

AMERICA'S SIXTH-BEST
OYSTER SHUCKER SPEAKS!

ALEWIVES:
THE RUN IS ON

PLUS:
WHAT WAS
THE ART
COLONY?

Down East

THE MAGAZINE OF MAINE | MAY 2023

101 Reasons
to Love Summer
in Maine



DISPLAY UNTIL 5/22/23 • downeast.com
\$7.99US



0 73361 02257 8 05>

What Was the Art Colony?

Maine's towering role in American art owes, in part, to enclaves of artists gathering in out-of-the-way places. With the days of the rusticators long gone, how is the tradition holding up?

BY BRIAN KEVIN



THE ART COLONY WALKING TOUR brochure they hand out at the Ogunquit Museum of American Art explains things succinctly. "Since the 1890s," it reads, "Ogunquit has been a destination for artists who sought the camaraderie of fellow artists and relief from the summer heat of the big city." Camaraderie and relief: a couple of time-honored reasons that an artist — anyone, really — might spend a summer or a lifetime in Maine. Follow the self-guided tour around Ogunquit's Perkins Cove and you'll stroll past the seaside studio that Massachusetts painter Charles Woodbury built in 1898, a fledgling art school in the midst of what had been, until then, a scatter of fishing shacks. You'll cross the footbridge to the shingled T-shirt shop that used to be Brooklyn painter and critic Hamilton Easter Field's art school, established 13 years after Woodbury's. You'll walk past the icehouse that Field built for local fishermen, which became a summer rental in the 1940s, a hotspot for mid-century Ogunquit artists that hosted, as the brochure says, "infamous summer parties and artists' balls." Today, it's a gift shop selling pottery and cobble-rock knickknacks and coasters that say things like, "The answer may not be at the beach, but at least we should check."

Ogunquit is one of two Maine locales instantly associated with the epithet "art colony." The other is the island of Monhegan, which, like Ogunquit, began receiving a trickle of itinerant artists in the later 19th century, mostly from the metros of the East, which by the 1920s had become a flood. Both hosted, at one point or another, Robert Henri, George Bellows, Margaret Jordan Patterson, Edward Hopper, and other bigwigs. In both places, the archetype of the plein air painter, seated at an easel overlooking the sea, is baked into the local DNA (and is still a common sight). But Monhegan and Ogunquit are far from the only Maine towns to have hosted robust communities of from-away artists looking for camaraderie and relief: In the first few decades



Artists visiting Monhegan in the late 19th century included Sears Gallagher (left) and Frank Myrick (right), photographed here in 1890. Facing page, clockwise from top right: Charles Woodbury, father of Ogunquit's art colony, in 1891; costumed for a "masquerade" at Boothbay Harbor's Commonwealth Art Colony, in 1915; a Commonwealth class portrait; Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture cofounder Sidney Simon critiquing student work in 1946.



COURTESY OF THE MONHEGAN MUSEUM OF ART & HISTORY (MONHEGAN); COURTESY OF THE OGUNKIT MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART (WOODBURY); COURTESY OF THE SKOWHEGAN SCHOOL OF PAINTING & SCULPTURE

the
ince
who
mer
ored
or a
kins
nter
st of
s the
nter
after
ocal
spot
ays,
shop
ings
eck."
n the
like
19th
had
enri,
and
nter,
(and
n the
away
ades



of the 20th century, the Commonwealth Art Colony attracted budding artists, musicians, and teachers to Boothbay Harbor. Around the same time, a coterie of American modernists gathered at the tips of Georgetown and Phippsburg, a spot branded "Seguinland" by turn-of-the-century tourism flacks. Lincolnville in the 1950s enticed a clutch of post-war figurative artists away from New York. Eastport in the 1970s welcomed a wave of bohemian creatives drawn by the promise of cooperative studios in an old sardine cannery.

All these places and more have, at one time or another, been characterized as carrying on Maine's tradition of art colonies. But today, among artists, scholars, and others, the phrase itself is ambiguous at best — and contentious at worst.

"The term 'art colony' has become a descriptive but somewhat vague notion in the American language," art historian Steve Shipp writes in a 1996 survey of historical American artist communities. The concept emerged from Europe in the 19th century, mostly France, where young artists, romanticizing pastoral landscapes and peasant life, fled the increasingly crowded cities in summer, posting up in tribes in unsuspecting villages, where locals tolerated them enough to pocket their francs. American artists who'd studied on the Continent — like Woodbury, Field, and early Monhegan booster Henri — adapted the model.

