

In painting's a rural soul, a Chadds Ford native, speaks of his former "dark" self years ago. The artist modeled for the Wyeths.

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Artist Jimmy Lynch once posed nude for Andrew Wyeth.

For another painting, Draft Age, by Jamie Wyeth, he wore his signature leather jacket and a pair of 1960s-style wraparound sunglasses.

In the end, the Andrew Wyeth painting, completed in 1990 and titled Man and the Moon, captured what Lynch thinks of today as his former "dark" self.

Now, Lynch, 54, is no longer prone to the long and moody meditations that once found him sitting on his porch swing for days, pondering a career move to California.

He stayed so long on the swing, Andrew Wyeth came along and painted him.

Lynch and Andrew Wyeth, 81, were neighbors when Lynch was growing up. The 1969 painting The Swinger is now owned by a Japanese corporation.

"I did everything from writing folk music to being in movies," Lynch recalled of his former days in his native Chadds Ford, before he moved to West Virginia five years ago with his wife and began painting in earnest.

The results of his renewed focus on art - about 20 oils and watercolors - are on view at the Somerville-Manning Gallery in Greenville, Del., through Oct. 10.

Many of the paintings capture Lynch's life on a 150-acre horse farm outside Greenbrier, W.Va. There are luminous oil paintings that show a hilly and almost careening topography, as well as scenes of neighboring farms.

"Every yard you pass in rural America is filled with stuff - washing machines, and old TVs, and doors that have fallen off their hinges," Lynch said recently at the gallery, where he observed his paintings with an amused, detached look, as if they were the work of another artist.

In addition to the West Virginia scenes, there is a series of paintings dating to the 1980s, when Lynch was living in a white bungalow near the Brandywine River Museum.

The paintings feature a skeleton that Lynch once borrowed from "Andy," as he calls his longtime friend and former neighbor Andrew Wyeth.

Lynch intended to study anatomy, but he wound up using the skeleton as a model, in paintings such as Keys, which depicts the skeleton crawling in a darkened field, the black outline of a wooden barn behind him.

Although they are accomplished, these early paintings resemble the artwork one might find in a cluttered bachelor's pad - a work completed to capture a joke or observation and then forgotten, left hanging in a dark corner.

They are unlike Lynch's present work, which Sadie Somerville of the gallery describes as full of "softness and quietude."

No longer "drawn to darkness," as Lynch puts it, his work is now more realistic and reflects many of his passions.

A short list would include horses, ancient trees, moonlight, old engines and farm equipment, and 6-year-old son and painting companion, Everett, whose work is also included in the show.

In some ways, the casual collection of old and new paintings is characteristic of Lynch, who has tended to sell his work in unusual venues. His only previous one-man show was held back in 1977, at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

It snowed on opening night, but the guests were amused by his exhibit of summer paintings, Lynch said. Rea Redifer of Kennett Square, a close friend and fellow painter who has worked with Lynch on various film projects, affectionately calls Lynch a "Huckleberry Finn" figure. His rebellious attitude had a lasting impact on small-town Chadds Ford, according to Redifer.

Tooling around in a converted Greyhound bus and before that, in a "lobster-colored" ambulance, Lynch was a constant reminder that artists need not be all that serious, Redifer said.

In West Virginia, Lynch said, he lives very close to the land.

When he's not painting outdoors, he's clearing trails, baling hay, and attending to horses.

"It's a thrill to be able to sit on your back porch and be able to hear your neighbors shutting their car door," Lynch said.

"You hear dogs barking and people talking in their yards a quarter of a mile away," he said. "You don't often get that kind of intimacy."

"I was always told by Andy [Wyeth] to paint what you're about, not what someone else is about," Lynch said, surveying his recent paintings. "That was advice that I really didn't follow until now."

The exhibit was held at the Somerville-Manning Gallery at the Breck's Mill off Route 52 in Delaware. The gallery is closed on Sundays. For more information, call 302-652-0271.