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How Did We Get Here? Artist Relatives in Provincetown, Massachusetts

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Biggest Art Colony in the World at Provincetown
On August 27, 1916, critic for the Boston Globe, A.J. Philpott, made a significant declaration about a small seaside town on the tip of Cape Cod, a stretch of land that extends off of the southeastern corner of mainland Massachusetts. The front-page headline of the Sunday paper read “Biggest Art Colony in the World at Provincetown” (fig. 1). At the time, there were said to be some 600 artists living, mainly seasonally, and working in the colony that ranged from painters and sculptors to playwrights and musicians from all areas of the United States and abroad. Provincetown became a separate world where artists could simultaneously isolate themselves from wherever they came from or wherever they lived during the off-season while also immersing themselves in a unique environment with other creative individuals. The artistic community has various groups of predecessors to thank for transforming this town at the very tip of a curving peninsula into a prosperous art colony and eventually, major tourist attraction.

The first of these groups of predecessors are the Pilgrims who set anchor in Provincetown Harbor from England aboard the Mayflower in 1620. Before continuing to Plymouth, the first settlers drafted and signed the Mayflower Compact, which set in motion one of the earliest foundations of democracy. The second group that made a profound impact on the town is the Portuguese population who arrived in the 19th century after sailors were hired to work on American whaling and fishing ships. Over the course of more than a century, the town was transformed from a Yankee village where whaling was the primary industry to a town dominated by the Portuguese community who had gained the expertise to establish a successful fishing industry. When the art colony truly came into existence at the turn of the 19th century, Provincetown had gained the reputation as a prosperous fishing center, a reputation it continues to hold today. Prior to the 19th century, Provincetown was still relatively difficult to get to. It wasn’t until the late 19th century that people could travel to the town by train. In 1873, with the expansion of the Old Colony Railroad following the merger of the Cape Cod Railroad with the Old Colony and Newport Railway, a train line was extended to Provincetown, making the town increasingly more accessible to the outside world.

Today, Provincetown continues to be, primarily during the summer months, a destination location for families, artists, the LGBT community, and everyone in
between. The population during the off-season remains close to 3,000 people while the summer visitors can reach over 60,000 according to a 2016 figure. Although inevitable changes have taken place since the arrival of the Pilgrims, from competing vacation destinations to increases in rent, the town has managed to resemble some form of its original status as a pioneering art colony. During the early years of the colony, a studio for the summer could be rented for around $25. For well-known cultural figures, such as Norman Mailer, Eugene O’Neil, John Waters and Edward Hopper, Provincetown has been either a permanent or seasonal home to individuals that have become highly influential in their fields. Equally as important as these artistic figures are the institutions and programs that added to their overall significance. By 1916, there were six summer art schools led by the likes of Charles Webster Hawthorne and George Elmer Browne that artists flocked to Provincetown to take part in. The schools made institutions, such as the Provincetown Art Association and Museum and the Fine Arts Work Center, as well as the major galleries of the time, which include the Sun Gallery and Long Point Gallery, a possibility because they became incentives for artists to travel to the colony. The art schools attracted artists, dealers and art-lovers, created new artists, and ultimately solidified the town as an art-centric destination. Today, Provincetown contains over 60 art galleries of various sizes, representing both emerging and established artists working in a variety of different media. Provincetown is noteworthy for its ability to mold and shift, much like its physical landscape. It exists as a microcosm of the greater art world, taking on multiple identities rather than limiting itself or surrendering to one specific style or movement.

