

## **TREASURES FROM THE FAMILY: THE GIFT OF BETSY JAMES WYETH**

Betsy James Wyeth acted as the chief curator and archivist of the Wyeth family's collections and rich history—a role that she entrusted to the Brandywine Museum, along with a major bequest, upon her death in 2020.

Longtime supporters of the Brandywine, the Wyeths donated paintings, lent important works to exhibitions, and made the extraordinary gift of the N.C. Wyeth House and Studio to the Museum. After her husband's death, Betsy Wyeth donated the

Andrew Wyeth Studio and its contents to Brandywine. Through these gifts, the Wyeths helped ensure that these sites of remarkable artistic activity would be preserved and appreciated by future generations. In a final act of philanthropy, Betsy Wyeth planned a major gift to the museum of artworks—beyond works by Andrew Wyeth—as well as the family’s extensive trove of archival material.

Presented here are highlights of the remarkable group of paintings that are now part of Brandywine’s collection thanks to Betsy Wyeth’s generosity. Betsy also ensured that her decades-long project of

collecting and organizing the letters of N.C. Wyeth would continue through a donation of material to Brandywine's Walter & Leonore Annenberg Research Center. The collection consists of thousands of letters, photographs, and other unique items that range from the record of N.C.'s birth in 1882 through the condolence messages the family received after his death in 1945. Betsy collected these letters from disparate sources, catalogued them, and published a selection in her book *The Wyeths: The Letters of N.C. Wyeth, 1901–1945*.

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)

*The White Company endpapers, 1922*

Oil on canvas



---

In the world of bookbinding and publishing, endpapers are the two folded sheets of paper attached to the front and back inside covers of a book, connecting those covers to the rest of the pages. While endpapers

serve a critical structural purpose in holding a book together, they also provide a space for illustrators to create imagery related to a book's narrative but not always directly part of it. N.C. Wyeth took particular care in designing the endpapers for the books he illustrated, including *Treasure Island* (1911) and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1919). Arthur Conan Doyle's historical adventure novel *The White Company* (1891), set during the fourteenth century, offered the artist another chance to create a striking endpaper composition when the Cosmopolitan Book Corporation reissued the novel in 1922 with new illustrations by Wyeth.

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)

