American Gothic Encyclopedia Article

American Gothic

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This painting of a stern-visaged, tight-lipped, nineteenth-century country couple posed in front of their pristine farmhouse has become not only one of the most reproduced images in American popular culture, it has also virtually become emblematic of the moral fiber and simple virtues for which America is said to stand. Painted by Grant Wood in 1930, *American Gothic* has been interpreted both as homage to the artist's Midwestern roots and as slyly witty commentary on American "family values." After winning an important prize in 1930, *American Gothic* quickly became, as Robert Hughes notes, "Along with the Mona Lisa and Whistler's Mother … one of the three paintings that every American knows…. One index of its fame is the number of variations run on it by cartoonists, illustrators, and advertisers…. The couple in front of the house have become preppies, yuppies, hippies, Weathermen, pot growers, Ku Klux Klaners, jocks, operagoers, the Johnsons, the Reagans, the Carters, the Fords, the Nixons, the Clintons, and George Wallace with an elderly black lady." In the visual culture of the millennium, *American Gothic* remains the most potent and pervasive symbol of America's heartland mythology, as witnessed by its perpetual permeation into all areas of popular culture.

***American Gothic* by Grant Wood.**

Further Reading:

Hughes, Robert. *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America.* New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.