Other areas of the United States were being dubbed art colonies and becoming popular hubs for artists around the same time and in fairly close proximity to Provincetown, such as Easthampton where Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning worked or Gloucester, Massachusetts where Hans Hofmann and Hopper spent time before coming to Cape Cod. When considering a larger scope, New York City, specifically Greenwich Village, and Paris, France became the desired locations for many artists. When the First World War was occurring, artists were choosing to stay put in the States and Provincetown provided that feeling of escape that they couldn’t achieve with Europe at the time or even New York, especially in the dead of summer. However, Provincetown proved itself as a coveted destination up there with Greenwich Village and Paris, attracting many of the same artists. The town is unique based on how long the art colony has been in existence and its level of influence despite being such a small town. In tracing the trajectory of American art history, Provincetown has become connected, in some shape or form, to every major movement, extending from Impressionism and Post-Impressionism to Abstract Expressionism and Modernism up to Contemporary art. It’s an unfathomable feat for this relatively insignificant place in the world to have gained such a substantial status. For many of the artists who emerged with each new decade and artistic movement, Provincetown became somewhat of a necessity along the creative journey.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Provincetown art colony is how within one family, multiple members will often become artists, a trend that has remained consistently prominent. Generations of artists have continually taken the pilgrimage to this utopian town as a welcoming escape from more commonplace artistic hubs. Whether coming for the landscape or merely as a place to work, Provincetown has been home to some of the leading artistic figures since the early 20th century. It is common that the children of these figures will become artists.
themselves, maintaining a relationship with Provincetown in some capacity. Through the analysis of two or three generations of artists growing up or working within Provincetown, one can begin to discover how the likelihood of parental influence simultaneously exists with the younger generation’s desire to develop their own innovative artistic practice. Through the examination of eight families, one can begin to understand how Provincetown became a concrete source of comfort and inspiration, whether directly or indirectly, for the first generation and how that has been passed down to the following generations.

The Schools

Why were artists drawn to Provincetown in the first place? Many will argue that the unique light emanating across the landscape was enough to make a person never want to leave. Provincetown has come to be known as one of the leading art colonies since Charles Webster Hawthorne founded the Cape Cod School of Art during the summer of 1899 (fig. 2). He was known for a plein air approach to painting, which resulted in entire classes being conducted outside. His work takes an impressionistic approach to realism where he is conscious of the subject but it is slightly obstructed by a blend of brushstrokes and a bold use of color. Hawthorne was more concerned with light than the specific details of the subject. The term “mudhead” was coined in reference to his work due to the ways in which color take precedence over the subject without making it completely unrecognizable. His priority with his teaching was to make his students see what was in front of them in a new way and be able to translate that onto the canvas. To add to the list of contributions to the art colony, he was a founder and served as Vice President to the Provincetown Art Association and Museum when it opened in 1914. Two of the more prominent schools that opened up around the same time as Hawthorne’s was E. Ambrose Webster’s Summer School of Painting in 1900 and George Elmer Browne’s West End School of Art several years later in 1916. Webster took a modernist approach and similarly to Hawthorne, was focused on capturing the light through the strategic use of color. Browne, influenced by his time spent in Paris in the early 20th century, taught an impressionistic style to his students yet preferred to work indoor from sketches. By 1916, over 300 artists were participating in the various art schools that had begun to crop up in Provincetown since Hawthorne’s arrival.

The next wave of artists who came to Provincetown and opened up schools demonstrate the changes that were taking place within the art world on a greater scope, outside of the art colony. A former assistant of Hawthorne, Henry Hensche, took over the Cape Cod School of Art when Hawthorne died in 1930 and changed the
name to the Cape School of Art. As someone who had worked closely with Hawthorne, Hensche’s teaching technique was closely aligned with his former boss. For the next 55 years, Hensche continued with the en plein air teaching method that became a fixture of Provincetown culture, bringing more and more visitors to the art colony that yearned to learn from other artists and be immersed in the physical environment.

1935 brought the arrival of German-born Hans Hofmann and his Summer School of Art. He taught in Hawthorne’s former studio space on Miller Hill Road while also maintaining his job teaching at the Art Students League in New York during the off-season. In reference to Hawthorne’s teachings and overall influence, Hofmann stated, “What Hawthorne as a painter aimed for and gave by intuition has become today a conscious tool of his successors. I am not surprised to find in the vanguard of today’s movements, painters who still appreciate the privilege of having been his students.” However, Hofmann became one of the leading figures to bring a new, abstract, non-representational mode of teaching to the colony known as Abstract Expressionism. The movement would eventually fully erupt in New York City in the 1940s and become the leading style of the art scene. Hofmann had spent a decade in Paris at a time when Fauvism and Cubism were becoming increasingly more popular with artists. His method of teaching became known as the “push and pull” theory. Hofmann would have his students paint from models or still lifes in the classroom but urged them to work on impulse and take liberties with the details. The theory has to do with form and color and how they create illusions of space that either recede or extend beyond the canvas. Hofmann eventually closed his school in 1958, eager to make his own painting his priority. His school was particularly unique because he didn’t utilize the landscape of Provincetown in the same way that the earlier schools, as well as ones existing at the same time as his, had.