*Self-Portrait*, ca. 1900

Oil on canvas

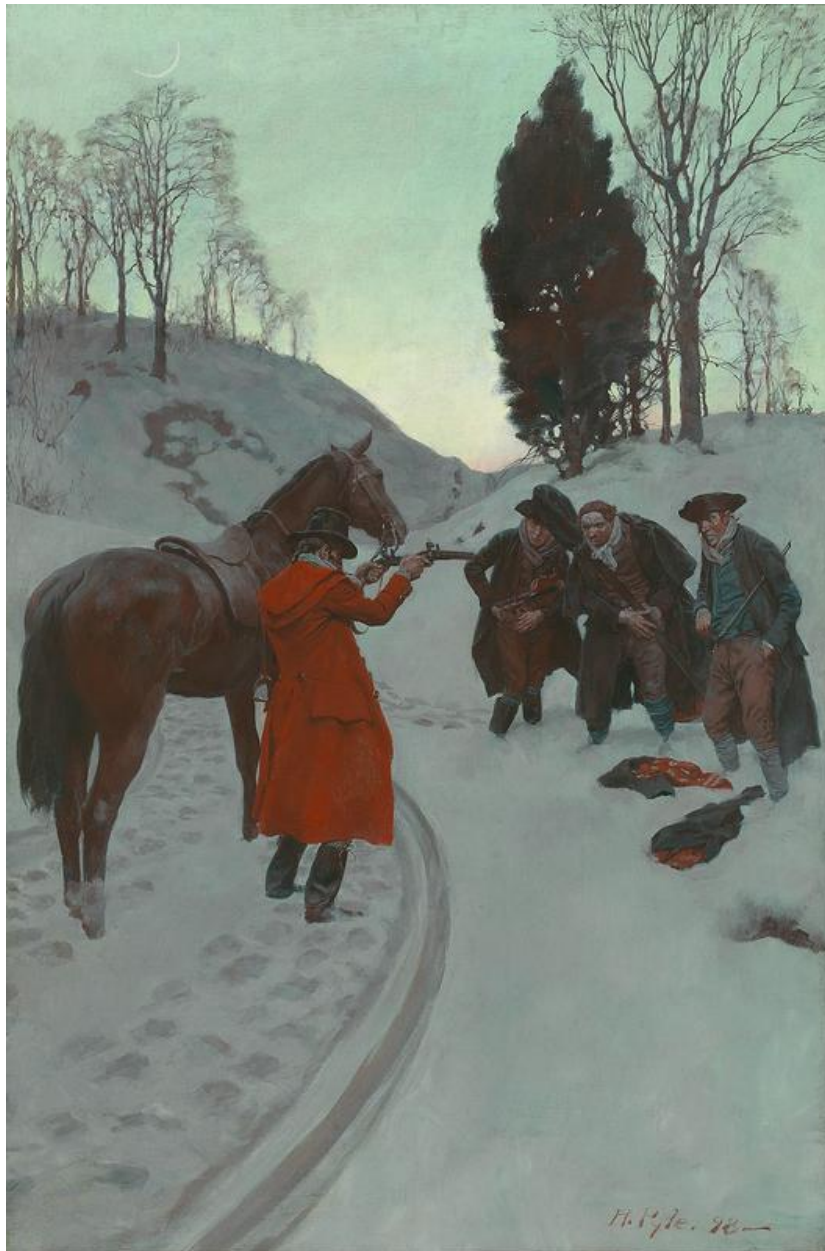


This extremely early N.C. Wyeth self-portrait was discovered in the attic of a house in his hometown of Needham, Massachusetts in the 1960s. The painting was part of a group of works from the late 1890s, before Wyeth moved to Wilmington, Delaware in 1902 to attend Howard Pyle's school. Andrew and Betsy Wyeth acquired the painting after it had been separated from the Wyeth family for more than half a century. It is N.C.'s earliest known painted self-portrait, a genre that he continued to practice throughout his career.

Howard Pyle (1853–1911)

*Small Game Better Than None*, 1898

Oil on canvas



This painting was reproduced as a full-color double page supplement at the back of the December 17, 1898, issue of Harper's Weekly. Unrelated to any text in the magazine, the image was published simply for the reader's pleasure in an issue otherwise devoted to Christmas stories. The Wyeth family acquired this painting around 2004, when it appeared at auction. Both Andrew and Betsy Wyeth had long admired Howard Pyle's work and often gave each other his paintings as gifts.

Howard Pyle (1853–1911)

*"My dear," said General Washington,  
"Captain Prescott's behavior was  
inexcusable,"* 1896

Oil on canvas



---

Even before he began teaching illustration in 1895 at the Drexel Institute (now Drexel University), Howard Pyle had already become one of the country's most sought-

after illustrators. His renown only grew when he started training students, first at Drexel and then at his own school in Wilmington, Delaware. Pyle had several subject matter specialties, but his works focusing on the Revolutionary era were particularly popular. The Colonial Revival movement of the late nineteenth century had sparked public interest in the founding of the nation, and with it, a demand for images of early America. Pyle created this painting as an illustration for Sara King Wiley's story "Love at Valley Forge," which appeared in the December 1896 issue of the Philadelphia based magazine *The Ladies Home Journal*.

Howard Pyle (1853–1911)

*The Visit to André*, ca. 1896-1897

Oil on board



---

During Howard Pyle's time, many literary works that we think of today as novels first

appeared as serialized stories in weekly or monthly publications. The Visit to André illustrated S. Weir Mitchell's story "Hugh Wynne: Free Quaker" in The Century Magazine in July 1897, as part of a yearlong series, each illustrated by Pyle. The whole serialized novel was eventually published with Pyle's illustrations as a limited-edition book by the Century Company the same year. The title character, going against his Quaker upbringing, serves under General Washington during the American Revolution, and in this scene, he makes a visit to Captain John André, a British spymaster who is about to be executed.

Howard Pyle (1853–1911)

*Yorktown*, n.d.

Oil on board



Among the works of art in the Betsy James Wyeth Bequest are several that require additional research, such as this Howard Pyle painting known as Yorktown. Because the work was in a private collection, it is relatively unknown among art historians. While the publication depicting this work has not yet been discovered, Pyle represented the battle of Yorktown—one of the last major engagements of the American Revolution—several times.