"The idea of Maine as a place for creatives is a very modern one, and art colonies in general are a response to the conditions of modernity," explains Thomas Denenberg, former chief curator at the Portland Museum of Art, now the director of Vermont's Shelburne Museum. "You get them when all of a sudden you have cities and people start fleeing for the country. And Maine is kind of the perfect geography."

Not least, Denenberg says, because so many young American painters idolized 19th-century heavyweights like Frederic Edwin Church and Winslow Homer, who'd made their reputations painting the rugged Maine coast. "Maine is where artists go to test themselves," Denenberg says. "You know, if you're gonna be a macho painter, you go stick your easel right on the littoral."

Places like Ogunquit and Monhegan



Clockwise from top left: Charles Woodbury's 1929 work *The Cliff*; Haystack residents picnicking in Camden in 1955, when the school was in its original Montville location; Red Grooms's 1964 painting *Slab City Rendezvous* depicts Mimi Gross, Yvonne Jacquette, Alex Katz, and others in Lincolnville.



Lessons en plein air, on Perkins Cove, at the Ogunquit Summer School of Drawing and Painting, est. 1898.



Maine Residencies Where the Arts Thrive

ELLIS-BEAUREGARD FOUNDATION, Rockland

Founded: 2015, following the deaths of its founders, married midcoast artists Joan Marie Beauregard and John David Ellis, though the couple had started another foundation in 2009, funding local arts education with largely anonymous donations (they called it Anonimo).

Setting: Currently, the foundation is building a small campus on a residential street in Rockland, not a mile from downtown's museums and galleries. When completed, facilities will include living quarters, four studios, and an exhibition and performance space.

Residents: Emerging through established artists in any discipline, including visual artists, composers, dancers, musicians, digital artists, and writers.

Backstory: Until last year, the residency was housed at the Lincoln Street Center, a former school. It's on pause in 2023, pending the completion of the new facilities. Meanwhile, the foundation continues to offer cross-genre grants and fellowships. ellis-beauregardfoundation.org

HAYSTACK MOUNTAIN SCHOOL OF CRAFTS, Deer Isle

Founded: 1950, by a consortium of Maine craft artists, originally in Montville. Architect Edward Larrabee Barnes's tiered campus of cedar-shingled buildings connected by boardwalks opened in Deer Isle in 1961.

Setting: Overlooking Jericho Bay, on Stinson Neck, an island con-

nected by causeway to Deer Isle. The campus includes studios for ceramics, woodwork, fiber arts, glass, smithery, and more.

Residents: Emerging to established visual or craft-based artists and writers, who stay for a two-week open-studio residency.

Backstory: Among past instructors are German textile designer Anni Albers, maverick glassblower Dale Chihuly, and ceramist and painter Toshiko Takaezu. Community offerings, including for local students, have expanded over the years, and a digital design and fabrication lab launched in 2011 is indicative of the progressive ethos. haystack-mtn.org

HEWNOAKS, Lovell

Founded: 1901, in a sense, when Minneapolis artists Douglas and Marion Volk renovated their Maine lake cottage and started hosting artist friends, including VIPs of the Arts and Crafts Movement. In 2013, Hewnoaks became a nonprofit hosting a juried residency.

Setting: The shore of Kezar Lake, surrounded by the foothills of the White Mountains. Residents stay and work in a scatter of rustic cabins and gather in a post-and-beam lodge known as Rambling Timbers.

Residents: Visual artists, writers, musicians, filmmakers, performing artists, and others, with preference given to Maine artists and those in their early and middle careers, who stay for seven to ten days.

Backstory: Douglas and Marion

Volk, a painter and a textile artist, respectively, hosted creative contemporaries like architect John Calvin Stevens and impressionist painter Childe Hassam. Volk heirs then ran a tourist camp on the property until 2005, when it was bequeathed to the University of Maine Foundation. hewnoaks.org

HOGFISH, Cape Elizabeth

Founded: In the works since 2018, when theater and opera vets Edwin and Matt Cahill bought their Maine property, Hogfish accepted its first residents last year.

Setting: Beckett's Castle, an 1874 turreted stone cottage surrounded by rose gardens on Cape Elizabeth's rocky coast.

Residents: Performing artists and some visual artists, who stay a month, with a production at the end of it.

