

Helga by andrew wyeth

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The " Helga Pictures" by Andrew Wyeth are a fantastic compilation of tempera and dry brush paintings, watercolours and pencil studies secretly created within a period of over fifteen years. Andrew Wyeth created over two hundred and forty individual works of neighbor Helga Testorf from 1971 to 1985 without telling a single person, including his wife. He stated that he would not have been able to have finished the project with everyone looking at it. (Allen) The large number of works and the palpable charge that runs through them suggested more than a simple artist-and-model relationship.

The Helga chapter landed on the covers of Time and Newsweek as the public speculated over whether Wyeth, then 69, had had an affair with the woman 22 years his junior. As the Wyeths tried to explain the relationship, the art world wondered whether the secrecy and subsequent revelation had been staged simply to raise the popularity and price of the paintings. " It was a love affair with the burning love that I've always had toward the things I paint," Wyeth said of the Helga paintings. " If I don't have it, the painting goes ordinary, routine. (Nelson/Oliver) Stung by criticism over the " Helga hoopla," Wyeth denied there had ever been a sexual relationship, and his wife admitted that not all of the works had been kept secret from her. When critics accused the Wyeths, and Andrews, of being " hucksters," the artist verbally shrugged, saying critics " were just looking to bop me on the head. " (Nelson/Oliver)) So who is Helga Testorf? She is a Prussian-born immigrant who was a caregiver to one of Wyeth's neighbors, Karl Kuerner, near his home in rural Chadd's Ford, Pennsylvania.

She was 32 years old when Wyeth first met her in the early 1970s, and something about the blond beauty stirred the artist in a very profound way.

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They were merely acquaintances for a while until finally Wyeth asked her to pose. Helga had never posed before but was willing. (Museworthy) In 1986, when the " Helga Pictures" were revealed, Mrs. Testorf was a middle-aged mother of four, living with her husband John on a secluded property called Zum Edelweiss on the other side of Chadds Ford from Wyeth's home. (Museworthy)

Helga, like her employer Karl Kuerner, was of German descent. Helga immigrated to the United States and Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania in 1961, eventually became a mother and homemaker before becoming Karl's caregiver. Due to her association with Mr. Wyeth, she eventually developed an keen interest in poetry and art. Before Andrew Wyeth's death, Helga was one of the ailing artist's primary caregivers. Why Andrew Wyeth became infatuated with this Pennsylvania Fraulein is unclear, other than he obviously found her a fascinating subject.

Some hypothesized that it was her reddish blonde hair that set the tone for this series of renderings by the enigmatic artist, that drew Wyeth to concentrate so much time and effort on the interpretation of this woman's visage and the ego within. Her chiseled features, her supple form, her pensive stare and ultimately, Helga's innate devotion to the process could have given the great artist the insatiable purpose to slavishly devote so much of his creative energies to one subject.

Some folks; however, luridly speculated that Helga's alluring visage engendered a passionate affair between she and the doting artist. For those who considered an affair was afoot, Andrew Wyeth's wife Betsy did not disappoint. (Day) Betsy, his wife of many decades and who was also his

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business manager, is said to have let rumor run unabated until she sold the entire series to Leonard E. B. Andrews in 1986. It has been estimated, that the series sold well in excess of over six million dollars.

She then denied that the scathing rumor was true, and was convincing to the point of believability. Today the rumor is not the subject, but rather Andrew Wyeth's profound artistry within the Helga series. (Day) Andrew Wyeth and Helga Testorf remained close friends until his death. Their relationship, and the art created as a result, has endured over many, many years. The Helga series is artist/muse embodied to perfection. And every artist should be so lucky to find his Helga. Museworthy) Works Cited: Allen, Scott. "Andrew Wyeth/The Helga Pictures." Cure the Blind. 6 July 2009. Web. 10 Nov. 2012. Nelson, Valerie and Oliver, Myrna. "Hugely popular painter Andrew Wyeth dies at 91." Los Angeles Times. 17 January 2009. Web. 10 Nov. 2012. "Andrew and Helga." Museworthy. 31 August 2008. Web. 10 Nov. 2012 Day, Wyatt Sanderman. "Andrew Wyeth's Helga: a Compulsive Fetish or his Best Work." Beaufort County Now. 29 September, 2009. Web. 10 Nov. 2012.