

ANDREW WYETH
BUZZARD'S GLORY



Schoelkopf

Andrew Wyeth *Buzzard's Glory*

Patricia Junker

What attracted Andrew Wyeth to young Johnny Lynch as a portrait subject? The boy was a Chadds Ford neighbor, nineteen when he first modeled for Wyeth in 1968. He was not so flamboyant as his older half-brother Jimmy, who had grown up alongside Wyeth's son Jamie, and was a fixture in the lives of both father and son—Jimmy Lynch is the subject of Wyeth's *The Swinger*, painted around this same time (fig. 1). The more temperate Johnny figures only briefly in Wyeth's art—in a few pencil and watercolor pre-studies for this portrait (see fig. 2), and two subsequent drybrush figure studies in 1970 and 1971.¹ So many other models, Jimmy Lynch included, occupied Wyeth over an extended period of time.² In the body of Wyeth's work, built on a small, recurring, and now familiar cast of characters, Johnny Lynch is something of a mystery. Wyeth would say decades after that it was the boy's thick, jet-black hair that intrigued him, but the lengthy, painstaking process of tempera painting was not typically one for the artist's first impressions or casual interests. The treatment afforded Johnny Lynch in 1968 was one reserved for Wyeth's most absorbing subjects: wife Betsy, World War I veteran Ralph Cline, and Christina Olson, just three among what was the large group of life-size head portraits in tempera and drybrush watercolor that distinguish Wyeth's work of the 1960s, a decade of remarkable portraits of memorable Wyeth characters.



Andrew Wyeth, *Buzzard's
Glory*, 1968. Egg tempera
on panel, 18 ½ x 23 ⅞ inches
(47 x 60.6 cm)



Writing on the occasion of Andrew Wyeth's first retrospective at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1966, PAFA's President, E.P. Richardson, announced that he was seeing signs of a new, dramatic shift in Wyeth's art at this time, the mid-1960s, away from psychologically-loaded human-centered landscapes and interiors and toward an up-close focus on their inhabitants themselves.³ Richardson could not yet identify the source of this change, but from the vantage of decades hence we can perhaps discern what triggered this move: a deepening sense of love and loss for Wyeth that was peculiar to this moment.

Portraits were Wyeth's way of holding on to a subject. People—Christina Olson and Walt Anderson in Maine, Karl and Anna Kuerner and Adam Johnson in Chadds Ford—these were Wyeth's connections, to a place and to a time, and their portraits were a way to ensure that the thread of

Fig. 1
Andrew Wyeth, *The Swinger*, 1969. Drybrush watercolor on paper, 14 3/4 x 24 3/4 inches (37.5 x 62.9 cm)

Fig. 2
Andrew Wyeth, *Buzzard's Glory Study*, 1968. Watercolor on paper, 13 x 16 inches (33 x 40.6 cm). Greenville County Museum of Art



time was never broken. As Betsy Wyeth said of her husband's motivation, "Andy has very much to do with timelessness."⁴ Just as Wyeth believed he could stare into the Chadds Ford landscape and envision its layered, tragic past, or find the source of the essential, unflinching New England character in the indestructible Olson house standing against the unrelenting elements at the Maine seacoast, so did he also come to believe that in faces he could trace epic human journeys and survival. His portrait subjects, Betsy Wyeth continued, "are in the present, but they are also their past generations."⁵

Wyeth had been wracked with thoughts of doom and death from the time of his father's fatal accident at the railroad crossing below Kuerner's hill in Chadds Ford in 1945, and then with the death of his beloved mother-in-law, Bess James, in Maine in 1959. He openly expressed regret that he had created no tangible objects—no portrait heads of his father or Bess "Maga" James—to keep them near.⁶ Newell Convers Wyeth is present in absentia through Wyeth's entire body of work, and Bess James was memorialized obliquely in a portrait of Betsy in 1965—Betsy not as Wyeth's wife, but as *Maga's Daughter* (fig. 3), so he titled the portrait, framing it inside an actual embroidered linen that had been passed down from Bess to Betsy. When in 1967 he had premonitions of the impending death of his beloved friend Anna Christina Olson in Maine, he made a point of capturing her in one last majestic portrait, *Anna Christina* (1967, Collection of the Brandywine Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).

Fig. 3
Andrew Wyeth, *Maga's Daughter*, 1966. Egg tempera on panel, 26 ½ × 30 ¼ inches (67.3 × 76.8 cm). Wyeth Foundation for American Art



Given this context for Wyeth's portraits, we have to ask, what was it about Johnny Lynch that he might have memorialized in such a thoroughly considered, introspective portrait? What about the boy did Wyeth hold dear? When he unveiled the head of Johnny Lynch in what were major exhibitions in 1970—first at the Nixon White House and then at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts—he offered a clue, something well beyond the boy's engaging dark looks, something deeply personal, something only Wyeth saw. "Johnny Lynch strongly resembles his first cousin Allan," Wyeth told BMFA director Perry Rathbone, referring to Allan Lynch, a singularly important figure in Wyeth's work. The similarities between young Johnny and the young Allan haunted Wyeth: "He even walked around town wearing an army coat, the collar turned up the same way Allan would turn his. That mane of black hair and the tilt of his eyes—all Lynch (fig. 4)."⁷

Johnny was perhaps chosen specifically to carry Wyeth's memories and his grief at the violent death in 1966 of Allan Lynch. Allan Lynch had been so much more to Wyeth than just a young friend; he was something of a soulmate—the two even shared birthdays. The artist had assigned special status to Allan Lynch from the time of Wyeth's father's death, when the boy stood guard over the body at the rail crossing, and then when he entered Wyeth's frame of vision as a boy in anguish, running helter-skelter down Kuerner's Hill, the boy Wyeth painted as a stand-in for himself in his first grief-filled painting, *Winter 1946* (1946, North Carolina Museum of Art). Four years later Wyeth painted the black-haired, eighteen-year-old Allan

Fig. 4
Andrew Wyeth, *Winter, 1946 Study, 1946*. Drybrush watercolor and pencil on paper, 15 × 18½ inches (38.1 × 47 cm). Collection of the Wyeth Foundation for American Art, P0632. The subject is Allan Lynch.



