

THE NATURE OF NATURE

WALTER ANDERSON • ARTHUR DOVE

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LUISE ROSS GALLERY

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WALTER ANDERSON (1903-65) *WATER LILIES* circa 1960 watercolor 8½ x 11 inches

WALTER ANDERSON and ARTHUR DOVE

The medium of watercolor requires, even demands, an ability to respond to the essentials of a scene or subject with a spontaneity and directness that Walter Anderson and Arthur Dove possessed in spades. These American painters, separated by a generation, found in watercolor the means to capture the rhythm and spirit of nature, reducing it to its primary components and rudimentary substance. A dedication to uncovering the underlying regenerative power of the natural world was inherent in both their lives and work.

There are some intriguing parallels that emerge when comparing their careers. Both lived primarily in rural settings, Anderson in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, Dove in the Finger Lakes region of New York. Both had formal art educations. They each traveled to France (a necessity for artists in those years), Dove in 1907 to marvel at the Fauves and Cézanne, Anderson twenty years later, immersing himself in the cave paintings at Dordogne. Each artist was an accomplished illustrator, Dove achieving some success with *Collier's*, *Life* and other magazines, whereas Anderson obsessively depicted scenes from *The Illiad* and *Don Quixote* for his own edification. Both were forced to make ends meet for the sake of their families, Dove as a farmer and caretaker, and Anderson as a painter of ceramics for his brother's pottery business. Finally, both artists spent much time on the water. For Dove, it was on a forty-two foot yawl on Long Island Sound; for Anderson, the small skiff that he rowed to sanctuary on Horn Island, twelve miles off the Gulf Coast, for days and weeks at a time. Under extreme conditions, each artist found the necessary environment for direct communion with nature.

Yet, there were dissimilarities as well. Dove had the good fortune of having a dedicated dealer and mentor in Alfred Stieglitz, and a patron in Duncan Phillips. He showed regularly at Stieglitz's galleries, and was included in the first Whitney Biennial in

1932. Though this did not bring financial security by any means, Dove had the benefit of showing his work with a community of avant-garde artists such as O'Keeffe, Hartley and Marin. This allowed Dove a modicum of freedom to pursue his goal of the purest distillation of nature in form and color.

Anderson, on the other hand, outside of his commercial efforts at ceramics, block prints and WPA murals, had limited opportunities to show his work except in regional exhibitions. Unlike Dove, his source of inspiration was not European modernism, but books on the graphic design elements of natural forms, such as Adolpho Best-Maugard's *A Method for Creative Design*, and his own study of ancient art and Pre-Columbian design. In his careful, meticulous study of the multitude of inhabitants of Horn Island (leopard frogs, blue crabs, sea turtles, a vast array of birds among others), Anderson has been aptly described as "a Robinson Crusoe with the inclinations of a St. Francis."¹ With the opening of a new museum in Ocean Springs dedicated to Anderson's work, a serious assessment may now commence that is long overdue.

— Robert G. Edelman

¹Sugg, Redding S., Jr., *The Horn Island Logs of Walter Inglis Anderson*

**THIS EXHIBITION IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
AGNES GRINSTEAD ANDERSON**

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ARTHUR DOVE (1880-1946) *UNTITLED #10* n.d. watercolor 5 x 7 inches

"I made a drawing of the bittern's nest while the flies stung; later a watercolor under my boat while the rain poured. Such is the life of an artist who prefers nature to art. He really should cultivate art more but feels that his love of art will take care of itself if it has things to feed upon."

WALTER ANDERSON

from *THE HORN ISLAND LOGS*

"Actuality! At that point where mind and matter meet. That is at present where I should like to paint. The spirit is always there. And it will take care of itself. We can tear our imaginations apart, but there is always that same old truth waiting."

ARTHUR DOVE