



THE TOP 10 CAMPGROUNDS IN NEW ENGLAND
N10



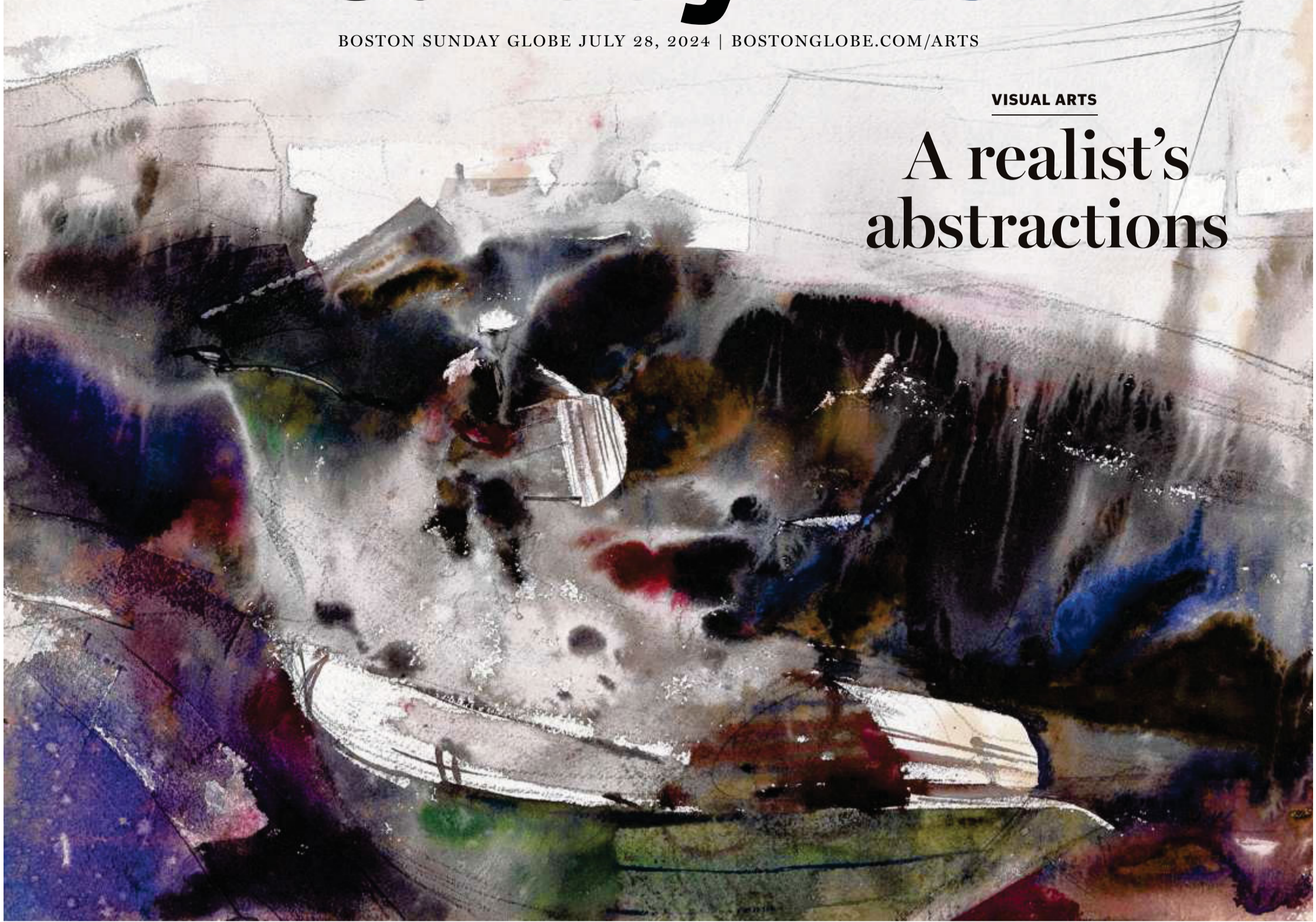
OUR FAVORITE NEW CAMPING GEAR OF THE SEASON
N10

SundayArts

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE JULY 28, 2024 | BOSTONGLOBE.COM/ARTS

VISUAL ARTS

A realist's abstractions



COLLECTION OF THE WYETH FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN ART

Andrew Wyeth, "Fog and the White Dory Study," 1941.