Lynch as the future of the post-war country, as *Young America* (fig. 5). Allan Lynch had lived for a while in the basement of Wyeth's studio, a drifter like others who found an empathetic partner in Andrew Wyeth. In 1966 Allan Lynch shot himself in the head.⁸ Wyeth surely grieved him and perhaps applied his grief onto his look-alike cousin, Johnny.⁹

Allan Lynch had embodied so much promise as a boy of eighteen in *Young America*. In 1968, Wyeth had to be wondering what might be this other Lynch boy's tragic future. The naïve teenager Johnny, who like so many boys his age, wore the old army jackets in play-acting, was now draft age and faced the specter of going to Vietnam. But home prospects were not so promising either. In tandem with Betsy Wyeth, the artist titled the portrait after the part of Chadds Ford where generations of Lynches had lived, *Buzzard's Glory*, a place where, legend had it, buzzards—birds of death—thrived, and the poor folk there shot them for food.

Fig. 5
Andrew Wyeth, *Young America*, 1950. Egg tempera on gessoed board, 32 ½ × 45 ¾ inches (82.6 × 115.1 cm). Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Joseph E. Temple Fund, 1951.17



PATRICIA JUNKER Ann M. Barwick Curator of American Art Emerita, Seattle Art Museum

Patricia Junker established the American art department at the Seattle Art Museum in 2004, serving as the endowed curator for fourteen years. Previously she was Curator of Paintings and Sculpture at the Amon Carter Museum and Associate Curator of American Paintings at the Fine Arts

Museums of San Francisco. She has authored award-winning publications: "Childe Hassam, Marsden Hartley and the Spirit of 1916," received the Smithsonian's Frost Prize; *Winslow Homer in the 1890s: Prout's Neck Observed* won the Henry Allan Moe Prize for scholarship. Her most recent scholarship has centered on Andrew Wyeth: in 2018 she organized *Andrew Wyeth: In Retrospect*; and she earlier published "Andrew Wyeth: Rebel" in the anthology, *Rethinking Andrew Wyeth*. Other major publications are: *Modernism in the Pacific Northwest*; *Edward Hopper's Women*; *Albert Bierstadt's "Puget Sound on the Pacific Coast"*; *Winslow Homer, Artist and Angler*. She has co-authored American art collection catalogues for the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; the Amon Carter Museum; and the Smith College Museum of Art. Junker frequently collaborates with Schoelkopf Gallery, notably in championing the work of the Wyeth family, a partnership that has proven invaluable in advancing scholarship and exhibitions in American art. Most recent exhibitions include *Enter Andrew Wyeth* in 2024 and *Jamie Wyeth: Portraits of Andy Warhol and Rudolph Nureyev* in 2025.

Endnotes

1. The paintings are *Undercover* (1970, Greenville County Museum of Art) and *Ice Storm* (1971, private collection).
2. Wyeth's remarks on the painting in Thomas Hoving, *Andrew Wyeth: Autobiography* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, in association with the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1995), p. 81.
3. E.P. Richardson, *Andrew Wyeth: Temperas, Watercolors, Dry Brush, Drawings, 1938-1966* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1966), p. 94.
4. Betsy Wyeth to Richard Meryman, *Andrew Wyeth: A Secret Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), p. 12.
5. Ibid.
6. Wyeth painted the bed-ridden Bess James in *Chambered Nautilus*, 1956, but the frail woman looks away from the artist and the viewer. See his expression of regret in his commentary on that painting in Richardson, p. 58.
7. Wyeth to Perry Rathbone, *Andrew Wyeth* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1970), p. 46. Jimmy Lynch, who was a closer friend to Wyeth than Johnny, did not have the same familial connection to cousin Allan Lynch; the golden-haired Jimmy was Johnny's half-brother; he had an Irish father.
8. Allan Lynch's detailed death certificate showing cause of death is available at Ancestry.com, *Pennsylvania, U.S. Death Certificates, 1906-1972* [database on-line], Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014.
9. Wyeth included Alan Lynch from his figure in *Winter 1946* among the long-ago Chadds Ford models gathered in the symbolic dance of death that is Wyeth's retrospective painting, *Snow Hill*, 1989, The Andrew and Betsy Wyeth Collection.

Photography and Copyright Credits

All works: © Wyeth Foundation for American Art / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, NY

Cover, p. 3, fig. 1: Tom Morrill; figs. 3–4: Andrew & Betsy Wyeth Study Center, Brandywine Museum of Art

For more information about this artist or any of our exhibitions, please contact the gallery. You can stay informed about our upcoming programs by visiting us at schoelkopfgallery.com or following us on Instagram [@schoelkopfgallery](https://www.instagram.com/schoelkopfgallery)

Andrew Schoelkopf
Owner
914 886 2700
andrew@schoelkopfgallery.com

Alana Ricca
Managing Director
203 524 2694
alana@schoelkopfgallery.com

SCHOELKOPF GALLERY
390 Broadway, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10013
212 879 8815
schoelkopfgallery.com

Schoelkopf