The schools had a profound influence on many of the artists who came to Provincetown, oftentimes traveling to the colony specifically to take part in them. The institutions, from the museums to the galleries and residency programs, were equally as important fixtures in the community that enabled the work of these artists and students to be seen by the public.

The Institutions

Although there have been numerous influential institutions since the art colony came into being, there are a select few that have proved to be the true taste-makers of the town. Prior to the 1860s, the French Academy, founded in the 17th century, determined what was considered the acceptable art of the time through their Salon exhibitions that had a notoriously high rejection rate. When Americans began coming to Paris around the turn of the century, Impressionism had become the standard style. When the Provincetown Art Association and Museum was founded in 1914, there was a split between artists who had spent time abroad, being exposed to styles that took a step in the direction away from Impressionism towards Expressionism and Cubism and those who were still devoted to the more conservative school of Impressionism that was carried out by Hawthorne. As the normalcy of more innovative styles began to settle in over time, the Art Association became more adaptive. Prior to 1921, Town Hall was being used as the primary headquarters for the institution but eventually the
the divide that existed within the town. It wasn’t until 1977 that the word “museum” was officially added to the title, a decision that was made in response to the institution’s collection that had grown to over 1,000 objects. From 2005-2006, the Art Association was completely renovated, a decision that many took issue with due to the unfitting modern aesthetic (fig. 3). The institution now serves to celebrate the evolution of art movements, maintaining its overall mission to pay tribute to the legacy of the art colony while remaining open to the inevitability of changing times and contemporary art.

We can look to three of the major galleries for demonstrating just how much Provincetown was a reflection of the larger art market, a microcosm of what was happening in major cities like New York, especially within the downtown art scene where creative experimentation was reaching new heights during the 1950s. The first of these galleries is Kootz Gallery, which was opened by art dealer Sam Kootz in 1953 at 481 Commercial Street. This particular gallery was noteworthy because it was an added branch to a gallery that was already located in New York City, representing well-established artists, such as Robert Motherwell, Milton Avery, Jack Tworkov, and Adolph Gottlieb. By 1955, Kootz had given responsibility of the gallery over to a James Joyce scholar named Nat Halper. Halper renamed the gallery HCE after the phrase “Here Comes Everyone” from Joyce’s Finnegan’s Wake. In existence until 1967, HCE served as a status symbol for its connection to the greater art world beyond the colony. It was promoting artists who had already achieved a level of success and therefore was immediately granted respect within town.

The next major gallery is the Sun Gallery, opened by poet Dominic Falcone and artist Yvonne Anderson in 1955 at 393 Commercial Street. Sun Gallery stood as an institution in opposition to the onset of Abstract Expressionism, representing post-war figurative artists. Abstract Expressionism was increasingly becoming the leading style of the time, and figurative artists were attempting to wedge out a space for themselves. The gallery became known as a kind of performance space where some of the first happenings took place. The gallery has become especially famous for an incident that occurred in 1959, the same year the gallery closed, when new owners, Irene Baker and Bill Barrell, had taken over the gallery. There was an exhibition of artist Tony Vevers’ work, including exposed images of nude women that hung in the
The work was deemed inappropriate by the local police force and resulted in a curtain being hung in front of the window so that children would not have to be exposed to the so-called “pornography,” yet on the opposing side, Hofmann initiated a manifesto that was willfully signed by almost 150 different artists and other supporters.\textsuperscript{11} The Sun Gallery provided a small, yet substantial stage for artists who were resisting a shift away from the figurative.

The third gallery, Long Point Gallery, was a cooperative organization that opened in 1977 and stayed open for the next two decades. The late 1960s into the 1970s were a time when the art colony was considered to be suffering, which involved the closing of many galleries around town. Long Point was originally founded by four well-known figures: Leo Manso, Vevers, Budd Hopkins, and Fritz Bultman. The founding members eventually reached out to others, such as Motherwell and Paul Resika, to join in their mission to revitalize the colony. Similarly to HCE, the majority of the artists shown at Long Point Gallery had representation in Manhattan, yet Long Point provided these artists with the opportunity to show newer work that they considered more experimental and an off-shoot from what people were used to seeing from them. In the founders’ efforts to boost the colony, the gallery was host to the famous Summer Sundays, which involved the weekly opening of a new exhibition and an opportunity to mingle with the artistic elite. During the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Long Point, the strip of land that forms the curving tip of Cape Cod, was home to fishermen and their families. When they left, many of the houses on Long Point were sent across the bay to the main part of town, one of which was the American Legion building that was eventually converted into Long Point Gallery. Unfortunately, the American Legion sold the building in 1998. Long Point was unable to extend its lease and the decision was made to close the gallery for good. Despite the gallery’s unfortunate closing in the ‘80s, it was successful in revitalizing the colony, not necessarily to its full glory but to some version of how it operated prior to the decline.

