

## Cicada, 1998-2000

Rob Evans (1959 - )

acrylic and oil on canvas

H. 40 x W. 120

In trust to the James A. Michener Art Museum from Ms. Joyce Tseng



### Biography

Robert Evans was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1959. He grew up in Kensington, Maryland, and he currently lives near Wrightsville, Pennsylvania. He received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Syracuse University in 1981. After he graduated from college, he moved into a nineteenth-century farm on a ridge above the Susquehanna River in central Pennsylvania.

The artwork of Rob Evans has been featured in exhibits in museums around the United States, and even at the Tretyakov Museum in Moscow! Some other museums that have exhibited his work include the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts, the Contemporary Art Center of Virginia, the Arkansas Art Center, the Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown, Ohio, and the Peninsula Fine Arts Center in Newport News, Virginia. He was also part of an exhibition of American drawings organized by the Smithsonian Institution that toured internationally.

There are many museums that have Rob Evans's artwork in their collection. These museums include not only the Michener but also the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the National Gallery of Art and the Corcoran Museum of Art, both in Washington, D.C., the Allentown Art Museum in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and the University of Delaware in Newark. His paintings have been featured in numerous books, newspapers, and magazines, and they have been discussed on public radio and television. The work *Cicada* has traveled to five different museums around the state of Pennsylvania as part of an exhibit called *Artists of the Commonwealth: Realism in Pennsylvania Painting, 1950–2000*.

**How large is this painting?** *Cicada* is about 10 feet long. This is as tall as an African elephant! Have you ever seen an elephant at the zoo before?

### Why is the painting divided into three areas?

Notice that Rob Evans divided the painting into three sections, creating a kind of triptych. This painting began in 1994 as a small sketch of a cicada shedding its skin on a tree branch. The sketch was inspired by his memories of the cicada's song vibrating each summer through the treetops at his grandparent's home named *Roundtop*. He would find their translucent skins on the bark of the trees. Have you ever seen or heard a cicada before? What do they sound like?

This painting evolved into three areas over time. The middle section of the painting was created first. Rob Evans later added the right and the left panels. The left panel is a view from the porch of his grandmother's house at night. This shows a memory Rob Evans has of watching fireworks across the river when he was a young boy. The right panel



shows the inside of the house with a view looking out the door to the same porch along with a glimpse of the river at dusk. You can see an empty wheelchair in the doorway. This wheelchair belonged to his grandmother.

### **This painting is a narrative painting. What does this mean?**

A narrative painting is a kind of painting that tells a story. Rob Evans is using images in his work to tell a story that is important to him. Together these images show memories that took place at his grandparent's home, an old four-story inn named *Roundtop*. This inn was on a larger property with a farm. It was surrounded by 100 acres of an old-growth oak forest. Here, Rob Evans spent his summers roaming the woods, collecting insects, bones, old bottles, and all kinds of interesting artifacts! This farm, *Roundtop*, and its natural landscape, is his starting point for almost all the concepts he deals with in his paintings. This place had a great effect on him. Have you ever created a drawing or a painting that tells a story? If not, try it! Think of all the details you will need to include.

### **What do the images mean in this painting?**

Rob Evans is using the images in his painting as symbols. A symbol in art is an image or object that is meant to stand for another idea. The images in this painting act together as a symbol of the life cycle. The child entering in at the left is the beginning of life. The wheelchair, which signifies old age, leaves at the right. These images are all connected by the flowing river in the background of each panel.

Have you ever seen fireworks? What happens to them after they are shot up into the sky? Fireworks can be symbols for something that is temporary since they disappear after they explode. The wheelchair is a symbol of Rob Evans's grandmother, who lived the last years of her life in the house at *Roundtop*. Rob Evans says that the empty wheelchair is like the empty cicada shell, a remainder of a previous life that has been left behind. The cicada is meant to signify transformation and metamorphosis. What other symbols could mean metamorphosis to you?

### **How did Rob Evans create this painting?**

Rob Evans's work is created through a long process. Often he starts with a small sketch in response to something that catches his attention or imagination. It can be something very simple, or even a passing thought. He then puts this sketch in a sketchbook. Sometimes the sketch can sit for a few months or years without him looking at it again. He returns to see his sketches to remind himself of them and keep their ideas alive in his mind. Eventually these ideas take root in larger paintings.

