



FEBRUARY 2011

## Painting the Wind

Charles Burchfield | *East Wind and Winter Sun*



**VISIT THE BMA**  
and look for landscapes that show many kinds of weather.

Charles Burchfield (American, 1893-1967).  
Detail, *East Wind and Winter Sun*. 1951.  
Watercolor over charcoal. 31 x 41 inches.  
The Baltimore Museum of Art: Edward Joseph  
Gallagher III Memorial Collection, BMA 1959.12.  
©Courtesy of Charles E. Burchfield Foundation

One wintry day, when a blustery wind was blowing from the East, Charles Burchfield put on his overcoat, picked up his easel, and went outdoors to paint. He did not have to go far—maybe just into his backyard or somewhere around his neighborhood. Burchfield liked to sketch and paint in all kinds of weather, no matter how inconvenient or uncomfortable. Thunderstorms, snowstorms, the sizzling heat of summer—all were exciting to him. But on this day he wanted to paint the wind.

How could he do that? Wind is invisible. We can feel it and sometimes even hear it, but it has no clear shape or color that we can perceive. Even so, Burchfield could see the path that the wind was taking all around him. It was bending the tree trunks and shaking their bare branches. It was blowing smudgy puffs of chimney smoke over his neighbors' rooftops and sending enormous clouds sailing across a wide open sky. The wind was even down on the ground, pushing on the scruffy brown stalks of grass near his feet.

Burchfield wanted to do more than paint what he saw outdoors. He said he needed "to paint what is there." That meant trying to capture the energy and mystery of the natural world, even when it is invisible. In Burchfield's view, clouds whoosh across the sky like the wings of a giant bird. Tree branches become sharp spikes that pierce the surrounding air. And amidst all the dreary gray of winter, the yellow sun, low in the sky, sends its rays down to the earth to warm one side of a house that might have been Burchfield's own.

### CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Have you ever seen the wind? You've surely seen what wind can do—blow papers around on the street, uproot a tree, mess up your hair. Read the favorite children's rhyme *Who Has Seen the Wind?*\* then draw your own picture-story about what a gentle breeze or a gust of mischievous wind can do.

*\*Who has seen the wind? Neither I nor you: But when the leaves hang trembling the wind is passing through. Who has seen the wind? Neither you nor I: But when the trees bow down their heads the wind is passing by.*

– Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

**PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.**

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Charles Burchfield. *East Wind and Winter Sun.*

1951. Watercolor over charcoal. 31 x 41 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Edward Joseph Gallagher III Memorial Collection, BMA 1959.12 ©Courtesy of Charles E. Burchfield Foundation