

# Anderson, Joseph Harry (1906–1996)

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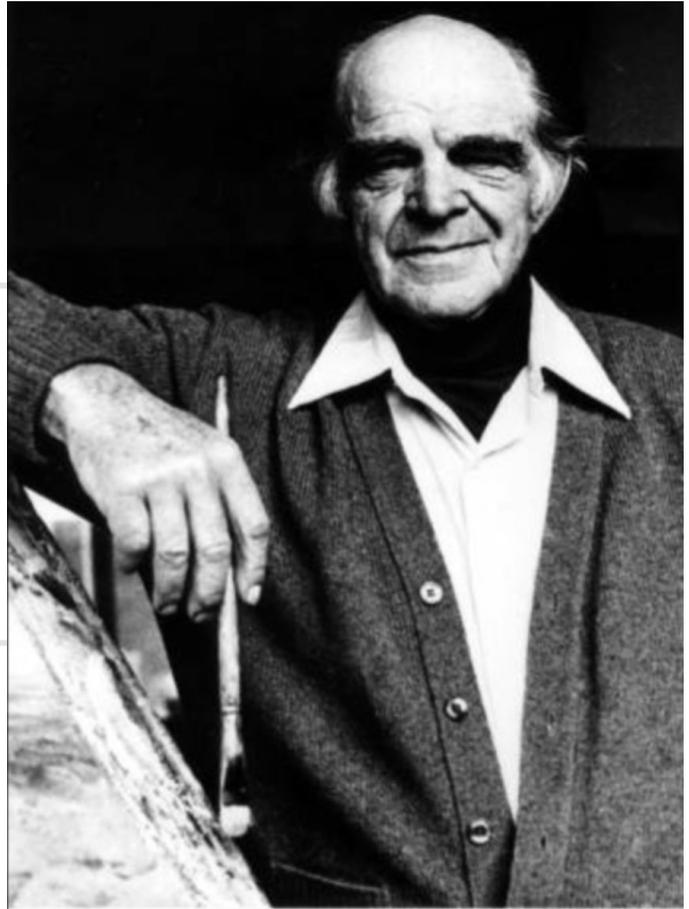
Joseph Harry Anderson was a world class artist and illustrator whose work included widely-admired paintings for the Adventist church.

## Early Career

Born to Joseph and Clara Stahl Anderson on August 11, 1906 in Chicago, Illinois, Harry was raised a Lutheran. His father, a metalworker, emigrated to the United States from Sweden.<sup>1</sup>

Harry studied math at the University of Illinois until he took an art class. He then transferred to Syracuse University School of Art. Once he graduated, he moved to New York City.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1930s the Great Depression made it extra difficult for artists to find work. In 1932, however, Anderson was hired to illustrate a short story in *Collier's* magazine, and thereafter had work illustrating stories. After two years of working in New York City, he moved to Chicago to continue his career. He worked for Stevens-Gross, an art service agency in Chicago. He was one of fifteen artists working with the company, and produced paintings for Montgomery Ward's Catalog, along with advertisements for Cream of Wheat, Velveeta, and General Electric. His drawings were published in popular American magazines like *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Woman's Home Companion*, and *Cosmopolitan*, in addition to storybooks.<sup>3</sup> Anderson had to find models to pose for his illustrations, and often used individuals who worked in his building. One such woman was Ruth Huebel.



Harry Anderson

Photo courtesy of Loma Linda University Photo Archive; Dept. of Archives and Special Collections, Loma Linda University.

## Marriage and Conversion

Ruth and Harry married in 1940, twelve months after met. Their first child, Tim, was born in October 1941. A daughter, Kristin, completed the family in 1943. By this time, Anderson had partnered with freelance artist Haddon Sundblom.<sup>4</sup>

As Anderson's painting techniques evolved and his workload continued to increase, he bought a home in Highland Park, near Lake Michigan. There he had a private studio. It was while their house was being renovated that the Andersons were introduced to the Seventh-day Adventist Church through their repairman, John Stoller. Even after Stoller finished his work for the Andersons, he still answered their questions about the Bible and gave them weekly Bible studies.<sup>5</sup> They began attending a local Seventh-day Adventist Church with Stoller, and Anderson gave up smoking.<sup>6</sup> In 1943 they were baptized at the North Shore Seventh-day Adventist Church in Chicago. They became involved with the Adventist church in Waukegan, Illinois.

## Art for Adventism

As Harry Anderson grew in his faith, he decided that he could not with good conscience draw advertisements for alcohol or create illustrations for fictional stories.<sup>7</sup> He began to consider working for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The art department at the Review and Herald Publishing Association in 1945 was comprised of only a few people and was housed in the attic, known as the "penthouse." T. K. Martin, the Review's art director, sought to grow the program, and when he heard of Anderson's conversion, he was elated to offer him work at the Review and Herald.<sup>8</sup>

Harry began with freelance work for the Review and Herald. Although offered a fulltime position at the publishing house, the Andersons were not ready to accept the reduced pay that a denominational position entailed. Anderson's first color painting for the Review and Herald was "What Happened to Your Hands?" It was illustrative of the type of paintings for which Anderson would become known, a loving, approachable Jesus in a contemporary setting. This was a turning point for the Review and Herald, and therefore the Adventist Church's, artwork. Even though the Review gave Anderson the most it had ever paid for artwork, it was still not as much as he received from other companies.<sup>9</sup>

In 1946 the Andersons moved to Takoma Park, Maryland, and Anderson continued working for the Review as a freelance artist. The Review provided him with a studio one block away from the publishing house.<sup>10</sup> Anderson contributed to the illustrations for Arthur S. Maxwell's popular series *The Bible Story*.