Following the Second World War, Provincetown was considered to be in another golden age during the 1950s and into the 1960s with many artists from New York flooding in.\textsuperscript{12} The ‘60s was a time of immense change and revolution that was felt in Provincetown, a place that has always proved to be a welcoming environment for the rebellious types. Provincetown became a slice of secluded heaven for this new generation that felt unheard or victimized by society in some way. This nationwide cultural shift may have had a lot to do with the changes that occurred within the art colony, challenging the advocates of Abstract Expressionism, and worrying many of the artists who had been around since the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. In the age of commercialism and Pop art, a new approach to figurative art was becoming a threatening force to the older generation. In another attempt to revive the colony, an attempt that proved more successful than a traditional gallery, a new type of institution was established that took the form of an artist residency program. The Fine Arts Work Center was opened in 1968 by a group of artists, writers, and other various supporters to help boost the art colony. Some of the more notable founders include Salvatore Del Deo, Motherwell, and Tworkov. As Provincetown was beginning to become an increasingly more expensive place to live, work, or visit, young artists early in their careers had the opportunity to apply for a fellowship and focus on their work without having to worry about the day-to-day struggles of trying to get by. Local gallery owner, Berta Walker, who has been summering in Provincetown since she was a child, describes the mission of the organization as a place “to give artists the opportunity to
really focus on their art without thinking.” This idea of escaping into the creative process was further implemented by the founders’ decision to make the fellowship during the off-season when the town becomes rather dismal and quiet, yet if anything was going to bring creative life back into the town it was to bring artists around to see and appreciate Provincetown at all times of year rather than just the momentary seduction of summertime. For the first year, the Fine Arts Work Center only gave fellowships to visual artists before extending the program to writers by 1969. Today, the organization continues to offer 7-month residencies each year to 10 artists and 10 writers and have expanded their program to include a summer workshop. Organizations like the Fine Arts Work Center prove just how committed the veteran members of the art colony are to preserving its legacy and ensuring its prosperous existence for years to come. Their efforts prove, despite their established status within the art world, a kinship with the younger generation.

The Artists

Artists come for the light, out of curiosity, or as a place of solitude to work. Artists have found Provincetown essential to their creative process whether that means using the landscape as inspiration, physically incorporating parts of the landscape into their work, or taking advantage of the town’s available spaces to set up studios. Even if the aesthetic appeal of the town has no direct influence on the work, it is still present in the creative process based on the fact that the artist chose to come to create there. Artists have the simultaneous opportunity to network and interact with likeminded individuals yet they can also retreat into their studios and fully disconnect themselves. In a city like New York, even when you are technically alone, you still feel the inescapable presence of others all around you.

It isn’t an uncommon phenomenon for children to follow in their parents’ or their grandparents’ professional footsteps, yet it is a fascinating one when it is tied to a place, and such a historically rich place like Provincetown. For artists who preferred to spend the off-season elsewhere, Provincetown became the perfect vacation spot once they began to start families. Often, as many of these artists matured, they decided to permanently move to the art colony, fully immersing their children from a young age in the power of the place. As the children grew up to become artists, it was up to them if they felt compelled to stay or an urgency to be in a city environment. Leaving was often a way to establish their own identity as an artist separate from their parents. When discussing the artistic practices of generations of artists within the same family, an important question arises concerning comparison: does the younger generation find flattery in the comparisons to their parents or do they actively create with the intention to be viewed in direct opposition to their parents? Although many of these artists would cringe at the topic of comparison, it is a necessary and unifying topic, especially when Provincetown becomes the basis by which many of these comparisons are made.
John Whorf (1903-1959)  
Nancy Whorf (1930-2009)

Born and raised in Winthrop, Massachusetts in 1903, John Whorf began summering in Provincetown in 1917 and became a student of both Hawthorne and Browne, gaining the technique and appreciation for the en plein air impressionistic mode of painting. As a student of these two figures, Whorf looked to his surroundings as inspiration for his subjects. The landscape, including the water, the harbor, and the boats, became common fixtures of his work (fig. 4). Originally, he chose to work with oil paints before switching to watercolors in the early 1930s, which has become the medium he is most known for. His methodology comes down to how the basic components of a composition come together to create an image, stating, “A good painter is one who can paint four white eggs placed on a white plate, which sits on a white tablecloth.”

