



MEMORIES

A Visit to Peter Watts

Unlocking the Outer Cape's light in a Wellfleet studio

BY [RACHEL BROWN](#) JUN 18, 2020

WELLFLEET — “A Norse god,” his wife, Gloria, said of him — sometimes with a wry smile.



Peter Watts at home in his studio, amid paint and work in progress. (Photo Marian Roth)

With a tall, straight physique and a leonine head, handsome at 88 years, Peter Watts sets before me a series of land, sky, and seascapes. They are breathtakingly beautiful. The surprise comes when I learn they are all recent.

The landscapes live as fleeting moments of the day or evening, the rendering of light and atmosphere enhanced by time and observation of nature, a love of life.

I am visiting his studio and exchanging memories of a long friendship with him and with Gloria, whom I had known since my childhood.

She, too, was an artist and photographer, once known as Gloria Nardin, and was part of New York's Photo League in the 1940s. Gloria died in 2018, and Peter has lived alone since then at their home, a small 18th-century Cape on Pamet Point

Road.

Peter keeps the house neat as a pin. It remains pretty much as it has been since the 1970s, when they acquired it from the writer Marie-Claire Blais and the artist and writer Mary Meigs. It is, of course, also art-filled, with works of many local artists as well as those of Peter and Gloria. There is an air of warmth and comfort and wonderful colors everywhere. But also a great absence.

Their life together had been peopled with celebrities and art notables. At their small dinner table — no more than six people — you could be sitting next to their carpenter on one side and a world-famous art dealer on the other. Gloria was a marvelous cook, drawing on her Italian parentage and upbringing, and an invitation was a thing of joy.



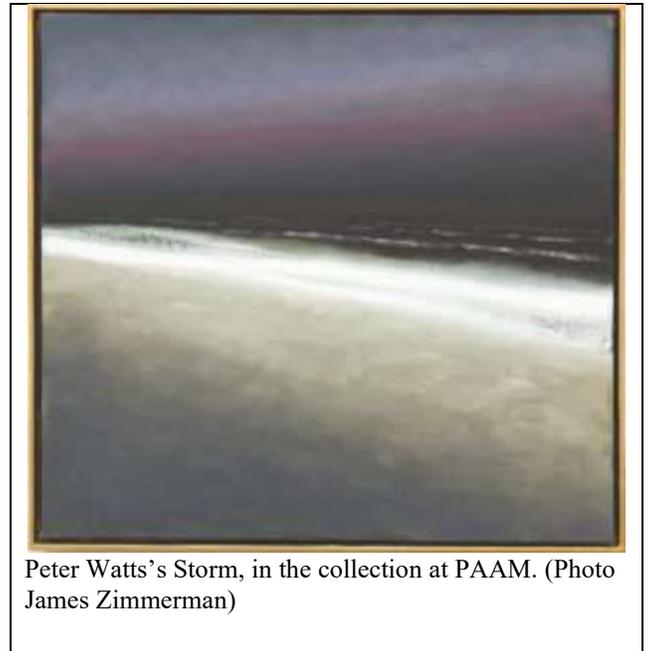
Photographs surround Watts in his studio. Most are of family and friends, but the author was drawn to this one of the artist as a young man. (Photo Rachel Brown)

Now friends call in, sometimes bring food, or take Peter out. Gloria's daughter Rani comes twice a month from Boston to help with bills and papers. Friends love him and care for him. And he continues to work indefatigably, surrounded by photographs of family and friends. He has kept longtime friendships from the past, even renewed them, with great warmth.

Peter has lately been facing health concerns and sometimes has difficulty finding the right word, but he still enjoys recounting stories about his years in Europe, the Army, travels in a VW bus fitted out for romantic adventures, the wild parties at his studio on Gansevoort Street in Greenwich Village, sagas and conquests.

Back on earth, he has grown deep roots on the Outer Cape. Some of his memories are of nurturing local arts organizations, notably the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, of which he was a director for a while. He is a keeper of local lore with a remarkable memory of Wellfleet characters now departed. Of those stories he has a trove.

But the painting is always first and foremost. His age has not hindered the vital creative energies so evident in his recent work. If he is a Norse god, it would probably be Odin, who had the power to unlock the mysteries of the universe.



Peter Watts's Storm, in the collection at PAAM. (Photo James Zimmerman)



Paradise Valley, in the PAAM collection, captures the landscape around Watts's home. (Photo James Zimmerman) Also with PAAM is Peter Watts's Tidal Marsh. (Photo James Zimmerman)