



JAMIE WYETH

# Mysterious Familiar

Jamie Wyeth rises at 5:30 a.m. to begin a day of painting—often after a night of dreams. He keeps paper next to his bed to make notes about his dreams, and once woke up to find everything covered in graffiti. At other times, the dreams coalesce into ideas for paintings.

Somerville Manning Gallery in Greenville, Delaware, is showing recent and older paintings in the aptly titled exhibition *Mysterious Familiar*, through June 1.

The familiar are the people, places and things of his homes in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, and islands off the coast of Maine. The mysterious is the unknowns

of all the knowns. “I look at myself as just a recorder,” Wyeth says. “I mean, I just want to record the things that interest me in my life.”

At about 13 he took an art class with his aunt Carolyn who had studied classical methods with her father, N.C. Wyeth. “I discovered the lusciousness of oil paint in Carolyn’s studio. It was the antithesis of my father’s dry, dusty, egg tempera. I discovered the look of it pouring from the tube. I loved feeling it, touching it. It makes you want to eat it, but it would probably kill you.”

He knew he wanted to “break out” from

the traditional approaches of N.C., Carolyn, his father Andrew and countless other Wyeth artists. Capable of matching their highly representational images, he developed a voluptuous, painterly style with non-natural viscerally stirring color.

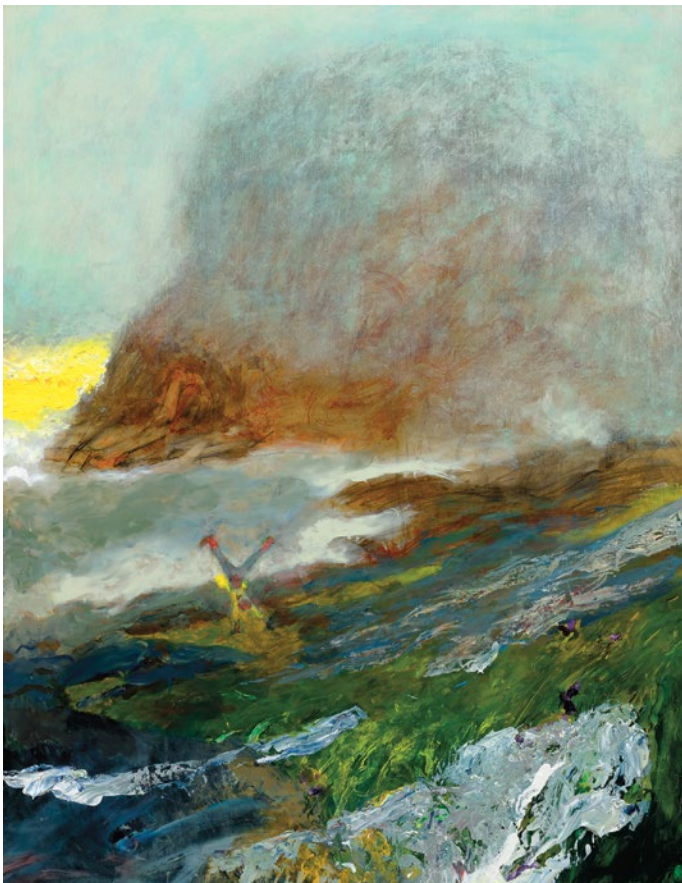
One painting in the exhibition, however, is nearly monochromatic. *The Sea, Photographed*, 2012, depicts an ethereal Andy Warhol in sport coat and shiny city shoes standing on the rocks of the coast of Maine with his camera aimed at the sea. “That came from a dream,” Wyeth explains. “He never came to Maine. He was a mysterious character and hid



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behind this incredible visage. He had a secret life and worked like hell but wouldn't admit it. Other than my father, he was the only serious painter I'd known." The mystery of the painting and that of his friend is repeated in Wyeth's title for the painting. The passive construction suggests that the ferocious sea was calmed and made to pose for the famous artist.

*Good Bye Gull Rock*, 2023, was inspired by his encountering a young woman doing cartwheels below Gull Rock on Monhegan Island. It is composed of oil and acrylic on gesso panel. The foreground is a thick, abstract impasto of color, with

several blotches of purple recalling the ubiquitous wild iris of Monhegan. Gull Rock is barely suggested in the mist. The young woman is caught in midair.

Wyeth combines media and paints on supports from the gessoed panels of egg tempera paintings to cardboard. "I'm not a great technician," he admits. "I love mixing mediums and techniques. It's all unconscious. But when things click, the image comes alive." ●

#### Somerville Manning Gallery

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**1**  
*Blind Goat*, 2023, oil and acrylic on gesso panel, 40 x 30"

**2**  
*Kleberg: Nocturnal*, 2023, watercolor, acrylic, charcoal and gouache on toned board, 20 x 16"

**3**  
*Goodbye, Gull Rock*, 2023, oil and acrylic on gesso panel, 40 x 30"

**4**  
*The Sea, Photographed*, 2012, combined mediums on toned paper board, 31 x 26 3/4"