Whorf permanently settled in Provincetown in 1937, accompanied by his wife and their four children. Being able to experience the town in its off-season was a major influence on Whorf’s work as he was able to capture the moody light that bathed the landscape or the crashing waves that disrupted the quietness and stillness during the winter months. As a descendant of Cape Cod fishermen, Whorf was drawn to capturing the thrilling and at times unsettling energy of the surrounding water. He has come to be known as a true pioneer of watercolor during the 20th century, presenting aesthetically pleasing images of Provincetown, as well as city scenes and his travels to Europe. Whorf is an example of an artist who is a direct product of how the art colony was defined in its early years, which was primarily based around the Hawthorne model.

Whorf’s daughter, Nancy, having lived in Provincetown the majority of her life, chose to make the town her subject. Her journey to becoming an artist was not straightforward, as she channeled her creative energy into furniture decoration before becoming a painter in the 1980s. She also chose to follow in her father’s footsteps and...
use watercolors as her primary medium early on yet eventually switched to oil paints and a palette knife with the intention to distance her work away from being compared to her father’s, admitting, “He was a masterful painter. How could I develop a technique so someone wouldn’t come up and say, ‘That’s a poor John Whorf.’”¹⁵ Using the palette knife allowed Whorf to work quickly, which she preferred, and establish her own personal style that is less about the inclusion of details and more about the simplification of form and the vibrancy of color (fig. 5). There had to be some distinction and she wasn’t willing to sacrifice Provincetown. She looked to the town as the source of her subjects, whether it was fishermen at sea or Commercial Street, empty and snow-covered in the middle of winter. She didn’t have the opportunity to learn under Hawthorne, yet Whorf could subconsciously learn his method from watching her father and then re-interpret it for her own style and generation.

**Chaim Gross (1904-1991)**

**Mimi Gross (1940-)**

Chaim Gross was born in 1904 in the former Austrian Galicia, the territory of modern-day Ukraine. As part of a Jewish family living in Eastern Europe during the First World War, the artist found himself having to continually relocate at a young age. By 1921, he found a permanent home when he immigrated to New York City. Gross is primarily known for his watercolors, drawings and sculptures, often depicting circus performers or children in dancing motions with their mothers rendered in wood and stone as well as bronze, which he began to experiment with in the 1950s. His work takes artistic liberties with the human form in order to put great emphasis on the movement of his figures. Gross was never an official student of Hawthorne but he was able to attend one of his demonstrations when he first visited Provincetown in the 1920s.¹⁶ He began visiting Provincetown with his family, including daughter Mimi Gross, in 1943, and continued to come back every following summer. Eventually the artist bought Browne’s studio in 1950. Gross’ artwork is not a direct reflection of the town; rather, Provincetown provided him with a pleasant place to work and engage with a community away from New York. He
is also known for his public works. One of which, appropriately titled \textit{The Tourists}, still sits in a central location in the middle of Commercial Street (fig. 6).

Mimi Gross' work is a bit more far-reaching than her father's, having worked in various mediums that span from painting and drawing to film and set design. She also has become known for her collaborations with former husband and fellow artist, Red Grooms (b. 1979), which manifested into 3-dimensional multi-media constructions (fig. 7). Gross was coming of age as a female artist during a time when Abstract Expressionism and the Hofmann school were rapidly gaining speed both within Provincetown and the greater art world, leaving her work to exist somewhere between the representational and abstraction. Gross seems to have more of an obvious urgency for experimentation than her father, while the elder Gross chose to stick to only a handful of artistic modes that he felt were worth exploring. Her choice of subject extends far beyond the human figure to landscape and anatomy. Her work has a true presence to it, partly due to her vibrant use of color and jam-packed compositions. The father and daughter share an affinity for the sculptural rendering of the female form, yet the elder Gross' work seems somewhat subdued, or rather, more concentrated and patiently mastered in comparison to his daughter's work. However, the urgency of Mimi’s style works for her, especially when considering the connections to surrealism and the emphasis on spontaneity that are associated with the ideology behind Abstract Expressionism. She draws from various movements, using various media and techniques to render her subjects.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image}\caption{Red Grooms in collaboration with Mimi Gross, \textit{From Ruckus Manhattan: Wall Street – Newsstand, Lamppost and Boom}, 1976. Mixed-media construction, 112 x 148 x 32 in. Courtesy of Marlborough Gallery.}
\end{figure}

