

James Wyeth

Jamie Wyeth

James ("Jamie") Browning Wyeth (born July 6, 1946) is a contemporary American realist painter, son of Andrew Wyeth, and grandson of N.C. Wyeth. He was raised in Chadds Ford Township, Pennsylvania, and is artistic heir to the Brandywine School tradition, painters who worked in the rural Brandywine River area of Delaware and Pennsylvania, portraying its people, animals, and landscape.

James Wyeth is the second child of Andrew and Betsy Wyeth, born three years after brother Nicholas, his only sibling. He was raised on his parents' farm "The Mill" in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, in much the same way as his father had been brought up, and with much the same influences. He demonstrated the same remarkable skills in drawing as his father had done at comparable ages. He attended public school for six years and then, at his request was privately tutored at home, so he could concentrate on art. His brother Nicholas would later become an art dealer.

At age 12, Jamie studied with his aunt Carolyn Wyeth, a well-known artist in her own right, and the resident at that time of the N. C. Wyeth House and Studio, filled with the art work and props of his grandfather. In the morning he studied English and history at his home and in the afternoon joined other students at the studio, learning fundamentals of drawing and composition. He stated later, "She was very restrictive. It wasn't interesting, but it was important." Through his aunt, Jamie developed an interest in working with oil painting, a medium he enjoyed at a sensory level: the look, smell and feel of it. Carolyn Wyeth and Howard Pyle were his greatest early influences in developing his technique in working with oil paint. While Jamie's work in watercolor was similar to his father's, his colors were more vivid.

As a boy, Jamie was exposed to art in many ways: the works of his talented family members, art books, attendance at exhibitions, meeting with collectors, and becoming acquainted with art historians. He also developed an offbeat sense of humor, sometimes veering to the macabre.^[2]

For at least three years in the early 1960s, when Wyeth was in his middle to late teens, Wyeth painted with his father. Of their close relationship, Wyeth has said: "Quite simply, Andrew Wyeth is my closest friend—and the painter whose work I most admire. The father/son relationship goes out the window when we talk about one another's work. We are completely frank—as we have nothing to gain by being nice. At age 19 [about 1965] he traveled to New York City, to better study the artistic resources of the city and to learn human anatomy by visiting the city morgue.

In 1968, Wyeth married Phyllis Mills, daughter of Alice du Pont Mills and James P. Mills¹, and one of his models. Although she had earlier been permanently crippled in a car accident and must use crutches (and later a motorized chair) to get around, Wyeth finds her a very strong, determined woman whose elusive nature means that he continually discovers something new about her. Mills is the subject of many of his paintings (which usually depict her seated)

including *And Then into the Deep Gorge* (1975), *Wicker* (1979), and *Whale* (1978), as well as, by implication, his painting of Phyllis' hat in *Wolfbane* (1984).

Phyllis had worked for John F. Kennedy when he was a senator and president. She has served on several boards, including "the National Committee for Arts for the Handicapped, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Resource Defense Council." A steeplechase rider when young, before her crippling accident, she later took over her parents' thoroughbred horse racing and breeding interests, winning the 2012 Belmont Stakes with Union Rags.¹²¹

In the 1960s Jamie purchased the Lobster Cove property on Monhegan Island in Maine, which had previously been owned by Rockwell Kent, the famed American painter of modernist wilderness landscapes admired by his grandfather and succeeding generations. Jamie has painted many of the local people on Monhegan Island. He and his wife have a home at Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania on the Brandywine. In the 1990s his parents, Betsy and Andrew Wyeth, sold Jamie the Tenants Harbor Light on Southern Island in Maine that they had owned since 1978. As it provides him the solitude and subject matter he most enjoys for his work, most of his painting is done at Tenants Harbor; the rest is done at Chadds Ford. The light station has been inactive since 1933. The tower that held the lantern was reconstructed for his studio.

Early on, Wyeth became interested in oil painting, his grandfather's primary medium, although he is also adept in watercolor and tempera, his father's preferred media. In describing his aunt's way of thickly applying oil to her palette, he stated, "I could eat it. Tempera never looked particularly edible. You have to love a medium to work in it. I love the feel and smell of oil."

In addition to studying his aunt's oil technique, he also admired his father's and grandfather's work, and that of Howard Pyle, his grandfather's teacher, as well as American masters Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins. What inspired Wyeth most was not the subject matter or technique of his grandfather, but his "sense of total personal involvement with and intuitive grasp of his subjects". Jamie Wyeth adopted a wider palette of colors than his father's, which was closer to his aunt's and grandfather's color choices.

Wyeth's artistic reach is broader than his father's and grandfather's. He excels in drawing, lithography, etching, egg tempera, watercolor, and mixed media. Though grounded in this family's artist tradition and subjects, and bound by the same solitude of his art, his wider travels and experiences have shaped a more rounded artist. In travels to Europe, he studied the Flemish and Dutch masters, and learned the intricate and exacting process of lithography, producing a substantial amount of graphic work.

On portrait painting, Wyeth stated, "To me, a portrait is not so much the actual painting, but just spending the time with the person, traveling with him, watching him eat, watching him sleep. When I work on a portrait, it's really osmosis. I try to become the person I'm painting. A successful portrait isn't about the sitter's physical characteristics—his nose, eyeballs and whatnot—but more the mood and the overall effect. I try not to impose anything of mine on him. I try to get to the point where if the sitter painted, he'd paint a portrait just the way I'm doing it."