



Capturing Nureyev: James Wyeth Paints the Dancer

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Painter James Wyeth first met Rudolf Nureyev in New York City in 1974. He was instantly intrigued with the dancer, so much so that Nureyev has continued to inspire him artistically for 24 years. Nureyev was one of the most photographed dancers in history. His image, as it was presented to the public, was very important to him, and he was notorious among photographers for tearing up images of himself that he considered unflattering. Wyeth recognized that the photographs of the dancer only revealed a small portion of Nureyev's complex character. Their growing rapport and friendship enabled Wyeth to capture in the portraits aspects of the dancer not seen through the photographer's lens. Rarely in art history has a model and artist relationship continued and evolved years after the model's death. Beginning in 1977, Wyeth created over 30 finely rendered, small-scale portraits of Nureyev. These intimate studies primarily focus on the subtleties of Nureyev's expressive face and physical presence. In 1993, following the dancer's death, Wyeth returned to several earlier large scale, three-quarter figure studies and reworked them with an energy and vitality that recalled Nureyev in life. The 2001 portraits show Wyeth's evolution as a painter and also reflect on Nureyev as a performer. *Capturing Nureyev: James Wyeth Paints the Dancer* features introductions to Nureyev and his illustrious career written by two noted experts in the dance field. Clive Barnes, former New York Times dance critic and author of the biography entitled *Nureyev*, gives a brief but poetic overview of the dancer's professional history. Lynn Seymour, one of Nureyev's former partners in London's Royal Ballet writes a personal account of her experiences dancing with Nureyev. Phyllis M. Wyeth, wife of James Wyeth and close friend of the dancer, shares her memories of Nureyev through personal photographs and memoirs. In her essay entitled, "Presenting Nureyev: Visual Cues in Promotional Dance Photography," Barbara Cohen-Stratynner, Curator of Exhibitions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, discusses promotional dance photography, illustrated with images of Nureyev used for promotional purposes. Lauren Raye Smith, Conservator and Assistant Curator at the Farnsworth Art Museum, explores Wyeth's artistic view of Nureyev in her essay entitled, "Nureyev Revisited: James Wyeth's Portraits." Wyeth's fascination with Nureyev has lead him to create more than 35 portraits of the dancer over a span of 24 years. Wyeth explains, "What's exciting is the continuity. You're getting closer and closer. Doing a series allows me to concentrate on how a subject evolved and how it affects me . . . At times I could work on a painting for the rest of my life."

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