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)

*Untitled sketch (cowboys and Indians),*

1903–1904

Oil on artist's board



Given the date of this untitled work by N.C. Wyeth, he may have painted it even before his Western adventures between 1904 and 1906. He gave the painting to the daughter of the family he rented rooms from when he first moved to Wilmington, Delaware, in 1902. Just as his classmates in Howard Pyle's school each selected an area of specialty within the broader illustration market, Wyeth decided to make a name for himself as a painter of Western themes—and he succeeded. His first published cover for the *Saturday Evening Post* (1903) was in this vein, and so was his commercial work for Cream of Wheat cereal (1906).

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)

*A Night Herder, 1905*

Oil on canvas



---

This early work of illustration by N.C. Wyeth accompanied his own article "A Day with the Round Up: An Impression" in the March 1906 issue of Scribner's Magazine.

Recounting his personal experiences on a cattle drive in Colorado, the article featured six illustrations, several of which were full page and in color. Wyeth took only 12 hours to complete this painting in August 1905. In a letter to his fiancé, Carolyn Brenneman Bockius, he recounted Howard Pyle's enthusiasm for the work. Wyeth described the painting: "The subject is 'The Night Herder.' In full moonlight on the plains with the immense sleeping herd in the middle distance." Although Wyeth's painting was inspired by his own adventures, a similar composition by the Western artist Frederic Remington from 1898 may also have influenced the work.

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)

*Slowly and thoughtfully, absolutely without bravado, Drift shuffled the cards. "Keep ca'm Dawse," he advised. "Set down, why don't you?,"* 1914

Oil on canvas



---

In the years after his Western sojourns,  
N.C. Wyeth continued to draw upon both his

experiences in and great love of stories about the American West for commissioned illustrations. In 1914 he illustrated Francis Hill's "Anent: A Biscuit Shooter," a prize-winning work of fiction published in Collier's Weekly. Former President Theodore Roosevelt, who helped judge the story contest, said that he particularly admired the central character—a gambling cowboy. Risqué for the time, the plot focused on a young woman forced into prostitution. Much of the reporting in that issue of Collier's covered World War I, with photography accompanying the harrowing accounts, greatly contrasting Hill's romanticized work of historical fiction.

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)

*"But be at rest; the Black Arrow flieth  
nevermore,"* 1916

Oil on canvas



N.C. Wyeth carefully researched the illustrations for his commission to illustrate new editions of *The Black Arrow* (1916) and *The Boy's King Arthur* (1917) for Charles Scribner's Sons. In February 1916 he visited the New York Public Library to learn more about the medieval period, immersing himself in Froissart's *Chronicles*, a fourteenth century account of life in England and France. The next month, he wrote in a letter to his mother: "The medieval period is gradually drawing me down into its tremendous confusion of customs, costumes and its singular spirit. I feel all pent up with the crowding impressions of an age rich in

picturesqueness but black with infamy. The history of those times is after all rather suffocating.... My head is clogged with long-bows, spears, salets, doublets, mail, quarter-staffs, jousting bouts, ferries, skerries, and moats." Wyeth also made several visits to The Metropolitan Museum of Art's galleries of arms and armor. This painting, an illustration for *The Black Arrow* by Robert Louis Stevenson, reveals the depth of the artist's study of costume and weaponry.

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)

Captain Nemo, 1918

Oil on canvas



Jules Verne's novel *The Mysterious Island* was originally published in 1875 as a sequel to his *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, with the famous Captain Nemo appearing in both books. N.C. Wyeth's portrait of the character is an unforgettable image. The captain's eerie skin color is Wyeth's interpretation of the effect of the glare of electric light in the undersea salon of the Nautilus, the submarine of the legendary recluse. Wyeth conceived the sumptuous peacock tapestry behind the figure to allude to Nemo's past life as the wealthy and learned Prince Dakkar of India, the peacock's native habitat.

Howard Pyle (1853–1911)

*Kidd at Gardiner's Island, 1894*

Oil on board



Howard Pyle (1853–1911)

*Pirates used to do that to their Captains  
now and then, 1894*

Oil on board



---

These two illustrations originally appeared in the November 1894 issue of Harper's Magazine to accompany Thomas A. Janvier's story, "The Sea Robbers of New York." Each

illustration depicts a common trope in pirate literature: burying treasure and rebelling against a captain. Historically, pirates rarely buried their wealth, but the legend of Captain William Kidd's treasure inspired authors such as Robert Louis Stevenson, Washington Irving, and Edgar Allan Poe to write tales about hunts for the hidden booty. Pirate mutiny, on the other hand, was a relatively common occurrence. Crew members often doled out punishments that included marooning the captain or even murdering him.