Backstory: Portland lawyer and poet Sylvester Beckett welcomed his writer and artist friends to gather in his Gothic cottage in the 1870s and '80s. Its rose gardens were planted by a previous owner, who won the castle in an auction and spent the next 30 years planting and tending them. hogfish.org

MONHEGAN ARTISTS' RESIDENCY, Monhegan

Founded: 1989, informally, with islanders Raquel and Peter Boehmer offering free rent and the island's Lupine Gallery donating studio space. Incorporated as a nonprofit six years later.

Setting: Only New England's most storied arts island, ringed by lobsterboats and dramatic headlands. Residents have a room and studio in a former post office shared with a shop.

Residents: Visual artists — skewing contemporary and including photographers, sculptors, and digital artists — at any point in their careers, with a preference for those who have strong Maine ties. Also, a special two-week summer residency for teachers.

Backstory: Five-week spring and fall residencies, accommodating just one artist at time, put participants in a Monhegan art lineage that encompasses Jamie Wyeth, Lynne Drexler, Elena Jahn, Rockwell Kent, and countless more. monheganartistsresidency.org

MONSON ARTS, Monson

Founded: 2018, by the Libra Foundation, which bought up and fixed up much of Monson's Main Street to spur economic development in a town hurting after the close of the local furniture mill. The Abbott Watts Residency for Photography was added in 2021.

Setting: The center of downtown Monson, on the edge of the Appalachian's Trail's 100 Mile Wilderness and on the shore of Lake Hebron. The clean, bright studios are freshly renovated, as are the homes where residents stay. Access to a woodshop and metal shop.

Residents: Visual artists, writers, and photographers from around the world at any stage of their careers, who stay for two to four

played a key role in what Denenberg calls “the construction of the mythic New England, of New England as a therapeutic environment.” Maine became known as “a place where artists retreat to solitude and communion with the natural world,” says former PMA curator Diana Greenwold, now at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Asian Art. “That was the way of selling Maine to rusticators, as a place where you go to get away.”

Susan Danly — then with the Portland Museum of Art, now an independent curator — worked with Denenberg on a 2009 PMA exhibition exploring this idea: *The Call of the Coast: Art Colonies of New England* focused on Ogunquit, Monhegan, and Old Lyme and Cos Cob, Connecticut. She has since

curated exhibits on the “Maine moderns” of Seguinland — including Marsden Hartley and William and Marguerite Zorach — and on the “Slab City” artists of the 1950s and ’60s — Lois Dodd, Yvonne Jacquette, Alex Katz, Neil Welliver, Bernard Langlais, and others — who converged in Lincolnville, near a road with that name. But while all these artists answered the call of the coast, Danly is among those hesitant to characterize the latter two as art colonies. To her, the phrase implies generations of artists coming and going, whereas Seguinland and Slab City, she says, “were moments that were not sustained, formed by deep personal relationships among the artists,” many of whom put down permanent roots in Maine.

For independent curator and arts writer Carl Little, “art colony” is a tricky label, insufficient even for Monhegan. “Both an art colony and an art community, I would call it,” he says. “Ogunquit was a place you went for a couple of weeks or months in the summer to paint or go to a school. But on Monhegan, artists like Rockwell Kent, Andrew Winter, Jay Connaway, and others all ended up buying places and living there year-round — it’s where you have some of the first great paintings of Maine in winter.”

Of course, it’s harder to buy a place on Monhegan these days, particularly on most artists’ incomes. Or, for that matter, to find a cheap seasonal rental within an easel’s

CONTINUED ON PAGE 96

weeks. Monson Arts will host some 100 residents in 2023.

Backstory: Once a slate mining town, then a center for furniture making, Monson also has a serious artistic pedigree. Painter Carl Sprinchorn called it home, as did seminal 20th-century photographer Berenice Abbott. Photographer Todd Watts assisted and printed photos for Abbott for years, and participants in Monson’s special photo residency utilize his studio and darkroom. monsonarts.org

SKOWHEGAN SCHOOL OF PAINTING & SCULPTURE, Madison

Founded: 1946, by artists Willard W. Cummings, Sidney Simon, Henry Varnum Poor, and Charles Cutler, all traditionally inclined artists who envisioned a school with instructors spanning a range of styles, approaches, and philosophies.

Setting: A 350-acre Madison farm that once belonged to Cummings’s family. (It’s said that when he proposed the inland location, Poor declared, “That’s good — there won’t be any of those lousy Maine rocks people love to paint!”) Private studios among woods and pastures are a short walk from Wesserunsett Lake, and campus resources include wood and metal shops, ceramic facilities, a media lab, and a 24-hour library with 15,000 books and other resources on art and art history.