Andrew Wyeth's fascinating experimentation spanned decades, yet is little known. A Farnsworth Museum show exults in his painting outside the lines.

BY MURRAY WHYTE | GLOBE STAFF

ROCKLAND, Maine — There's a temptation, often indulged, to see American art of the mid-20th century across a great divide. On one side, realists like Edward Hopper and Leon Kröll dedicated themselves to depicting American life just as they saw it, shambling through the tumult of industry, urbanization, and war. On the other side, artists like Jackson Pollock and

Robert Motherwell were capturing the era's upheavals in the riotous blur of Abstract Expressionism — raw emotion, leaving only enigmatic tracks in paint. Nothing is ever quite so black and white, and certainly not art. But Andrew Wyeth, the master of the rural dour sublime, as bridge between the two worlds? You might not have seen that coming. At the Farnsworth Museum of Art, a canny and fascinat-

ing show makes its case: "Abstract Flash: Unseen Andrew Wyeth," a subtle summer smash, exults in Wyeth's painting outside the lines. It is nothing less than a thrill, both as vital connective tissue in the Modern American canon, and as a simple, indulgent pleasure of a great artist revealed in new layers. The exhibition's title makes that much clear.

WYETH, Page N4

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Tuning in to the Harris campaign megamix

By A.Z. Madonna
GLOBE STAFF

In the hours after President Biden announced he wouldn't be running for reelection come November and officially threw his support behind Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic establishment flocked to support her — and so did a wide swath of the music world.

Lil Nas X, Carole King, Cardi B, Barbra Streisand, Ariana Grande, and John Legend (to name a few) quickly posted their support for the new Democratic frontrunner on social media, as did album-of-the-year contender Charli XCX — being a British citizen, the "brat" singer-songwriter-producer won't actually be able to vote in this election.

But after the musician posted "kamala IS brat" on her X page, Harris's

HARRIS, Page N2



KENT NISHIMURA/GETTY IMAGES

Vice President Kamala Harris danced with gospel singer Kirk Franklin last month during a concert at the White House marking Juneteenth.

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

What viewers watch can say a lot about their politics

By Don Aucoin
GLOBE STAFF

'What shows on Netflix can I watch with my conservative, 'NCIS'-loving, octogenarian parents?" a poster asked last year on Reddit, the popular social-news forum. "Bonus if my wife and I can tolerate watching it without wanting to gouge out our eyes."

And there it was, a snapshot of the political polarization and media fragmentation that will frame the three-month sprint to Election Day by vice president and presumptive Democratic nominee Kamala Harris and former president and Republican nominee Donald J. Trump.

During any presidential campaign, the nation reflects itself to itself in the cultural mirror that is television. Almost invariably, the public's reaction to TV news coverage breaks down along partisan lines. Even today a Red-Blue divide extends even to scripted TV series. Or at least the responses to them by viewers/voters do.

Everything is political in the current moment. Actually, you could argue that's been the case

for more than nine years, since Trump rode down that escalator in Trump Tower, announced his candidacy for president in a speech laced with anti-immigrant xenophobia, and became a pervasive presence in the national psyche.

Because the entertainment industry is perceived as leaning left, conservative viewers are quick to point to examples of political bias and "wokeness" in TV dramas and comedies. It can get pretty . . . granular. One Reddit poster who claimed that AMC's "The Walking Dead" had gotten "woke" wrote: "What's very obvious is that anti-gun people could not survive years after a zombie apocalypse. You must have had some practice."

POLITICS, Page N5



ADOBE

Inside

VISUAL ARTS
TALES TO TELL

Harvard exhibits look at volumes large & small, volcanic eruptions, and more

N3



MOVIES
COMING OF AGE

Writer-director Sean Wang gets personal with 'Didi,' his feature debut

N6

Visual Arts



COLLECTION OF THE WYETH FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN ART

Examining Andrew Wyeth's forays into abstraction

► WYETH

Continued from Page N1

Wyeth, long put in a box as a master of tiny, intense narratives of American rural decline, suffered a sidelining in the 1960s by critics and institutions, though never by the viewing (and buying) public, as American Modernism veered sharply into abstraction.

