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AMERICAN ART LEGACY PAYS TRIBUTE TO PASSION, PERFORMANCE  
OF DANCER RUDOLF NUREYEV IN MULTI-MEDIA EXHIBITION

*Capturing Nureyev: James Wyeth Paints the Dancer*  
on view June 2–August 20, 2006 at Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art

KANSAS CITY, MO—An upcoming traveling exhibition on view at the  
Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art documents a special creative collaboration

between two artists: **James Wyeth**, an artistic legacy whose famous family, most notably his father, Andrew Wyeth, made a significant impression on the history and imagination of American art; and **Rudolf Nureyev**, a legendary figure in the world of dance. Organized by the Farnsworth Art Museum, with over 35 paintings and drawings of Nureyev by Wyeth, more than 60 photographs and designs from the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and a sampling of Nureyev's costumes, *Capturing Nureyev: James Wyeth*

*Paints the Dancer* offers a multifaceted view of

the connection that formed between the two artists, and takes a closer look at the artistic autonomy of the third-generation member in the celebrated Wyeth family. Drawing on a rich history of dance imagery in art that includes Edgar Degas' ballerinas and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's cancan dancers, the exhibition also highlights the beauty and athleticism of the dancer's body, and the way it is celebrated in the visual arts.

*Capturing Nureyev* opens with a free, public reception 5:30–7:30 p.m., Friday, June 2. For a complete list of educational events, see page 4–5.

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James Wyeth, *Nureyev—Don Quixote—Yellow Background*, 2001, combined mediums, 47 3/4 x 36 inches; Collection of the Wyeth Foundation

### A creative collaboration

Wyeth's portraits of Nureyev were inspired by the close friendship that developed between the two artists while Wyeth observed and painted the dancer backstage, in rehearsals, and in performances. Wyeth first met Nureyev in 1974 and began working on the portraits in 1977; some of the works were completed eight years after Nureyev's death in 1993. Larger in scale and brighter in color than the 1977 works, these later paintings depict the consummate performer as he is remembered onstage—in lavish costumes against dramatic backdrops.

According to Wyeth, Nureyev was one of his most difficult and demanding models, taking an active role in determining how his body, the instrument of the dancer, was to be presented. "I've never worked with anybody who was that concerned with how I was doing him. He wanted to see everything," Wyeth told *The New York Times* in March 2002. "He was the first person I ever painted whose visage was his world, his life." Over time, the painter and the dancer began to understand each other's art, and the process became a collaborative effort. Wyeth was granted rare permission to observe and sketch Nureyev in his most revealing and intense moments as he was preparing to take the stage.

Nureyev was one of the Soviet Union's most promising young stars when he defected in Paris during the 1961 Kirov Ballet tour of Western Europe. On the international stage, Nureyev's partnership with Royal Ballet in London's Margot Fonteyn became one of ballet's legendary pairings, attracting new audiences to the art. With his talent and charisma, he helped revitalize 20th-century ballet, cutting through the traditions and prejudices by insisting on the widest possible choices of repertory and technique. He was the first major classical dancer to regularly work with modern dance choreographers and danced as a guest artist with the leading international dance companies and set and choreographed ballet productions for a number of companies. He also developed seasons of programs called *Nureyev and Friends*, featuring a mix of European contemporary ballets and American modern dance works. From 1983 to 1989, he served as artistic director of

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the Paris Opéra Ballet. Nureyev died on January 6, 1993 in Paris.

### **An artistic legacy**

James Wyeth once said, “Everybody in my family paints—excluding possibly the dogs.” James’ father, Andrew Wyeth, is considered to be one of the most popular American realists of all time, and James’ grandfather Newell Convers Wyeth is renowned for his distinctive illustrations in classic novels. James’ aunt Henriette (Wyeth) Hurd also became a noted painter. Following their footsteps, James left school in 1958 at the age of 12 to begin his artistic career. By 18, he had already achieved a measure of prominence, with his paintings hanging in the permanent collections of several notable museums and libraries. By 20, he had his first one-man show in New York, and before the age of 35 he enjoyed a retrospective at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Today his work is represented in select collections such as the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, California; the Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, Maine; the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art; and the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.

### **A comprehensive overview**

To further illuminate Nureyev’s persona, *Capturing Nureyev* includes costumes worn by Nureyev and lent from private collections, as well as more than 60 photographs from the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, the world’s largest archival collection of dance materials. The black and white images document Nureyev’s roots in the standard ballet repertory and his expansion into works by European and American choreographers. *Capturing Nureyev* also features designs by Rouben Ter-Arutunian for Tetley’s *Pierrot Lunaire*, the work that Nureyev was rehearsing when Wyeth began the series of paintings. A video biography of Nureyev is also on view during the exhibition.

