



N.C. Wyeth

Title

The Abdication of Attila

Medium

Oil on canvas

Date

1917

Dimensions

39 3/4 × 36 1/4 in. (101 × 92.1 cm)

Catalogue Number

96.1.16

Credit Line

Bequest of Carolyn Wyeth, 1996

Web Description

This painting, done on speculation rather than commission, was the result of an opportunity the artist had to study photographs of war atrocities brought to the U.S. by a German defector during World War I. Overcome by the horror, Wyeth wrote to his mother, "I am on the verge of creating a reeking cartoon--a bloody commentary on Emperor William....The Abdication of Attila is the legend for my cartoon. I will depict a throne, mountain high, built of human dead and dying (women and children conspicuous). On the summit of these writhing bodies the throne chair, which Attila the leader of the Huns is abdicating in favor of Kaiser Wilhelm. Attila, the fat, bloody monster, stands to the right center (with his generals) humbly proffering his crown to the new 'Scourge of the Human Race.' Wilhelm in bigoted ostentation is accepting it, his eyes lifted to God, his acclaimed accomplice!!!" (N. C. Wyeth to Henriette Zirngiebel Wyeth, July 3, 1917, Wyeth Family Archives). The description goes on at great length, as the artist, first verbally and then through the picture, works out his anger at the German Kaiser. Andrew Wyeth remembered that his father told him he tried to place the picture with Life Magazine, but was unsuccessful.