

Grant Wood

Biography



Grant Wood (born Grant DeVolson Wood) was an American painter, born on a farm near Anamosa, Iowa on February 13, 1891. This is not far from Eldon where is located the house he painted in the background of American Gothic. He studied woodworking and metalwork and then painting at the Art Institute in Chicago (1912). During World War I, he painted camouflage colors on military equipment (like Paul Klee for the Germans), then taught art in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He went to Paris to study painting and returned home in 1924. Four years later he was back in Europe, in Munich this time, to supervise the manufacture of stained glass windows. He was deeply impressed by early Flemish paintings and their very detailed and naturalistic manner. The primitive and naive qualities of Gothic art had already fascinated the Blaue Reider group in Munich some 17 years before.

Back in America, Wood became a regionalist painter specializing in the representation of everyday, ordinary people from his rural Iowa. He burst on the national art scene with his American Gothic picture, which won him a bronze medal and a \$300 prize at the 1930 exhibition of the Art Institute of Chicago and was immediately purchased by the Art Institute of Chicago.

In the early 1930's and under the Federal Arts Project, Wood supervised several Iowa projects that painted murals, including those for the Post Office Building in Washington, D.C. and for the Library of the Iowa State College at Ames, Iowa. The very idea for these murals was made possible by earlier contributions to this type of public and didactic art by Mexican painters such as Jose Clemente Orozco.

Chronology

Grant Wood's home and studio was located at 5 Turner Alley from 1924 to 1934.

Near downtown Cedar Rapids, the Studio is owned and operated by the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, which houses the world's largest collection of works by Grant Wood.

Grant Wood (1891-1942) was a prominent member of the Regionalist movement. His most famous painting, *American Gothic*, was painted in this studio in 1930.

[Plan a visit today to tour the Grant Wood Studio and Visitor Center!](#)

The Grant Wood Studio is a founding

- Feb. 13, 1891** Grant DeVolson Wood is born on a farm near Anamosa, Iowa.
- 1901** Grant's father Francis Wood dies. His mother Hattie Weaver Wood moves her family of three sons and one daughter to Cedar Rapids.
- 1910** Grant graduates from Washington High School and spends the summers of 1910 and 1911 studying art in Minneapolis.
- 1913** Grant moves to Chicago and works as a designer at Kalo Silversmith Shop. After about a year, he and another Kalo colleague open their own short-lived Volund Crafts Shop in Park Ridge, Illinois.
- 1916** Grant studies briefly at the Art Institute of Chicago, then returns to Cedar Rapids.
- 1917-1918** Grant enters in the U.S. Army, serving at Camp Leach near Washington, DC and Camp Dodge in Des Moines, Iowa.
- 1919** Grant begins teaching at Jackson Junior High School in Cedar Rapids.
- 1920** Grant and Marvin Cone—a friend and fellow painter—spend part of the summer exploring and painting in Paris, France
- 1922** Grant begins teaching at McKinley High School in Cedar Rapids.
- 1923-1924** With financial support from his patrons John B. and David Turner, Grant studies art at one of the most famous art schools in Paris, the Academie Julian. He also travels throughout France and Italy.
- 1924** Grant moves into 5 Turner Alley. His sister Nan marries Edward Graham, who is soon diagnosed with tuberculosis. During Edward's extended treatments in a nearby center, Nan also lives at 5 Turner Alley.
- 1926** With the support of David Turner and others, Grant and some friends form the Fine Arts Studio Group, with the idea of creating the "Greenwich Village of the Corn Belt" by filling all two blocks of Turner Alley with studios for artists. Nothing ever comes of the plan. In the summer, he travels to France and holds a one-person exhibition at Galerie Carmine in Paris.
- 1927** Grant wins the commission to create a stained glass memorial to America's veterans in Veteran's Memorial Coliseum—now Cedar Rapids' City Hall. He retires from teaching for the Cedar Rapids School District.
- 1928** Grant travels to Munich to oversee the making of his stained glass commission for the Veteran's Memorial Coliseum.

OTHER FACTS

Grant Wood's American Gothic caused a stir in 1930 when it was exhibited for the first time at The Art Institute of Chicago and awarded a prize of 300 dollars. Newspapers across the country carried the story, and the painting of a farm couple posed before a white house brought the artist instant fame. The Iowa native, then in his late 30s, was enchanted by a cottage he had seen in the small southern Iowa town of Eldon. Its Gothic Revival style, indicated by the upper window designed to resemble a medieval pointed arch, inspired the painting's title. He asked his dentist and his sister Nan to pose as a farmer and his unmarried daughter. The highly detailed style and rigid frontal arrangement of the figures were inspired by Northern Renaissance art, which the artist studied during three trips to Europe. After returning to Iowa, he became increasingly appreciative of the traditions of the Midwest, which he also celebrated in works such as this.

American Gothic remains one of the most famous paintings in the history of American art. It is a primary example of Regionalism, a movement that aggressively opposed European abstract art, preferring depictions of rural American subjects rendered in a representational style. The painting has become part of American popular culture, and the couple has been the subject of endless parodies. Some believe that Wood used this painting to satirize the narrow-mindedness and repression that has been said to characterize Midwestern culture, an accusation he denied. The painting may also be read as a glorification of the moral virtue of rural America or even as an ambiguous mixture of praise and satire.

Gothic Revival style is a term used to describe the early-19th-century movement in architecture and the decorative arts inspired by the Gothic style, which flourished from the 12th to 15th centuries and is characterized by an aesthetic emphasizing verticality and height and features such as the pointed arch and flying buttress. The 19th-century Gothic Revival was felt most strongly in the design of churches, university campuses, and government buildings.

By The Art Institute of Chicago and VAGA, New York, NY