Residents: Emerging visual and craft artists from around the

world (not limited to painting and sculpture), who stay for a nine-week summer program.

Backstory: The first generation of Skowhegan artists — Alex Katz, Ellsworth Kelly, William King, Nancy Graves, and Janet Fish — became art-world darlings, helping raise the school’s profile, but the list of high-profile alums and visiting faculty in the years since is vast and varied; it includes Claes Oldenburg, Louise Nevelson, Roy Lichtenstein, Barbara Kruger, and many more. skowheganart.org

SPACE GALLERY, Portland

Founded: 2016, when the contemporary arts gallery and venue — a Congress Street anchor, founded in 2002 — converted one of its upstairs rental studios to accommodate visiting artists.

Setting: In the middle of Portland’s Arts District, surrounded by other artists in studios that SPACE rents in the historic Durant Block.

Residents: Visual artists, writers, musicians, performing artists, and others from anywhere in the country. Length of stay varies. An independent press housed in the same building has worked with residents on editioned prints.

Backstory: Residents have run the gamut from local creators — SPACE recently hosted Portland musician, photographer, and podcast host Genius Black — to documentarians, installation artists, choreographers, and embroiderers who’ve traveled



across the country. One of the state’s most diverse programs. space538.org

SURF POINT FOUNDATION, York

Founded: 2019, the result of legacy planning by arts patron Mary-Leigh Smart, a co-founder of Ogunquit’s Barn Gallery, and artist Beverly Hallam. The pair lived in the modernist home they called Surf Point from 1971 until their deaths in 2017 and 2013, respectively. Surf Point hosted its first residents in 2019.

Setting: Four large and very new studios overlooking 50 acres of woods and coastline managed by the York Land Trust. Renowned writer May Sarton once lived on the site, and Surf Point’s substantial library includes a complete collection of her work.

Residents: Visual artists, curators, writers, and other U.S.-based arts professionals, invited

on the basis of nomination by a group of alumni and other artists and academics convened by the foundation. The monthly residencies last three weeks.

Backstory: Just a few years into its existence — and interrupted right out of the gate by the pandemic — Surf Point has already hosted an impressive roster of artists. The foundation’s first-ever alumni exhibition, showing through May 28 at York’s George Marshall Store Gallery, highlights more than 30 of them, as well as work from late founder Hallam. surfpointfoundation.org

TIDES INSTITUTE & MUSEUM OF ART’S STUDIOWORKS, Eastport

Founded: 2013, after the Tides Institute, a presence on Eastport’s Water Street since 2002, bought and restored the 1887 downtown storefront known as the Holmes Building.

Setting: In the middle of Eastport's downtown and just steps from its working waterfront, with views of Passamaquoddy Bay. Residents are housed in a historic home and a renovated former church, within walking distance of a pair of studios, one of which is a print shop, with a letterpress and other printmaking equipment.

Residents: Visual artists and craftspeople (though there are no specialized studios other than for printmaking) at any stage of their career from around the world, who stay for two-, four-, or eight-week terms.

Backstory: The Tides Institute places special emphasis on residents finding ways to engage with the community in Eastport and/or elsewhere down east, mandating regular open-studio hours, and most residents give public artist talks or demonstrations at the end of their residency. tidesinstitute.org

WATERSHED CENTER FOR THE CERAMIC ARTS, Newcastle

Founded: 1986, when a group of artists converted an abandoned brickmaking factory into a space for clay artists to live and work.

Setting: A 54-acre campus on a Newcastle back road, next to a sprawling organic farm, with an open-concept studio and all manner of ceramics equipment, including many electric, gas, and wood-fired kilns.

Residents: Clay artists from around the world, students to professionals, for programs that last two to four weeks. One artist each year is chosen for the Salad Days residency, crafting nearly 500 plates and bowls (!) over the span of seven months for the center's annual fundraiser, during which attendees use them to, yep, eat salad.

Backstory: The Watershed campus was once the site of a waterstruck-brick factory, which relied on clay from the banks of the Sheepscot and other nearby streams. During the peak of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Watershed hosted programming for people living with the illness, providing a space for creativity and community support. This year's popular Salad Days festival is July 8. watershedceramics.org

— ADRIENNE PERRON



Left: Hamilton Easter Field, the libertine.
Right: Charles Woodbury, the traditionalist.

