements with a publisher to pen a biography that would chronicle his childhood on a farm, his foray into Impressionism and his subsequent return to his Midwestern roots. In his drawing for the book jacket, Wood portrayed himself working at an easel in a barnyard to illustrate his return from a bohemian lifestyle.

Take a closer look

The figures in this piece can be considered as both Wood's audience and subject matter. Their faces are immobile and their eyes are cast downward; the onlookers register little emotion and appear to be looking less at the canvas and more at the ground beneath them. This raises questions on the nature of Wood's homecoming and his relationship with the public.

Did you know?

The Figge Art Museum acquired a number of Grant Wood's personal belongings as a part of the Grant Wood Archive in 1965. In addition to his glasses, which are recognizable from *Self Portrait*, the objects include a Persephone cameo brooch that belonged to his mother. This brooch was featured in two of his paintings, *A Woman with Plants* (a portrait of his mother), and in his most famous painting, *American Gothic* (Art Institute of Chicago). Wood used his sister, Nan, and family dentist, Dr. Byron McKeeby, as the models for the father and daughter depicted in *American Gothic*.

On your own

Grant Wood Archive: <http://figgeartmuseum.org/Grant-Wood.aspx>

Cedar Rapids Museum of Art: <http://www.crma.org/Content/Grant-Wood.aspx>

American Gothic House: <http://www.americangothichouse.net>

University of Virginia: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma98/haven/wood/intro.html>