



CASVA

Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts

The Wyeth Foundation for American Art and CASVA

In February 1987, at what was described as “a splendid evening” in Washington, several members of the board of the Wyeth Endowment for American Art—now the Wyeth Foundation for American Art—proposed the creation of a two-year predoctoral fellowship program in American art at CASVA. John Wilmerding, then deputy director of the Gallery, was a guiding force behind the plan that resulted in a long-term series of grants to the Center to support research in American art by a new generation. In all, twenty-four Wyeth fellows have benefited from this program, including several who went on to professional museum careers; Jodi Hauptman (Wyeth fellow from 1993 to 1995) focused on Joseph Cornell for her Yale dissertation and is now senior curator of the department of drawings and prints at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Others became university or college professors at such institutions as Smith College, Stanford University, Columbia University, Princeton University, the University of Delaware, Northwestern University, and Bowdoin College, making it quite difficult to imagine that in Wilmerding’s time at Harvard University it was rare for a promising graduate student to seek to study American art.

There was some concern in the early years about the definition of a fellowship dedicated to one of America’s greatest figurative and realist painters. The original idea was that the fellowship should support the study of American art before World War II. However, with the flexibility of the Wyeth board, the fellowship evolved to embrace American art in the widest terms, including the traditions of

native, pre-revolutionary, and post-World War II art. Today, the award of a Wyeth Fellowship at CASVA represents a standard of excellence.

In 2001, the Wyeth Foundation for American Art awarded the Center a grant to support the symposium “American Art History in the New Century.” The meeting of scholars proved so successful and significant that the Wyeth Foundation agreed to support a longer-term program of lectures and conferences in addition to the predoctoral fellowship. Since 2003, a Wyeth Lecture in American Art by a distinguished scholar has alternated biennially with a conference dedicated to presenting new work in the field.

Encouraged by the Wyeth Foundation to reach beyond the East Coast, the Center has worked to make the Wyeth Lectures available to a wider audience through audio podcasts and eventually video podcasts. Wyeth Lectures by all of the speakers in the series, including Jules Prown, Kathleen Foster, Alexander Nemerov, Richard J. Powell, Bryan J. Wolf, and Jennifer L. Roberts, are now freely accessible online with closed captioning for the hearing impaired at www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/audio-video/wyeth.html.

Wyeth conferences have approached a variety of topics in American art, from the history of collecting to documentary photography, from art and religion to landscape painting in the later twentieth century, following current directions in the field. At their most ambitious they have involved collaboration with other institutions. In 2008 CASVA and the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) cosponsored the Wyeth conference “Images of

the American Indian, 1600–2000,” bringing institutional neighbors together, in connection with exhibitions of George de Forest Brush at the Gallery and Fritz Scholder at NMAI.

The 2014 conference, planned in collaboration with the Brandywine River Museum of Art, was inspired by the Gallery’s exhibition *Andrew Wyeth: Looking Out, Looking In* (fig. 1). Curators Nancy Anderson and Charles Brock collaborated with CASVA in the planning of the Wyeth conference, together with Thomas Padon, director of the Brandywine River Museum. For this historic turning point for Wyeth studies, three scholars who have long dedicated their research to the artist agreed to participate: Wanda Corn, who wrote her dissertation on Wyeth and who has been the most acute and consistent critic of his work; Anne Classen Knutson, organizer of the 2006 exhibition *Andrew Wyeth: Memory and Magic* at the High Museum, Atlanta; and Kathleen Foster, who curated the High Museum exhibition when it moved to Philadelphia and contributed to the catalog. David Cataforis, author of *Rethinking Andrew Wyeth* (2014), presented the current state of Wyeth studies, singling out the dissertation of Edwin R. Harvey (amazingly, the first on Wyeth in forty years) as “pathbreaking.” Harvey himself gave a spellbinding interpretation of Wyeth’s *Hay Ledge* as a representation “not only of whom and what but also *how* Wyeth saw and painted.” Leo G. Mazow spoke on Wyeth’s contemporaries, specifically Edward Hopper and his hotel paintings, and Abbie Sprague focused on the British and American tempera artists whose techniques, inspired by Cennino

Cennini, were introduced to Wyeth by Peter Hurd.

The photographer James Welling provided a link between the conference at the Gallery and the intense field trip to the Brandywine River Museum held the following day. In his talk, Welling described his understanding of the perceptual acuity of Wyeth, whose work he had studied as a youth and returned to in 2010, photographing sites that Wyeth inhabited and represented. Welling's photography has been called a kind of ventriloquism, and his studies of Wyeth's territory in particular a kind of haunting. Through working in Maine and Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, over the past few years, Welling says that he has come to see how his own interest in frames, framing edges, windows, and doorways, as well as in water and wind, was confirmed by Wyeth's work, though the relationship is never literal. The Gallery's *Wind from the Sea* by Wyeth inspired Welling's photograph of the same title made in 2012 (fig. 2).

At Chadds Ford, a smaller group discussed Wyeth's paintings and drawings on display in the Brandywine River Museum. Joyce Hill Stoner conserved many of these works with Wyeth's guidance, and her oral history, shared in the galleries, will be a remarkable record for the future. Visits to the sunlit studios of Wyeth and his father, N. C. Wyeth, and to the mysterious spaces of the Koerner farmhouse and surrounding landscape set the stage for new thoughts about the artist and the study of American art.

• Elizabeth Cropper, *Dean, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts*



Fig. 1. Andrew Wyeth, *Brandywine Valley*, 1940, watercolor on wove paper, The Armand Hammer Collection



Fig. 2. James Welling, *Wind from the Sea*, 2012, archival inkjet print on rag paper, courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner, New York/London, The Olson House, a National Historic Landmark, owned and operated by the Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, Maine