Facing page: Rockwell Kent painting on Monhegan in 1907, near the cliff known as Black Head.



Two Mentors, One Rocky Start

On the craggy shores of a fishermen's cove, a pair of rivals birthed Maine's archetypal art colony.

As the 19th century came to a close, Maine was on the cusp — or precipice, depending on perspective — of becoming Vacationland. From Kennebunkport to Moosehead Lake to Bar Harbor, rail service had opened the state to travelers to an unprecedented degree. Small, sleepy Ogunquit, however, remained largely untouched. The nearest train station was at York Beach, and from there, Ogunquit was a bumpy ride — seven miles over dirt roads, via horse-drawn carriage. Perkins Cove, a mile outside town, was especially rustic: cow pasture, fallow fields, a handful of fish shacks. When the painter Charles Herbert Woodbury first laid eyes on the cove, in 1889, he pronounced it an “artist’s paradise.”

Several years later, Woodbury bought five acres on the cove's southern shore for \$400. A highly regarded artist and art teacher in Boston, he opened the Ogunquit Summer School of Drawing and Painting in 1898. As many as a hundred students would arrive every summer, for a six-week course that cost all of \$40 (not counting housing, which started at \$8 a week), kicking off Ogunquit's days as a hotbed of the arts. Under

Woodbury's tutelage, the prevailing sensibility was traditional. His students focused on landscapes, painting en plein air, in the representational mode of the great impressionists. He was wary of the avant-garde. “You can't expect the public to understand your arbitrary symbols,” he preached.

In retrospect, it seems inevitable that the founding father of the Ogunquit colony would clash with Hamilton Easter Field, who first arrived at Perkins Cove one day in 1902, stepping from a carriage right across the road from where Woodbury's students were working at their easels. Field, a staunch proponent of individual expressiveness and experimentalism, was an influential art critic in New York. He ran with vanguard modernists like John Marin, Marguerite and William Zorach, and Alfred Stieglitz, and he was no slouch as an artist himself. His great talent, though, was his eye for talent, and thanks to a family fortune from the manufacture of chinaware, he could support up-and-comers. On Perkins Cove, Field moved into a house in plain sight of Woodbury's school, and, in 1911, opened the Summer School of Graphic Arts.

“All of a sudden, Hamilton Easter

Field comes in, buys up all this property, and starts bringing up a bunch of Brooklynites," Ogunquit Museum of American Art associate curator Devon Zimmerman says. "It's such a Shakespearean thing in a funny way — these two camps of different ideologies, different dispositions, clustered around this small tidal basin."

Woodbury's students skewed female, many coming from well-heeled Boston families. They were known locally as the "Virginal Wayfarers," a play on Marginal Way, the path from the cove into town. They mostly hewed to their teacher's approach. Field's students were livelier, louder, more willing to push artistic boundaries. They took their cues from diverse influences: American folk art, Cezanne, the Fauves, cubists. Edward Hopper, George Bellows, and Marsden Hartley paid visits. The same fissures running through the New York art world had stretched all the way to Ogunquit.

Woodbury was an apt representative

of the old guard. A slight, angular man, he possessed an aura of Yankee propriety. Field was an obvious contrast. He had a high-pitched voice, he stuttered, and he was gay. They didn't hit it off. "When you say 'relationship,' I don't know if I'd say they had one," Ogunquit Heritage Museum curator Charlotte Tragard says. "I've never seen anything about the two of them breaking bread and opening a bottle of wine and talking about brush strokes. They couldn't have been more polar."

The record is light on specifics about interactions between Woodbury and Field, although one particular provocation is recounted in a history of the Ogunquit art colony, *A Century of Color: 1886–1896*, by Louise Tragard (Charlotte's sister). One summer, a nude model from Field's school wrapped herself in a kimono, darted across a footbridge to Woodbury's property, and sunbathed au naturel on the steps to his studio. Woodbury reportedly

failed to find humor in the situation.

Over time, across the country, Field's cohort proved the ascendant one, and many of his students — Niles Spencer, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, and Bernard Karfiol, among others — played important parts in the modernist movement. Another student, Lloyd Goodrich, went on to direct the Whitney Museum, in New York. But in Ogunquit, the art colony peaked and faded. Woodbury died in 1940, and his school closed. Field died in 1922, and his heir, the sculptor Robert Laurent, kept the school going until 1962. By then, artists were getting priced out of Ogunquit. Nowadays, the legacy of the art colony is well represented in the collection of the Ogunquit Museum of American Art. Fittingly, the museum, perched over the mouth of Perkins Cove, was founded by Henry Strater, a student of Hamilton Easter Field's, on land that had belonged to Charles Woodbury. —WILL GRUNEWALD

I Spent An Eight-Hour Day Doing Nothing But Listening to the Skowhegan Lecture Archive

In rural Maine, one of the nation's most renowned residences has amassed a 700-hour trove of artistic insight.

