

Mixed Media



ART

 *Will Coleman '07 at the Brandywine Museum of Art, where he is the inaugural Wyeth Foundation curator and director of the Andrew and Betsy Wyeth study Center.*

Andrew Wyeth's work is some of the most recognized and reproduced of any American artist—the starkly beautiful *Christina's World* appears in the sci-fi movie *Oblivion*, inspired an episode in the latest season of the FX series *Atlanta*, and was issued as a U.S. postage stamp. Yet, though many of his iconic tempera paintings and watercolors are in public collections, a great deal more of his work has remained largely hidden from view.

Active as an artist for more than 70 years, Wyeth (1917-2009) focused on the people and places around Chadds Ford, Pa., and Cushing, Maine. Nearly 7,000 of his artworks were collected and documented by Wyeth's wife and essential creative partner, Betsy James Wyeth (1921-2020).

To bring their astonishing private collection to the world, the couple established the Wyeth Foundation for American Art, and in October **William L. Coleman '07** became the inaugural

Wyeth Foundation curator and director of the Andrew and Betsy Wyeth Study Center. Coleman is based at the Brandywine Museum of Art in Chadds Ford, supervising staff, collections, and exhibitions there as well as at the Farnsworth Art Museum in Rockland, Maine. (The Farnsworth has a long connection to the Wyeth family and will house and exhibit part of the collection.)

Wyeth often painted the same landscapes and buildings many times over the years. “The collection is a treasure trove of how [Wyeth’s] ideas took shape, from precocious childhood drawings to his final works in 2008,” Coleman says. “In addition, the family’s library and archives will be accessible to researchers via the Wyeth Study Center.”

Coleman grew up in suburban Philadelphia and has early memories of visiting the holiday train display at the Brandywine Museum. Each summer, he spent time in Mid-Coast Maine, exploring the same landscapes that had

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Among the works featured in Home Places: Andrew Wyeth and the Architecture of Chadds Ford, an exhibition curated by Coleman, are: (top) Brick House, Study for Tenant Farmer, 1961, watercolor on paper; and (bottom) Noah's Ark Study, 2004, watercolor on paper.

inspired three generations of Wyeth family artists. Coleman's grandmother was a painter and introduced him to Wyeth's work. His grandfather, John R. "Jack" Coleman, was president of the College from 1967-77, and his father, John M. Coleman, is a member of the Class of 1975.

"I was always interested in art growing up," Coleman says. "And that was always linked to a love of the natural world—hiking, and being in landscapes like Monhegan Island [Maine] that had such a rich art history. There were so many wonderful artists who embedded themselves in this lobstering outpost and made remarkable work. I got steeped in that experience of seeing painters with easels on cliffs and on roads."

Raised a Quaker, Coleman majored in art history at Bryn Mawr. He spent a summer interning at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and in 2007, when he was a Haverford senior, the College provided him the opportunity to curate his first exhibition, *The Pennsylvania Landscape: Colonial to Contemporary*, at the Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery on campus. It was the first loan exhibition by an undergraduate at the college and included an important Andrew Wyeth watercolor that Coleman transported from its museum lender to Haverford in the trunk of his dad's car. "We wouldn't allow that today," admits Coleman, who was praised at the time as "a precocious curator" by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Married and the father of one, Coleman earned

a pair of master's degrees in history of art and in musicology in the UK, then a Ph.D. in history of art from the University of California, Berkeley. He served as associate curator of American art at the Newark Museum of Art, then became director of collections and exhibitions at The Olana Partnership, based at artist Frederic Edwin Church's 250-acre estate in Hudson, New York.

"I've ended up specializing in single-artist legacy collections and this was the logical next step," he says of his move to the Wyeth Foundation. "This felt like an exciting chance to spread my wings."

Coleman has written extensively for scholarly and popular outlets and frequently gives talks at museums around the country. "I've come to really enjoy speaking to a broad general public," he says. "It's really rewarding to speak to people who ask good, often challenging and critical questions, [such as] why do these old, expensive paintings still matter, and what relevance do they have in a time of climate crisis and violence in the world?"

It's something he's thought a lot about recently. As one of his final projects for Olana, Coleman curated the exhibition *Chasing Icebergs: Art and a Disappearing Landscape*, which centers on a series of paintings and drawings of icebergs by Frederic Church, who chartered a ship to take him to an area known as Iceberg Alley off Labrador in 1859. Also included in the show are works by four contemporary artists who focus on the Earth's changing polar environment, as well as photographs and text Church collected about icebergs and Arctic exploration. In conjunction with the exhibition, Coleman also oversaw the publication of a new illustrated edition of the long out-of-print 1861 book *After Icebergs with a Painter*, about Church's epic trip.

As for the paintings of artists such as Church and Wyeth, says Coleman, "There are those of us who feel they have much to teach us about the deeper rhythms and motivations of human experience. It's exciting to see the possibility of the humanities in general and art in particular to help us in times of hardship."

The first show curated by Coleman at the Brandywine Museum of Art is *Andrew Wyeth: Home Places*, and runs February 4 through July 13.

More information: brandywine.org/museum/exhibitions

—Anne Stein

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WINTER 2023

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