*Cicada* began as a sketch and later became the painting it is today. Rob Evans's paintings take a few years to complete, and often he exhibits these large-scale works in various stages of completion. *Cicada* was exhibited in seven different museums from 1998 to 2001 before it was completed! Between each exhibit, he worked on the painting some more. He wanted to give it a sense of history and age, and so he used materials that gave that effect. He mixed mulch, pumice gels, and glass beads into his paint, and he even used a power sander on the painting! He likes that his painting was an evolving object.



## Learn More

Learn to tell a story with your art, like Rob Evans did in *Cicada*. Find the activity “Tell a Story with Art,” below.

One of the components of the painting is fireworks. James McNeil Whistler also painted fireworks in his *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1874). It is on display at the Tate Museum in London, [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)

In both of these works, there is a celebration. It could be New Year’s Eve, or the fourth of July! Learn more about fireworks and firecrackers in the 2002 NOVA history of pyrotechnics at [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org).

### **What is the object in the center of the painting that looks like an empty bug?**

That is the old outside covering of the cicada! The insect shed it during the process of metamorphosis. The word metamorphosis means to develop and change. It is used to describe the way that some insects and amphibians, develop into an adult. But that is not all. *Metamorphosis* is the name of a story written by Franz Kafka in 1946 about a man that wakes up one day to find that he has become a beetle. The word also refers to a series of 2000 year-old Roman tales about changes that can happen. Learn more about the book at [www.sparknotes.com](http://www.sparknotes.com). Learn more about Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* at [larryavisbrown.homestead.com](http://larryavisbrown.homestead.com).

Do you know how to play marbles? You can see the start of a game in the painting. Learn how to play marbles at [www.landofmarbles.com](http://www.landofmarbles.com).

You can make your own marbles, using little balls of self-hardening clay; but if you really want to get fancy, you need to make them out of glass. Watch a demonstration at [www.artglass2.com](http://www.artglass2.com).

## Related Images

Rob Evans is a contemporary artist with his own website. Take a look at some of his other works. Can you find another triptych? Or other works with insects? You will enjoy investigating his talents at [www.robevansart.net](http://www.robevansart.net).

Real cicadas look like giant flies. Look at some facts and pictures about them from the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, [insects.ummz.lsa.umich.edu](http://insects.ummz.lsa.umich.edu).

Other painters, including British artist Elisabetha Van der Heide, also like to portray insects. Look at her drawings and paintings at [www.bevanderheide.com/insects.html](http://www.bevanderheide.com/insects.html).

Other insect works of art are very old. You can see many of these at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

A triptych can be an artwork in three parts or it can be an artwork that shows three parts of something. Triptychs have been created throughout history. Look at some more traditional triptychs:



Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)  
Philadelphia Museum of Art in Philadelphia, [www.philamuseum.org](http://www.philamuseum.org)

## Related Links

### **What kind of tree is the cicada sitting on?**

In the center of the painting is a large oak tree. Oak trees are interesting to many people because they grow so large and can live in so many environments. There are societies that are like fan clubs of oak trees. One is The Live Oak Society in New Orleans at [www.archytech.org](http://www.archytech.org). This society claims that the largest oak is in Louisiana. There are other claims for the largest of the oaks. Learn about them at [www.angeloaktree.org](http://www.angeloaktree.org). Maybe you know of an oak tree that is even larger!

### **I live in Pennsylvania and we have lots of cicadas. Is the cicada my state insect?**

The Pennsylvania state insect is the firefly! We see lots of those in the summer. Lightning bugs or fireflies are neither bugs nor flies, but soft-bodied beetles. They are typically brown or blackish in color, usually with markings of red or yellow on the large, shield-like pronotum. A lightning bug's most distinctive characteristic is, of course, its light, though not all species have one. It is a cold light produced by chemicals in the firefly's body. Males and females of each species have their own flashing patterns, allowing members of the same species to recognize each other for mating. You may be able to distinguish such patterns as a J, a series of dashes, or a series of dots. Lightning bug larvae feed on slugs, insects, and other invertebrates, and live in damp, swampy habitats. The food eaten by the adults is largely unknown. Learn more about Pennsylvania symbols and emblems at [www.netscape.com](http://www.netscape.com).