One of the first things I did upon arriving at Colby College's Bixler Art and Music Library was break a compact disc. I'd come to listen to recordings from the Skowhegan Lecture Archive, and my first request was for CDs of the presentation that painter Lois Dodd gave in 1979. But the discs, long unplayed and a bit neglected, were fragile things. None of the student employees who helped me had ever handled this part of the library's collection, nor did they know of a device I could play them on. This surprised me, considering Colby is one of the few places in the world where one can access this vast and remarkable archive.

Established in 1946 on a 350-acre farm in Madison, the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture provides accommodations and work space for nine weeks each summer to artists from all over the world. Its founders were inspired by European art schools and their rigorous programming and prided themselves on inviting artists with "divergent

viewpoints" and counter-cultural roots. Faculty and residents were there to learn from one another — and, starting in 1952, from the big-name artists invited to lecture in the rural campus's white-clapboard barn. The lectures vary substantially in scope — where some artists just click through slides of their work, discussing their approach, others meander through fascinating stories of lives lived in the arts or hold forth on aesthetics, politics, and culture.

"We don't tell anyone what to say at all," Skowhegan archives manager Paige Laino told me. "There are no parameters. We try to emphasize that even though the lecture archive is public, it's hard to access, which gives people license to be a lot more candid than they would in other contexts. What people choose to do with that is kind of their own prerogative."

The Skowhegan Lecture Archive is little promoted, with copies housed at fewer than a dozen institutions, including New York's Museum of Modern Art, LA's Getty Center, and the Yale University Library. Laino calls it "a

little arcane secret you get to access if you know the right pass code." The archive today comprises more than 700 hours of audio, of which I have now listened to exactly eight.

My small taste of Skowhegan was strange and overwhelming but inspiring. I began by pulling a few familiar names, painters like Lois Dodd (a longtime Skowhegan instructor and, eventually, board member) and Alex Katz ("Mr. Skowhegan," according to an intro to one of his nine Skowhegan lectures). It turns out, great painters aren't always fantastic speakers, and Dodd's talk was hard to follow without seeing her slides — or the second disc in the series, which I cracked while removing it from its jewel case. So instead, I spent much of my morning with Katz: CDs of lectures from 1962, 1975, and 1995.

It was fascinating to hear the different Katzes. You'd expect later iterations to be more formalized and confident, and they were: Katz became a better speaker over the years, his stories smoothed, his pauses for laughter better timed. He spoke repeatedly about

becoming a better viewer, learning to see with the eyes of an artist. "Seeing is developed," he explained. "The process of seeing is developed through an interest in art." In his earlier lectures, he seemed to focus his gaze on landscapes and the beauty of Maine, the Earth, the colors and tones and textures and ridges. As an older man, he became more interested in documenting his "encounters with glamour," clocking the clothes of his fellow New Yorkers. It was the same man speaking, the same mind, and it was gratifying to hear the shifts and movements that happen within an artist.

Less uplifting was a 2000 lecture by the Guerrilla Girls. The group of anonymous female artists, who wore gorilla masks in public, made waves in the art world, beginning in the '80s, by calling out structural sexism — one famous poster pointed out that women represented some five percent of the Met's modern-art collection and 85 percent of its nudes. At Skowhegan, discussing their work as artists and activists, they were funny and sharp (and masked), and their points about misogyny in the art world felt no less salient 23 years later.

After this depressing realization, I took a break to stretch my legs in the Colby College Museum of Art. My next request at the reference desk was inspired by artists I saw there: Yun-Fei Ji, Susan Shatter, Neil Welliver. On a whim, I also requested Marguerite Zorach's 1954 lecture and a 2002 talk by Kay Walkingstick, two names I didn't know but found intriguing.

Quality of insight didn't correspond with name recognition, which I should have expected and yet, somehow, surprised me. Walkingstick's crisp, entertaining presentation covered the Cherokee artist's eclectic use of Indigenous patterns and iconography. Sitting at a desktop, I was able to pull up images of her abstract paintings as she described them, and I felt like I was in the room with her,

focusing on unwound tepees, wondering at the expertly muted colors and unfamiliar forms. Cherokees never lived in tepees, she explained, but her art "wasn't about that — it was about the view of Native people from the outside."