## Later Career

In 1951 Anderson decided to move to Massachusetts, where he continued to paint in a new studio.<sup>11</sup> Ruth Anderson served as his secretary, managing the business transactions, interacting with customers, and

negotiating the price for his artwork. Even though Anderson was no longer working at the Review, he still painted pieces for the publishing house. The Review commissioned him to do a number of large paintings, but did not always want to pay the going rate for such works, so Anderson sometimes did not accept the commission. In the 1960s the growing popularity of photography and the increased cost of models made it more difficult for the Review and Herald to pay for Anderson's illustrations.<sup>12</sup>

Anderson continued to interact with artists from the Review after moving to Massachusetts. Former colleagues came to visit his studio, as did many others who dropped by. His studio was more than a space where Anderson painted, it was a place where he created.<sup>13</sup>

Anderson also corresponded extensively with T. K. Martin, the Review art director, throughout the 1960s. Anderson had always had difficulty painting water scenes, and Martin through his letters explained how to form waves and water scenes that contained motion. Martin played a role in the conception of several of Anderson's most well-known paintings, including "What Happened to Your Hands?" and "God's Two Books." For the former, it had been Martin's idea to pose the children looking at Christ's hands, and paint God's face in the trees. Martin also helped Anderson find models for his paintings and execute his ideas.<sup>14</sup>

Anderson did not paint religious pieces exclusively for the Adventist Church. His painting of the Second Coming for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is one example of how widely his artwork was known throughout religious communities in the United States. Anderson's first painting for the Mormon Church was "Jesus and His Apostles" on a five foot by twelve foot backdrop for display in the Mormon Pavilion at New York World's Fair in 1964-1965.<sup>15</sup> "Christ Calling Peter and Andrew" by the Sea of Galilee is another painting Anderson completed for them. In all, the Mormon Church asked Anderson to paint more than twelve large paintings.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, Anderson's legacy within the Adventist Church, continued to grow. In 1976 Ruth Anderson, along with Raymond Woolsey, published *Harry Anderson: The Man Behind the Paintings*, chronicling the artist's life from childhood through the 1970s when he was still painting commissioned works.

Anderson was living in Danbury, Connecticut when he died on November 19, 1996, at the age of ninety, survived by his wife, Ruth, their two children, six grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.<sup>17</sup>

## Legacy

Anderson received a number of awards and prizes during his lifetime, including the Clara Obrig Prize from the National Academy of Design, and awards from the American Watercolor Society and the Art Directors Club.<sup>18</sup> He was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree from Andrews University in 1977.<sup>19</sup>

From the king of Jordan to readers of well-known American magazines like *Saturday Evening Post*, Anderson's work was admired throughout the world.<sup>20</sup> He did more than 300 paintings for the Adventist Church<sup>21</sup> and is best remembered for his depictions of Jesus. Of these he stated:

I paint Christ the way I like Him, not to please other people. This is the way, if I met Him, I'd like to see Him. I've often wished I had lived in Jerusalem to see what He looked like. In the old days, painters used to portray Him as haggard, emaciated. The Bible says He would not stand out in a crowd, but it also suggests He was not ugly. I know He was a carpenter, that He did a lot of walking, so I see Him as strong, both physically and emotionally. I try to show that.<sup>22</sup>

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## SOURCES

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"Harry Anderson, Noted Religious Illustrator, Dies." *ARH*, January 2, 1997.

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## NOTES

1. Raymond H. Woolsey and Ruth Anderson, *Harry Anderson: The Man Behind the Paintings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), 17.
2. Woolsey and Anderson, 18-19, 22.
3. *Ibid.*, 25-26, 29.
4. *Ibid.*, 31.
5. *Ibid.*, 34.
6. *Ibid.*, 37.
7. *Ibid.*, 38.
8. *Ibid.*, 47.
9. *Ibid.*, 51.
10. *Ibid.*, 58.

11. Ibid., 84.
12. Ibid., 117.
13. Ibid., 11.
14. Gert Busch, interview by author, Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, July 12, 2019; Woolsey and Anderson, 74.
15. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Online Catalog, accessed July 30, 2019, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record?id=9d34e4e0-1a5a-46ae-a45a-0f8de87ecf22&view=summary&subView=arrangement>; Woolsey and Anderson, 119.
16. Woolsey and Anderson, 121.
17. Randy Hall, "Harry Anderson," *Columbia Union Visitor*, December 15, 1996, 18; "Harry Anderson, Noted Religious Illustrator, Dies," ARH, January 2, 1997, 21.
18. Woolsey and Anderson, 108.
19. Andrews University, "Honorary Degrees," accessed July 30, 2019, <https://www.andrews.edu/graduation/honorary-degrees-by-date.pdf>.
20. Woolsey and Anderson, 12-13.
21. Ibid., 113.
22. Ibid., 111.

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