Walter Inglis Anderson
Artist, Naturalist, Mystic
As an artist, Walter Anderson’s work defies definition. He began his career as a portrait painter, worked as a pottery decorator, and later developed a theory of art as a means to “realize” the natural world. Many of Watler Anderson’s works pull from distinctive styles of art - crossing the boundaries of time and space.
During Walter Anderson’s lifetime the Mississippi Gulf Coast was largely undeveloped. Anderson found the natural environment of the rivers, bayous, and barrier islands to be ideal for observations of nature. As you look through his art, notice the different viewpoints that Walter is approaching his subject from. Is it through the grass? From the top of a pine tree? Underwater?
Throughout his life Walter Anderson sought communion with nature. The objects that he left behind paint a portrait of a man seeking hidden knowledge through the medium of art. Sissy, the artist’s wife, called him a “mystic, a shaman.”
“When I feel the beauty of a flower or the trunk of a tree, I am at once inducted into a world of three dimensions and have a sense of form which is the opposite of artificial forms and conventions.”

- Walter Inglis Anderson
1903

Walter Inglis Anderson is born to Annette McConnell and George Walter Anderson in the Garden District of New Orleans, Louisiana.
Walter Anderson, along with his brothers Peter and James McConnell “Mac” grew up adventurous youths exploring the marshes and woods of their home.

Annette, a student of Newcomb College, taught her boys art, history, and literature. George Walter, took them fishing and hunting. These experiences molded the brothers and influenced their modes of artistic expression from the very beginning.
In 1915, Peter and Walter were enrolled in St. John’s School, a military academy in New York. Of his time at the school, young Walter sarcastically wrote, “The one great virtue was conformity. you can imagine what a good thing that would be for a young boy who is just beginning to show individuality.”
Walter aquired a little cat boat and in August of that year he was lost on the Mississippi Sound and presumed dead. When the young man showed up the next day he reminded his mother, “You knew I could swim.”

Newspaper Article, August 1920.
1924

Walter leaves New York for Philadelphia to attend the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

Photograph from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Archives, c. 1928. Walter is on the first row, far left.
Being the naturalist he was, Walter would spend most of his time at the zoo, drawing the animals.

*Lioness*, c. 1927, Graphite on Paper, Courtesy of the family of Walter Anderson
For his work, Walter received a Packard Award for animal drawing from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art.

*Lioness, c. 1927, Graphite on Paper, Courtesy of the family of Walter Anderson*
1927

Walter Anderson is awarded a Cresson scholarship. The scholarship allows him to travel to France and Spain where is influenced by the art in the cathedrals and the cave paintings at Les Eyzies.
1928

Walter Anderson joins his family in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, where his brother, Peter, had started a pottery called Shearwater.
Dancing Man Vase
Walter Inglis Anderson, decorator
Peter Anderson, potter
c. 1930
Ceramic
Jo Love Little Acquisition Fund Purchase
Man on a Horse
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1935
Oil on board
Courtesy of the Family of Walter Anderson
Chesty Horse with Flaming Mane and Tail
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1935
Ceramic
Jo Love Little Acquisition Fund Purchase
Compote with Birds, Walter Inglis Anderson, decorator, Peter Anderson, potter, c.1950, Ceramic, Gift of David Chipman and Ruth Chipman Busch
During this time, Walter suffered from mental illness and was committed to numerous mental healthcare facilities. In the hospital Anderson was subjected to treatment in the form of chemo and hydro-shock therapy. He was also given treatments of metrazol, a drug administered through the veins that throws the patient into convulsions often accompanied by apprehension, fear, and panic.

Anderson escaped the hospitals that he was admitted to several times. One of the most amusing stories of Anderson’s escapes involved his exit through a hospital room window with the aid of torn bed sheets. According to Walter’s wife, as he was repelling down the side of the building, he paused to draw a mural of birds with a bar of ivory soap.
Man in Palmettos
Walter Inglis Anderson
C. 1937
Pencil on Paper
Courtesy of the Family of Walter Anderson
Patient taking an Ice Bath
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1937
Pencil on Paper
Courtesy of the Family of Walter Anderson
During his time in the mental hospitals, Walter Anderson would write his wife and on the backs of the letters he would draw the two of them at home at Shearwater. In this image, Walter Anderson is gardening and Sissy gathers zinnias behind the house.
1941

Walter moves with his wife and two children to his wife’s family home in Gautier, Mississippi.