Unlike Walkingstick, I knew Zorach's name because I'd heard of her husband, sculptor and painter William, who has many lectures in the archive. Marguerite has one — informal, digressive, and surreal in its distant touchstones. She spoke of the first show of American modern painters in New York, in 1913; the 1915 founding of the Provincetown Players; and other early-20th-century icons I knew only from textbooks. I found myself tearing up listening to her voice, the sound of it, that now-extinct Transatlantic accent. Her stories. ("How can anybody who looks like a perfectly nice girl paint such perfectly horrible pictures?" was her husband's incredible pick-up line.) I felt suddenly very lucky to have access to these recordings.

The lecture I thought about most over the following days was the last one I heard, by painter Neil Welliver, who lived in Lincolnville and was known for his large-scale landscapes. In his 1973 talk, he expressed frustration with the art-worlds' labels, the "chauvinism" of new realism, and the human tendency to degrade nature. He also spoke, unpretentiously and with great conviction, about the grace granted by attentiveness. "There are moments," he said, "brief intervals in one's eye and mind where everything is, for a second, real and clear. They are the most fleeting moments of all." For him, these moments tended to happen in nature, and thus it was not the scene he was placing on canvas, but rather the feeling of having one's "entire psychology" encompassed by awe: "The air is crystalline. The direction of the wind is absolute. Light falls with astounding clarity. Every object sits in its designated space or moves with unbelievable precision. Every gesture is right."

I left the library that evening blinking against the light, my eyes, ears, and mind exhausted, craving sunglasses, water, and silence but still wanting to be blessed with some sudden beauty. Maybe I could have a Welliver moment, I thought. Maybe I'd glimpse a rainbow

or get thrown into a thunderstorm. But there was no moment of glory along the muddy campus walkway or in the gritty parking lot, just a fleeting melody floating from a music-building practice room, a piccolo sweetly piercing the March air. It was good enough. — KATY KELLEHER



Above: Skowhegan students at work in the campus's Blake Library, in 1964. Left and below: painting a life model in the Red Studios, circa 1960s.



THE ULTIMATE GIFT FOR OYSTER LOVERS

Like Oysters?



Over 1 MILLION oysters opened without injury!



FAST, SAFE, EASY!

Opens *horizontally*,
keep juices in the shell

Now **ANYONE** can open Oysters!

207-592-4775

www.awshucksoysteropener.com



MAINE POTTERY TOUR

May 6 & 7, 2023
mainepotterytour.org

WHAT WAS THE ART COLONY?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 92

swing of Ogunquit. Or to buy a midcoast farmhouse for \$1,200 — the equivalent of \$18,000 today — which is what Lois Dodd, Alex Katz, and Jean Cohen paid for their place on Slab City Road, in 1954. The rising cost of rustication was one reason that artists in the later 20th century started to answer the call of the coast differently.

"In the 1850s, in France, it really was a bunch of guys getting out to the woods of Fontainebleau or to Brittany — more ad hoc," Denenberg says. "But that whole 1890s 'we're off to the country to study with a charismatic guy' model becomes something else by the 1950s, something more institutionalized."

Enter the contemporary arts residency — for which the term "art colony" was once used more or less interchangeably. Pianist Marian MacDowell and her husband, composer Edward MacDowell, founded what's considered to be the country's first such program, then known as the MacDowell Colony, in New Hampshire, in 1907. Unlike in Ogunquit and Monhegan, where artists showed up uninvited, stayed in boarding houses, and commingled with fishermen, MacDowell was intended as a set-apart sanctuary for small, select groups (admitted, at first, by invitation and, later, by application). "Apart from being founded in a spirit of back-to-nature idealism," art historian Michael Jacobs writes, "places such as . . . the MacDowell Colony, with their institutional and monastic character, had virtually nothing in common with" the 19th-century French model.

The first MacDowell-ish residencies took root in Maine mid-century and have since thrived. The Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, founded in 1946, is one of the country's most esteemed, with more than 2,000 annual applicants vying for 65 private studios and cottage quarters on a former farm in Madison. Maine-dwelling artists introduced to the state via Skowhegan include Alex Katz and the late David Driskell, Robert Indiana, and Ashley Bryan. In 1950, a group of Maine craftspeople established Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, today on Deer Isle, which a recent PMA exhibit credited with nothing less than having "transformed art, craft, and design in the 20th century." Artists come by the hundreds each summer for short residencies, workshops, and more.