## **PIRATES!**

Of all the many characters—both historical and fictional—that Howard Pyle (1853–1911) created for book and magazine illustrations over the course of his career, none are more vital today than his pirates. Pyle embellished stories of these buccaneers with images that came to define the classic pirate costume: tricorne hat, eye patch, hoop earrings, scarf, frock coat, loose-fitting shirt, breeches, and boots with buckles.

In February 1911 Pyle was living in Italy, so when Charles Scribner's Sons decided to

publish an “elaborate edition” of the most popular pirate tale of all time, *Treasure Island*, they turned to N.C. Wyeth, one of Pyle’s most talented students. Wyeth’s fervent enthusiasm for the project carried him through an intense period of production. On March 30 he wrote to his mother that he was about to turn his attention to *Treasure Island*: “I can see my pirates passing before me in almost real flesh and blood—mostly blood!” By the end of July, Wyeth had finished the 17 commissioned paintings, all in full color and much larger than necessary for publication purposes. The images of Jim Hawkins, Blind Pew, Bill Bones, Long John Silver, and the

rest followed the model of Pyle's pirates. The proceeds from this highly successful project allowed Wyeth to acquire an 18-acre parcel in Chadds Ford where he built his house and studio. After Pyle's death later in 1911, Wyeth upheld the legacy of his mentor as the definitive painter of pirates for decades to come.

Excerpts from N.C. Wyeth's letters to Henriette Zirngeibel Wyeth, Chadds Ford, PA, (top) March 30, 1911 and (bottom) July 25, 1911

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)

*To me he was unweariedly kind; and always  
glad to see me in the galley, 1911*

Oil on canvas



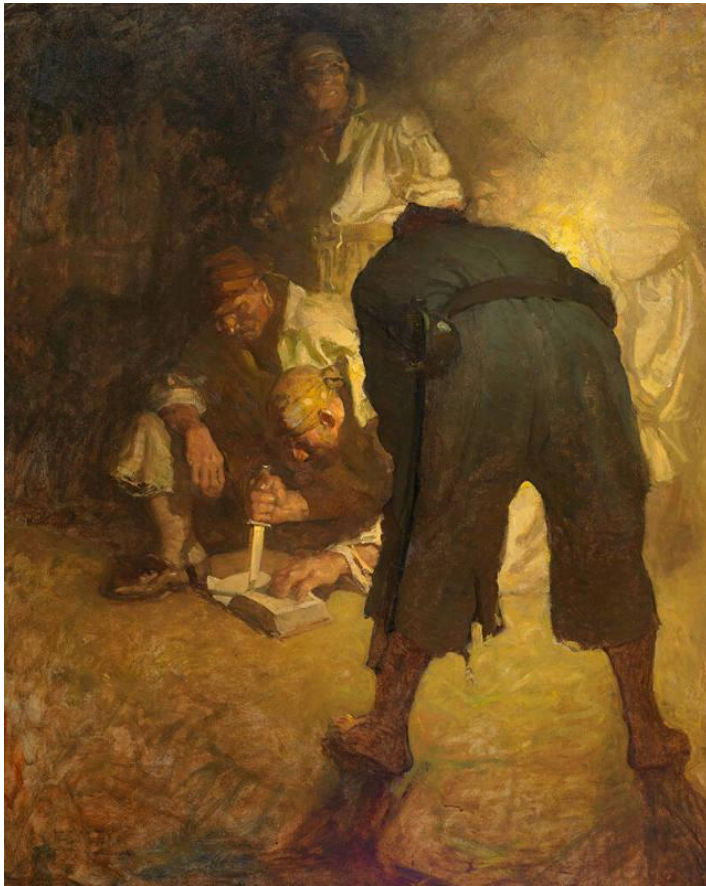
In his paintings for the 1911 edition of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, N.C. Wyeth selected the scenes he wished to illustrate. At this moment in the narrative, young Jim Hawkins has not yet lost his faith in Long John Silver, the ship's cook who later leads a mutiny. Rather than depicting a picture-postcard view of the seascape that surrounds the Hispaniola, Wyeth makes us part of the crew, below deck in the cramped galley with these two characters. He deftly conveys the keeling of the ship by depicting the slant of the floor and the angle of the bird cage hanging overhead.