But he was never so cut-and-dried. As the show's curator, Karen Baumgartner, writes in the exhibition catalog, "Wyeth specified that conveying emotion in his work was the primary goal, and subject matter was secondary."

I had my own epiphany on the breadth of Wyeth's private practice a few years ago at the Colby College Museum of Art's exhibition of Wyeth's previously unseen drawings imagining his own funeral. The show included a visceral, minimally marked sheet of paper loosely depicting the hill near the place where his father, N.C. Wyeth, had died in a car wreck when Andrew was a young man. Its simmering angst — rough, sparse swipes and splashes of watercolor, a hurriedness that evoked a sense of panicked rage — put me in mind of the gestural work of AbEx giants like Franz Kline or Willem de Kooning.

Its scale, nearly 6 feet wide, was as un-Wyeth as the picture itself. Surely, I

thought, there's more where *that* came from. And so there is. At the Farnsworth, a couple of dozen works, all watercolors, line the walls in a tidy array. The neatness belies the turbulence within them: Gushy washes of paint drench the paper, uncontained. Almost all the works are untitled, an abstract convention. One that is not, "Fog and the White Dory Study," 1941, straddles the boundary that was then just starting to emerge in American Art. In a vibrant haze of thick dark stains — an abstract field of soft form that Mark Rothko himself could appreciate — a lone figure trudges in the painterly mire.

The picture seems determined to be two things at once, a tension that sets Wyeth adrift in an invigorating new context. Other works follow suit, teetering between a recognizable world and painterly chaos: "Untitled," 1947, a dizzying, earthy muck in tones of lichen green and steely fog that could be a soggy marsh; "Untitled," 1950, where a spindle of felled tree lies in an inky splatter of muck-brown. Other works veer similarly toward the vaguely recognizable: A 1939 piece, likely a jagged shelf of Maine coastline battered by icy sea, or another from 1953 with a flattened Cubist-like perspective of bleached fragments of board and batten folding into each other in a cloak of



HADLOCK GALLERY

shadow.

But the fact that Wyeth refused to name any of them matters. He could feel the pressure of the American art movement soon to take over the world. Was he trying things on for size, fascinated, threatened? We can't know for sure, but we do know that his semi-se-

cret abstract practice ran parallel to his whole career of crisp egg-tempera painted realism; the earliest piece here is from the 1930s, the last, from the early 2000s. And the show unearths some remarkable passages that make a powerful case for the artist's confidence and curiosity comfortably coexisting.

An interview with Wyeth just a few months before his death in 2009 revisits the Corcoran Gallery's 1955 Biennial Exhibition of American Painting, where Wyeth advocated for the inclusion of Color Field painter Kenneth Noland's crisp abstract work. Noland's rigid forms and sharp delineations were anathema to the tense, moody softness of figure and landscape that Wyeth perfected.

In fact, the two men formed a close friendship, testament that the two camps of American art at midcentury might have been more porous than we know. The exhibition touches on what, for any art nerd, is an exhilarating snippet of American art history. In a letter displayed here, Edward Hopper writes to Wyeth about his dismay at the Whitney's 1959 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting being a showcase for abstraction. The show, Hopper writes, "is bent strongly towards non-objective painting," and he represents a group of artists who "think it unfair that it should be prejudiced in one direction so strongly."

He urges Wyeth to sign a petition in protest. Wyeth, still a young artist, was feeling, as Hopper did, the shock of the new threatening to divert his chosen path. And the demand was acute, coming from Hopper, the elder statesman of American art whom Wyeth had grown up admiring. In his response, also here, Wyeth gently but eloquently refuses. "[A]bstract art and all its cousins is the toughest neighbor that realism has had to put up with for years," he writes. But, Wyeth concludes, "I do not feel we should weaken our cause by letters of protest but should strengthen it by better paintings." He did.

Murray Whyte can be reached at murray.whyte@globe.com.

From top: Andrew Wyeth, "Untitled," 1950; a visitor at "Abstract Flash: Unseen Andrew Wyeth" at the Farnsworth Art Museum in Rockland, Maine; Wyeth's "Untitled," 1947.



COLLECTION OF THE WYETH FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN ART