Smaller-scale residency programs have proliferated also — including a juried one on

Monhegan, founded in 1989, which houses visiting artists in an apartment and studio above a gift shop. "Everybody realized that an artist couldn't afford to rent anything anymore," says Danly, who sits on the program's board. In the last few decades, she says, she's seen a "mini explosion" of such residencies in Maine. "People want to come here, but they do need some sort of outside support that residency programs can supply. It's really important for keeping the Maine art scene active and alive."

"I believe that Maine has more summer-residency programs — and I think you could easily say per capita — than any other state," says Donna McNeil, a former director of the Maine Arts Commission who now runs Rockland's arts-focused Ellis-Beauregard Foundation. The tally, McNeil points out, includes programs for visual artists as well as writers, composers, musicians, theater artists, and others (sometimes under one roof, as at Ellis-Beauregard's residency), and the vocabulary surrounding them can be inexact. "A colony is certainly a different thing from a residency," she says, "and then places like Skowhegan and Haystack are more like schools. So it gets really blurry."

Neither is every Maine residency a bucolic retreat, per se. Ellis-Beauregard is currently building a new facility for its residency smack in the middle of Rockland. Monson has hosted artists right downtown since 2018, part of an economic-development strategy for the Appalachian Trail town, supported by Maine's charitable Libra Foundation. "The studios are all on Main Street," says Monson Arts senior advisor Stuart Kestenbaum, who also directed the much more isolated Haystack from 1988 to 2015. "So there are logging trucks going by. The residents are around in the community, they get to know people." Both Ellis-Beauregard and Monson's programs are year-round — an indicator that contemporary residencies are about a lot more than escaping summer in the city.

"A difference from when those first artists came to Maine and stayed for a couple of months is that now the residencies are almost part of a progression," Kestenbaum says. "You get a degree, get your MFA, and then you do residencies. You find people who move from residency to residency for years. It's kind of like going to Europe with a backpack, and I think that's new since the '80s."

"Even 20 or 40 years ago, you could get together with a bunch of friends, if



"Blue Flowers" Holly Brooks



Archipelago

SUPPORTING MAINE'S CREATIVE ECONOMY

Discover Maine Art, Discover Maine Craft

386 Main Street, Rockland ME 04841
207-596-0701 | TheArchipelago.net

you were a New Yorker, and go buy something wonderful in the hinterlands and set up shop," says Marc Mewshaw, executive director of Lovell's Hewnoaks residency. "In the absence of that option, another way to reproduce that sense of community is to seek out these residencies." Hewnoaks, which brings artists in all disciplines to a set of humble cabins on Kezar Lake, was initially established in 2013 as Hewnoaks Artist Colony, but the program is one of many in the arts world to have ceased using "colony" in recent years, on account of its unsavory imperialist connotations. Among the earliest renouncers was what's now simply called MacDowell, which made headlines when it nixed the nebulous term, in 2020.

"Obviously when 'colony' was first being used as a term of art, there were two meanings," Mewshaw says. "It can be pretty benign a group of folks establishing a community, but it can also refer to the seizure of land and violent exploitation and subjugation." For an organization that "believes really strongly in pluralism and uplifting voices that have traditionally been left out of the canon," he says, abandoning "colony" simply felt consistent with core values.

Nevertheless, he recognizes a through line from the old days of easels at Perkins Cove and Monhegan cliffs. "That sense, in the 1900s, of rustivating to the coast, of leaving the heat and clamor and noisiness of the city, I think that's still very much valid and probably even more so now," Mewshaw says. And the clamor, in a sense, has only gotten louder, encompassing social media, incessant news cycles, pandemic anxiety, and more.

Hewnoaks's original owners, artists Douglas and Marion Volk, understood their peers' need for camaraderie and relief. They were contemporaries of Woodbury and Field and Henri, and in the early 20th century, they opened their Kezar Lake summer home to artist friends and students who also made pilgrimages to places like Ogunquit and Monhegan. So what would the Volks make of Hewnoaks today? "They would probably be perplexed by how formalized these kinds of spaces have gotten," Mewshaw says, "but I think they'd be pretty damn satisfied to know this was their legacy." ■

BRIAN KEVIN IS *DOWNEAST*'S EDITOR IN CHIEF.