Oldfields from below the bluff, 1952. Image courtesy of MGCCC and Down South Magazine.
Fall Woods
Walter Inglis Anderson
C. 1945
Watercolor on Paper
Permanent Collection
Road to Oldfields
Walter Inglis Anderson
C. 1945
Watercolor on Paper
Gift of Mary Stone Brister
1941 - 1947

During this period, Walter Anderson is the primary caregiver for his children. Walter draws inspiration for his artwork from his children, their adventures, and their love of fairytales. Oldfields gave birth to Anderson’s most prolific period including the calendar drawings, pen and ink illustrations, the Oldfields Murals, and the Linoleum Block Prints.
Pelicans in Flight, Walter Inglis Anderson, c. 1945, Gouache on Wallpaper
Gift of the Family of Walter Anderson
Detail from *Five Fish*, Walter Inglis Anderson c. 1945, Linoleum Block Print
Gift of the Family of Walter Anderson
Two Kittens and Motifs
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1945
Pen and Ink
Courtesy of the Family of Walter Anderson
February 5th
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1945
Pen and Ink and Watercolor
Courtesy of the Family of Walter Anderson
1947

Sissy and Walter separate. Walter moves into his cottage at Shearwater and Sissy and their now four children move into the “barn,” Walter’s mother’s home on the property.
1948

The Brooklyn Museum holds an exhibition of Walter Anderson’s large-scale block prints. This exhibition could have established Anderson as a major American artist but Walter shunned the spotlight. When his family came to get him to go to the opening they found a note on his door reading “Gone to China.”
Walter Anderson visits China with the hope of traveling across the country to Tibet. However, the artist is robbed and he is forced to return home prematurely.
Banana Blossoms
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1949
Watercolor on Paper
Gift of the Friends of Walter Anderson
Chinese Crab
Walter Inglis Anderson
C. 1949
Watercolor on Paper
Courtesy of the Family of Walter Anderson
Chinese Lobster, Walter Inglis Anderson, 1949, Watercolor on Paper
Jo Love Little Acquisition Fund Purchase
As a gift to the community, Anderson takes on the task of creating a mural for the Ocean Springs Community Center. He adorns the walls with images of the coast’s natural and cultural history. He receives a $1 check for his efforts.
Detail from Community Center Mural, Walter Inglis Anderson, 1951, House Paint on Stucco
Ocean Springs Community Center, City of Ocean Springs
Southeast Corner, Community Center Mural, Walter Inglis Anderson, 1951, House Paint on Stucco
Ocean Springs Community Center, City of Ocean Springs
Bust of Allison
Walter Anderson, designer
Peter Anderson, potter
c. 1950
Ceramic
Gift of Frances B. Warden
Walter Anderson increases the amount of time that he spends on the barrier islands – especially Horn Island. He rows twelve miles out to the island in his little skiff to study, paint, and experience the majesty of the natural world.
Pelicans on North Key
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1949
Watercolor on Paper
Gift of the Friends of Walter Anderson to the museum
Goldenrod on Horn Island
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1955
Watercolor on Paper
Gift of the Friends of Walter Anderson to the Museum
Dead Ducks
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1955
Watercolor on Paper
Gift of Carmen Beck
Cormorant
Walter Inglis Anderson
C. 1953
Polychromed Wood
Jo Love Little Acquisition Fund Purchase
Alligator in a Bulrush Pond
Watler Inglis Anderson
c. 1959
Watercolor on Paper
Courtesy of the Family of Walter Anderson
Moths
Walter Inglis Andersron
c. 1960
Watercolor on Paper
Knight Foundation Acquisition
Walter Rowing, Walter Inglis Anderson, c. 1950, Watercolor on Paper, Collection of the Family of Walter Anderson
October 1965

Walter Anderson returns from Horn Island and asks his wife, Sissy, to take him to the hospital. She takes him to New Orleans where he dies a month later from surgical complications after an operation for lung cancer.
Shortly after Walter’s funeral, his wife, Sissy, and her sister, Pat, enter Walter’s cottage to survey his belongings. Along with all of the artwork lying around, they discover a locked room. Unable to find the key, Pat knocks the lock off with Walter’s hatchet. They discover a breathtaking mural in the “little room”, along with thousands of watercolor paintings, most of which were never before seen.
The Little Room, South Wall, Walter Inglis Anderson

C. 1953, House Paint, Gift of the Family of Walter Anderson
Detail from Little Room
Walter Inglis Anderson
c. 1953
House Paint
Gift of the Family of Walter Anderson
“In order to realize the beauty of man we must realize his relation to nature.”

– Walter Inglis Anderson