

Peter Wyse

Finding Magic in the Mundane



Watching the Game on the Back of our Eyelids, acrylic, 48 x 48 in.

“I have a love of whimsy. It’s an innocuous perspective that people seem to connect to,” says Peter Wyse when asked to describe his artistic style. His paintings are childlike in their deceptive simplicity, fundamentally Cana-

dian in their theme and based on Wyse’s life experiences, from simple moments to challenging times.

The main characters in Wyse’s paintings are children, mostly boys, who often symbolize Wyse himself. Into the Forest is a painting that shows a young

boy bundled in a trademark Wyse toque and scarf holding a walking stick in one mittened hand; a large black bear stands behind the boy, a comforting presence. Dark shadows from the unseen trees in the forest stretch toward the pair from the bottom of the canvas.



The Trail, acrylic, 24 x 20 in. White Rock Gallery, White Rock, BC.

"I painted *Into the Forest* at a time when my wife was going through a health scare," explains Wyse. The boy and bear wear solemn yet steadfast expressions at the beginning of their frightening journey. The boy represents Wyse; the bear, his dog, a stalwart and lifelong companion.

Wyse gestures to a painting that shows a forest of trees with a white wolf running through it, called *Shadow Racing*. He explains that the wolf was a symbol of strength and hope during those dark days of uncertainty. "Noti-

ce how there is no shadow under the wolf," he says. Long dark shadows trail from the surrounding trees' spindly trunks.

He turns to me and recalls the final painting in the series, *Out of the Woods*. "I painted it when we learned that everything was going to be ok," Wyse says. The painting shows the boy and bear walking on the trail with the dark forest behind them, stars in the distance. Light shines on their faces. It is an introspective painting; the darkness of the woods is a memory left behind.

The recent Sobey Art award nominee notes that he is inspired by a range of artists, from Henri Matisse and Mark Rothco to the murals of Mesoamerica. The unique style that Wyse has developed is based on colour field painting, which combines spatial relationships with vibrant colours and distinct lines. It is characterized by large areas of flat, solid color across the canvas. Wyse complements the style with his own unique method of shaping the painting's fine details from layers of paint with a hand sander. "I love to see the



Shadow Racing, acrylic, 12 x 24 in. White Rock Gallery, White Rock, BC.



Of the North, acrylic, 12 x 24 in. White Rock Gallery, White Rock, BC.

history of a painting emerge through all of the layers," he says.

Wyse works from his solitary home studio in historic Clayburn village, 75 km east of Vancouver. Established in 1905, Clayburn Village was the first "company town" in B.C. It supported three stores, a bank, a school and a church and was home to a brick factory. "We live in the 'doc's' house. It has 16 inch thick brick walls," says Wyse, who shares his home with his wife, six-year old son

and labradoodle dog. "The area is in the middle of nowhere. The community is really quiet and mellow; sometimes we see deer in the front yard."

When he was a child, Wyse was introduced to art by his grandfather R.E. Walker, an artist who schooled him in the practice of painting. "Gramps had an advertising agency in Vancouver and sold it. Then he became a painter," says Wyse. His grandfather painted fulltime and was represented by

four galleries across B.C. Wyse spent time in his grandfather's studio and visited galleries since the age of eight years old.

His grandfather is elderly now, but Wyse fondly recalls a period when he painted with his "gramps" when he was 30 years old. One of Peter's brothers as well as a sister in Paris is also a painter. While his style is completely different than his grandfather's Group of Seven technique, Wyse feels that his grandfa-



Midnight Serenade, acrylic, 14 x 12 in.

ther was a strong influence on his own career as a painter and can remember the moment when it all came together.

Looking back, Wyse says he was always good at art, but it wasn't his first career choice. He studied art history and fine arts at the University of B.C. and planned on becoming a teacher. "It never occurred to me that I could make a living painting." The first show he had was on Granville Street in Vancouver with over 30 paintings. It sold out. "My

gramps came up to me at the show, patted me on the back and told me I was ready to become a full-time artist."

Wyse has been a full time artist for years now and has taken part in solo and group exhibitions across B.C., Alberta and Washington state. His work is also featured in private collections around the world. One of his latest projects is painting for local professional snowboarder Chris Dufficy.

Giving back is also important to Wy-

se, who often donates his time and paintings for charities like Canuck Place, a children's hospice that provides palliative care for kids of B.C., the SPCA, JDRF Heroes Program and B.C. Children's Hospital Foundation.

"It is an absolute privilege to be able to do what I do," says Wyse. "Almost a year ago, I was invited to take part in the annual JDRF Walk for a Cure. Three children from the Lower Mainland won a contest to walk the route with a guest



The Family Tree, acrylic, 12 x 10 in.

of their choosing.” One of the children chose Wyse, who was introduced alongside “Fin,” the Vancouver Canucks’ mascot and Arnold Schwarzenegger’s body double. “That was the day my son asked me if I was famous.” After the

event, the boy’s mother sent Wyse a heartfelt thank you letter on behalf of her son.

Wyse’s young son is an ongoing inspiration for many of the paintings, as are his neighbourhood friends. “My son

is convinced they’re all about him,” says Wyse, who never paints a child’s facial features. “The facial details are always hidden or averted. I believe it takes something away from the kids. And this way when people look at the paint-

ings, they can find some personal connection to the characters.”

Just as often as his son is featured, Wyse paints dogs onto the landscape of his whimsical planes. Is it coincidence that Wyse was born in Chinese Year of the Dog? Perhaps not. They have always played a significant role in his life. “Dogs can live 15 years or more. They are silent witnesses to our lives, they see everything we do,” he says. Their labradoodle reminds Wyse of a mother bear in her protective spirit and he has incorporated figures of bears in his paintings to represent his loyal dog.

It’s the mundane, the every day moments that feature strongly in Wyse’s paintings, coupled with his unique method of layering and sanding flat coats of paint to reveal features and details. “It’s like a piece of wood that is washed up on the beach. You can see the various layers of paint on it. My technique is to start with the darkest paint and then work with lighter tones. When I sand at the end, the layers of paint dictate how it will look, say how the freckles will come out, so I could paint the same face 1,000 times, but it will always look different.”

On his easel, Wyse has a sign taped on that reads “Don’t control the substance.” Sometimes it falls off but he tapes it back on right away. The words are his own mantra. To Wyse, it means he must paint his own life experiences or it won’t be authentic. **I**

Ingrid C. King

Peter Wyse is represented by: White Rock Gallery White Rock, B.C.; Hambleton Gallery, Kelowna, B.C.; Canada House Gallery Banff, AB; Level Gallery Collingwood, ON; Koyman Gallery Ottawa, ON.



Conundrum, acrylic, 24 x 12 in.