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)

*About halfway down the slope to the stockade, they were collected in a group,*

1911

Oil on canvas



---

Alternatively titled *The Black Spot*, this painting captures a moment only briefly

mentioned in *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson. After arriving on Treasure Island, the group of pirates who have joined Long John Silver in a mutiny on the *Hispaniola* are now plotting a rebellion against him. Readers learn that one of Silver's men tore a page from a Bible to create the infamous "black spot," an ominous message between pirates—an indictment, a condemnation, and often a death sentence. Stevenson does not explicitly describe the scene when the pirates create the black spot, but Wyeth chose this moment to illustrate, adding his own interpretation to the text.

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)

*Self-Portrait with Palette*, ca. 1909–1912

Oil on canvas



This self-portrait by N.C. Wyeth hung in the artist's studio between portraits of his mother and father. Depicted against an inky background, the artist poses with his palette and brushes. His raised chin and furrowed brow suggest that the artist is scrutinizing his subject—which in this case is himself. The details of the face and eyeglasses at the center of the canvas are much more finely rendered than the other elements of the composition, especially the artist's hand, which is pressed close to the picture plane. By focusing on the head rather than the hand, the portrait emphasizes the mental labor involved in the act of making a painting.

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)

*Andy with Fire Engine*, 1922

Oil on canvas



While visiting Port Clyde, Maine, N.C. Wyeth wrote to his wife, Carolyn, and asked about his five year-old son: "I am wondering how Andy likes his fire engine?" The following month, he painted a portrait of Andrew holding the toy. The perky, rosy-cheeked child seems barely able to sit still to pose for his father.

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)

*Summer Days*, ca. 1913/1915

Oil on canvas



---

N.C. Wyeth's impressionist-style view of a brook flowing through a lush green landscape has been in the Wyeth family for more than a century. Seen from a distance, his wife Carolyn and daughter Henriette sit

barefoot by the water's edge in a relaxed summer idyll. In 1913, when N.C. began the painting, the Wyeths had moved into their new house in Chadds Ford, which is today one of three of Brandywine's historic properties—all National Historic Landmarks. The painting was passed down to Andrew and Betsy Wyeth in 1960, not long after they moved to Brinton's Mill, just upstream from the Brandywine Museum of Art, where the painting was first exhibited in 1973. Part artistic record and part family history, *Summer Days* exemplifies the strong relationship between the Wyeths and the Brandywine Valley that led to Betsy James Wyeth's bequest to the museum.

N.C. Wyeth (1882–1945)

*Chadds Ford Sunday, 1904*

Oil on canvas



---

The inscription on the back of this painting,  
"Chadds Ford Sunday July 31, 1904," not

only lends the painting its title but also links it to a piece of archival information. In a letter written to his mother, now a part of the N.C. Wyeth Correspondence Collection of Betsy James Wyeth, he writes: "This morning I hiked to the studio and in one hour knocked out, in my estimation, the best sun light picture I ever did." In the letter, Wyeth did not name the subject of his painting, but the family has identified it as this work, a portrait of the artist's future wife, Carolyn Brenneman Bockius. This "sun light picture," as the artist called it, reflects his experimentation with the plein air painting of French and American Impressionists.

Henriette Wyeth (1907–1997)

