



Meet Jay Wilson, or is it O.M. Norling?

By **Mary Davis**
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Meet Jay Wilson, our new design consultant for this magazine!

Jay Wilson is an artist and businessman, married to Amy, and the father of three young sons. They live in Atlanta. Jay, the youngest of three sons, was born in Georgia and lived here for his first six months. Later his family's home base became Wisconsin, although they lived abroad for many years. Jay's elementary school years were spent in Germany and his high school years in Korea. He knows both languages, German and Korean, and those cultures have influenced his life and his art.

Page 1 | 3 ▶

Recently, Jay created his new business, **Whobody, Inc.**, a creative and design firm which focuses on developing visual marketing solutions. For the two years prior to his new business, he worked as the Creative Director for Soapbox Studios, which also works with our Mythic Imagination Institute projects. His earlier business was named NineRodessa. From 1993-97, Jay worked for Turner Broadcasting, where he was a designer and he was involved in television graphics and design for the internet.

Jay's website is <http://omnorling.com>. Visit it and you'll discover some of his amazing art work, plus you'll get some clues about the mystery of O.M. Norling!

MD: Jay, when did you begin painting?

JW: Growing up, in my family of origin, art was not part of the lexicon. Art was discussed on the periphery, if at all, but I loved to paint. I remember taking paints out of my Dad's toolbox when I was 8 or 9 and painting on cardboard.

MD: You mentioned living in Germany.

JW: One significant thing about living in Germany was that I met my relatives in Sweden! My branch of the family left Sweden in the late 1800's. That person was O.M. Norling, who changed his last name to "Wilson." He just disappeared! He just wasn't there one day. He'd vanished. Then seven years later, his Swedish relatives received a letter from him from New Orleans. Had he been in trouble? He had stowed away, traveled up the Mississippi River and settled in central Illinois. There are amazing letters from him.

MD: What happened in Korea?

JW: I went to Korea as a high school "jock" in football and basketball. Then, an amazing thing happened there! Mr. O'Brien became my teacher. He was a photographer. I was amazed by Mr. O'Brien's power. Korea was his first teaching assignment, and he had been there thirty years when I arrived. He had a sort of "art kingdom" set up. For me it was the first time art was solid, cast shadows, had weight, and I could take it seriously.

Page 1 | 3 ▶



MD: *What was he like?*

JW: His personality was kind, but he was absolute firmness. So I suddenly found myself in an environment where I could be an artist...where we took art seriously...I wanted to see how good I could become. In my senior year, I only needed one required course, so out of six or seven hours in the day, I took five of Mr. O' Brien's classes. I became sort of his assistant.

Mr. O'Brien's emphasis is technical excellence...which leads to my current approach.

MD: *What about sports?*

JW: I continued playing football and basketball. I was being offered athletic scholarships and being lured by them, by all the calls and attention. Then, one day, Mr. O'Brien sat me down in the middle of the room, more serious than I had ever seen him. He said, "Don't you dare turn your f----- back on art!" I am the kind of person who can focus on one thing. So, I turned my back on the athletic scholarships.

MD: *How did your parents respond?*

JW: Art was regarded as flimsy. My Dad saw it more in black and white. My Dad set the tone in the family, while Mom got things done. She supported whatever I wanted to do. There was someone in the family who understood art: my Dad's brother was a farmer and a schoolteacher who loved art.

MD: *So, in college, what happened?*

JW: I have a Graphic Design degree from Southern Illinois University. It was the last generation pre - computers, so I received traditional, old - school training. I think ideas can get lost by going to the computer instead of starting with the messy, creative process by hand.

I started painting seriously, but as a hobby. I have no training in painting. I am self -taught. My painting is traditional, oil painting.



I've never liked the bounce of stretched canvas and I began making my structured surfaces from ¼ " birch ply-wood years ago...Being the son of a master craftsman of cabinetry, I learned that while ply-wood may seem like cutting a corner in quality, it's actually far more stable over time than solid woods due to its interchanging layers of wood and glue...The technique I've adapted to over time is that of the masters: 'Under painting.' I use only unbleached titanium and raw umber to paint my figures and objects. Color is only applied at the end of the process in very thin, translucent layers (colors mixed with liquin). No detail is added when I'm color washing. In a nutshell, my style is about building layers on top of layers from beginning to end.

MD: *You said that in 2005, your son Max was born in the morning, and you had your show that night! Tell us about the process of getting to the exhibit.*

JW: For four years my art vanished. After four years, I got to the point that I felt I was becoming generic, a cliché...part of myself was dying. I said, "I'm not going to let this happen." So, I went to a friend, a gallery owner, and asked for time on the schedule. I decided this was the only way to make this happen, so from 5 to 8 am every morning, I worked on paintings. So, that was my break - through. I felt, "If I'm ever going to do this, it is now."

MD: *Let's talk more about your new business and also about connecting with Mythic Imagination.*



JW: I have built my business by working with lifestyle companies which have high emotive content...things that need to be felt, that create an experience.

Initially, I felt a giant gap between what I do and what Mythic Imagination does; I did not see a connection. Naïveté is always close by with me. I look at something and then one day I realize I have a connection.

This connection happened when I started writing for the second O.M. Norling series. I realized that what I was doing was pure mysticism, although lots of it was rooted in reality. My grandfather, Red Wilson, was the grandson of O.M. Norling and a conservative farmer in the Mid - West. I pulled from him what I call Mid-West mysticism (from old Europe) that included "wart - knots." Growing up, if we had a wart, he took us to the basement, tied a knot, a special knot in a string. He put it somewhere, and the wart would go away. He also had ways to stop bleeding in both people and animals.

So, I'm fascinated by these mysteries, and I started to make the connection with the old stories. They really are part of our lives. This had been part of me, I just had not recognized it.

MD: Back to your art...

JW: It's worth noting, as far as the artwork itself, the written story is important, but I've never wanted it to overshadow the art.

It comes down to this: all the paintings are stories of feminine strength and vulnerability. I think on a spectrum,

◀ Page 3 | 3

strength and vulnerability create the beauty in women...and far exceed what you would find in masculinity. Strength and vulnerability encompass so much and when you put them together, grace and elegance come in. It's really the extent of the spectrum. Masculinity has such a focus...it occupies such a smaller range of the spectrum. My use of animals and static positions of forces and lines are all placed as indications of masculine influence and interaction...and some of it is threatening and some of it is non- threatening.

MD: This takes us back to Amy...

JW: She is an art history major. She is my inspiration, my rock, my critic and my praiser!

MD: Are people buying your paintings?

JW: All my paintings are sold, and I just completed a commission. Every year I donate a painting to my sons' schools' fundraisers and I am also donating a painting for the High Museum's fundraiser.

MD: Let's discuss your process some more.

JW: I do all the drawings and form a series. The simplest way I can put it is that everything starts with writing. The geese, the lion, all are metaphors for what I've written; I pick what's striking in the writing.

MD: Do you paint from dreams?

JW: There is a subconscious element...stepping into the feminine mind and assembling positives and negatives, fears and strengths...and defining those with animals: the powerful grace of a horse, the pin -pricking presence of a woodpecker, the aggression of a lion. You start to position those in a way...you have powerful balance. Then, you place four woodpeckers on a lion and you've created something new...you have this agitator placed on top of aggression. Just like chemistry, you have something new: the aggression is in balance, in check...or distracted...and so by doing this, you can change the presence of a lion...balancing on an umbrella, it becomes more a protective force.

So, that's the fun...of creating the visual...the static tension within the composition... that is decipherable if you, the viewer, choose to take on the challenge!



◀ Page 3 | 3