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A catalogue accompanies *Capturing Nureyev* and is available for purchase in the Museum Shop; it includes essays by two noted experts in the dance field: Clive Barnes, former *New York Times* dance critic and author of the biography *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.

## FREE EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

**Friday, June 2, 5:30–7:30 p.m.**

**Opening Reception: *Capturing Nureyev: James Wyeth Paints the Dancer***

Start your weekend on a cultural note by attending the opening reception for the exhibition. Stop by the Kemper Museum and check out the diverse array of works on view by James Wyeth that celebrate the life and talent of Rudolf Nureyev and the beauty of dance.

**Saturday, July 8, 7:00–8:00 p.m.**

**Lecture and Demonstration: Kansas City Ballet Dance "Shorts"**

In relation to *Capturing Nureyev: James Wyeth Paints the Dancer*, Matthew Powell, dancer with the Kansas City Ballet, will demonstrate some of the strength and athleticism prominent in the work of Rudolf Nureyev by dancing short excerpts from . . . . Powell, who studied at the West Virginia School of Ballet and at the School of the American Ballet, will also lecture about the choreography and techniques presented in these short works. Seating is first come, first served in the Museum atrium.

**Saturday, July 15, 2:00 p.m.**

**Meet Me at the Museum Public Tour**

Join a Kemper Museum docent for a free walk-in tour of the exhibition. No reservation is necessary. Space is limited to 25 participants.

**Friday, July 21, noon–1:00 p.m.**

**Feed Your Mind Lecture: Nureyev Form and Figure**

Join us for a free lecture presented by William Whitener, artistic director for the Kansas City Ballet. Whitener will discuss the work of dancer Rudolf Nureyev and screen several short video clips to discuss the performances and techniques that characterized Nureyev's career. Participants may enjoy an \$8.00 box lunch from Café Sebastienne during the lecture by reserving one with a credit card in advance. The lunch includes a sandwich, salad, drink, and cookie. Please specify if a vegetarian option is preferred. No outside food or drink is permitted. Seating is limited. Contact Kristy at 816-457-6134 or [kristy@kemperart.org](mailto:kristy@kemperart.org) to reserve a space for the lecture and/or pre-order a box lunch.

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**Saturday, July 22, 9:00 a.m. –noon**

**Adult Drawing Workshop: Figure, Light, and Line**

Kansas City artist Bret Gottschall will lead a free figure drawing workshop in which participants will work from live models (dancers). Using both wet and dry media to explore a variety of application styles, participants will capture the essence of the figure on a physical and emotional level, emphasizing the emotional connection between the model and the artist. All supplies will be provided. Registration is required, and space is limited. Contact Kristy at 816-457-6134 or [kristy@kemperart.org](mailto:kristy@kemperart.org) to reserve a space in this free workshop.

**Wednesday, August 9, 1:00–3:00 p.m.**

**Kids Back to School Burnout Buster (for ages 8–11)**

This free interdisciplinary workshop highlights works in *Capturing Nureyev: James Wyeth Paints the Dancer*. Participants ages 8–11 will spend time in the exhibition, work with Kansas City area dancers, and using pencil, charcoal, and pastels, sketch the dancers (and each other) in various poses. Registration is required, and space is limited. Contact Kristy at 816-457-6134 or [kristy@kemperart.org](mailto:kristy@kemperart.org) to reserve a space in this free workshop.

**Thank You**

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**About the Kemper Museum**

Kansas City's acclaimed, free contemporary art museum, the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art opened in 1994 and draws more than 130,000 visitors each year. The Museum boasts a rapidly growing permanent collection of modern and contemporary works of artists from around the world. The Museum hosts temporary exhibitions, installations, performance work, film and video series, lectures, concerts, children's workshops, and other creative programs designed to both entertain and challenge. For more information, visit [www.kemperart.org](http://www.kemperart.org).

The Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art is open 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m., Tuesday–Thursday; 10:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m., Friday–Saturday; and 11:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Sunday. The galleries at Kemper East (200 E. 44th Street) are open 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m., Tuesday–Thursday. The Museum's popular Café Sebastienne serves lunch 11:00 a.m.–2:30 p.m., Tuesday–Saturday; dinner 5:30–9:30 p.m., Friday–Saturday; and brunch 11:00 a.m.–2:30 p.m., Sunday. The Museum and Café are closed on Mondays.

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