Portrait of Andrew Wyeth Standing with  
Watercolor, ca. 1938

Oil on canvas



---

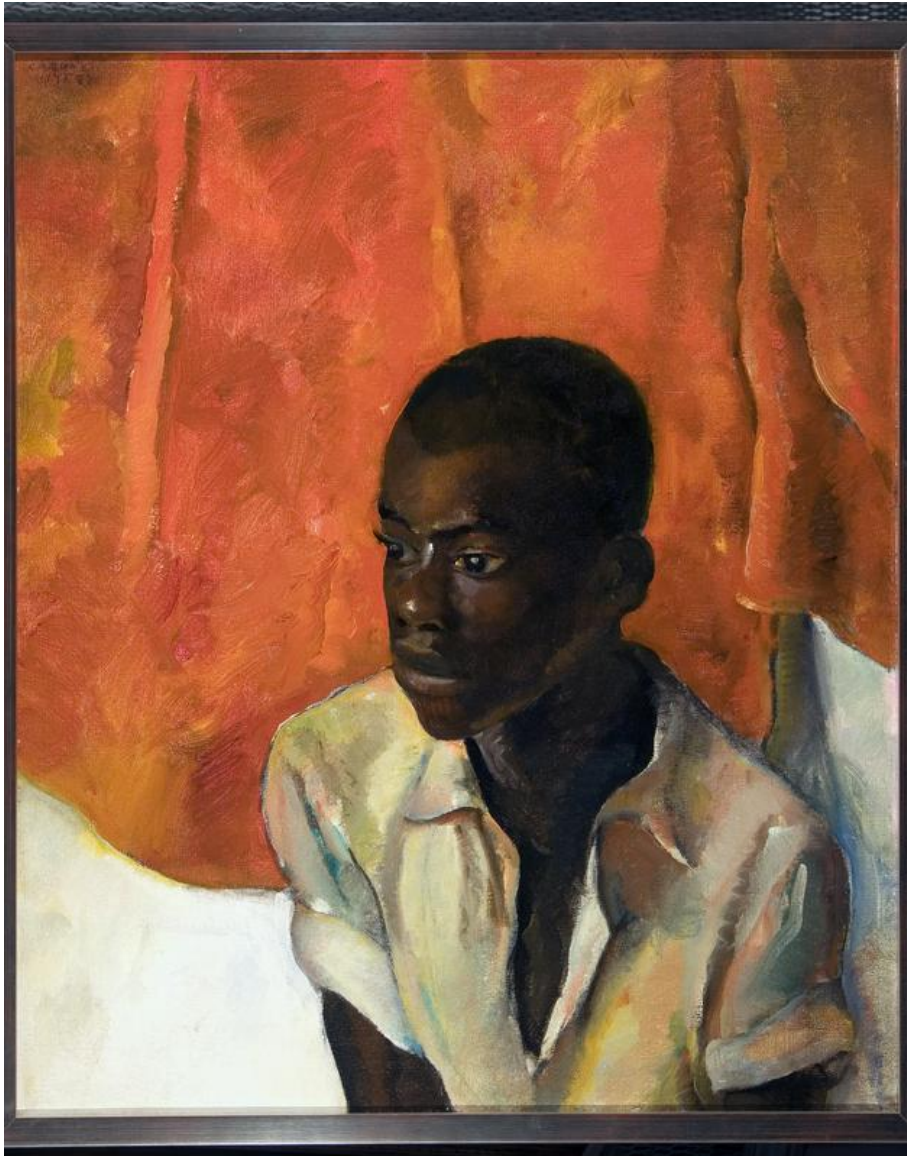
With this portrait, Henriette Wyeth marked  
an important milestone in the artistic career

of her youngest brother, Andrew. At just 20 years old, Andrew had his very first solo exhibition at New York's Macbeth Gallery. Though trained by his father to be an illustrator, Andrew began experimenting in watercolor at an early age. His colorful, exuberant watercolors of Maine subjects received immediate acclaim. Henriette's portrait of her brother depicts a young, self-assured artist standing alongside one of his watercolors. While Henriette's skill at portraiture is at the heart of this painting, her ability to replicate her brother's watercolor style is also a tribute to her own mastery of oil paint.

Carolyn Wyeth (1909–1994)

*David Lawrence*, ca. 1931

Oil on canvas



David Lawrence was a friend of the Wyeth family, roughly the same age as Andrew. He and his father lived nearby, and he appears in Wyeth family photographs playing with the younger children as they acted out the stories of Robin Hood. Over the years he also modeled for paintings by N.C., Henriette, and Andrew Wyeth. Carolyn Wyeth rarely painted portraits, which was her older sister Henriette's specialty. After moving into her own studio in 1931, she was free to work more independently of her family members and perhaps experimented in the genre.

Carolyn Wyeth (1909–1994)

*Brown Bottle*, ca. 1924

Oil on canvas



Painted by N.C. Wyeth's daughter Carolyn when she was a teenager, *Brown Bottle* demonstrates her talent even before she began training with her father in his studio in 1925. Up to that point, she had studied on her own, sometimes using the family's chicken coop as her workspace. In 1931, her father added an extension to his mural studio specifically for her use.

Jamie Wyeth (b. 1946)

*Corn Crib*, 1964

Watercolor on paper



As a teenager, Jamie Wyeth was known to roam the farms in the vicinity of Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, where he found the property that is the subject of this very early work. In *Corn Crib*, Wyeth takes on the challenging regularity of the structure's slatted walls, which were designed to allow air circulation to help dry corn stored inside. So detailed is his rendering that the maker and type of feed pictured are clearly visible on the lefthand sack as John W. Eshelman and Sons of Lancaster's Pennsy scratch feed for chickens.