\textbf{Philip Malicoat (1908-1981)}

\textbf{Conrad Malicoat (1936 -2014)}

The Malicoat family has been referred to as “Cape Cod’s first family of art,” spanning five generations that date back to the early 1900s. The family has birthed painters, sculptors, writers, printmakers, and musicians. Philip Malicoat had heard of Hawthorne’s school and traveled to Provincetown to partake in 1929 before settling on the art colony permanently in 1931. Malicoat married artist Barbara Brown in 1932 who is the daughter of Harold Haven Brown, an artist who was personally recruited by
Hawthorne to relocate to Provincetown in the ‘20s. Malicoat’s painting style is defined by loose brushstrokes and loosely defined forms (fig. 8). He worked with both watercolors and oil paints early on in his career before choosing to work strictly with oils beginning in the 1950s. His work is a subtly abstracted take on the impressionistic styles he learned under both Hawthorne and Hensche. Malicoat was an active member of the art colony during his time, most notably as one of the founders of the Fine Arts Work Center.

Conrad Malicoat, son of Philip, is a praised member of the art community in Provincetown for his unique contributions to architecture. Born and raised in Provincetown, Malicoat spent time away from his home at Oberlin College, Paris and New York City before eventually settling down in Provincetown in his adulthood. It is common for natives of the town, especially artists, to leave and then choose to return later in life. The vibrant city life needs to be experienced in order for Provincetown to be fully appreciated. His artistic practice spans from ink works on paper to sculptural pieces made from wood, metal, brick and stone. The artist was one of the first fellows to be given a residency at the Fine Arts Work Center. After getting married in the ‘60s and starting his own family, Malicoat searched for a way in which he could use his artistry to make a decent living. He received commissions from local businesses and private homes to create sculptural walls, chimneys and fireplaces out of bricks (fig. 9). The interplay of the normally laid bricks with the sporadic sections jutting out into space became the signature style that made him recognizable as an artist.

Robert Motherwell (1915 -1991)
Jeannie Motherwell (1953-)

There’s no other place in the world – or in America that I know of – where such a marvelous thing for a painter exists. Otherwise I would leave the place because I’m too exposed here, too accessible.

- Robert Motherwell, on Provincetown
As one of the leading figures associated with Abstract Expressionism, Robert Motherwell is considered to be the superstar of the mid-20th century in Provincetown. Motherwell first came to Provincetown in 1942 in the midst of World War II. Born in Aberdeen, Washington in 1915, he eventually made his way to the east coast, becoming one of the most influential members of the New York School. He began summering in Easthampton during the ‘40s and ‘50s before choosing Provincetown as his primary summer home in 1953. Motherwell and his wife at the time, artist Helen Frankenthaler, had studios in the barn that eventually became the Fine Arts Work Center. His path to becoming a full-time artist was not entirely straightforward, as he had other interests throughout his young-adult life and a family who insisted on a more reliable and structured form of education. It wasn’t until his time at Columbia University in the early 1940s, under the mentorship of Meyer Schapiro, that he became exposed to the leading artists of the time and decided to seriously devote himself to his art. He is known for his paintings, collages, and printmaking that involve bold colors and simplistic shapes. Although he has high praise for the color black, it’s his use of blue that he attributes to Provincetown, expressing that in New York it became referred to as “Motherwell Blue” (fig. 10). During the ‘60s, when the art colony was undergoing numerous changes, Motherwell was one of few Abstract Expressionists to stay around and accept the inevitable shift that was taking place. He was also involved in the revitalization efforts as a member of Long Point Gallery.

Motherwell’s daughter with Betty Little, Jeannie Motherwell, was born and raised in New York City and began to summer with her father and stepmother in Provincetown beginning in the 1950s when she was a young girl. She began painting while studying at Bard College in the 1970s. Her paintings and collages, which she began after taking a decade-long break as an artist, have clearly originated from her father’s famous techniques in terms of both palette and the gestural abstraction she
employs to create fluid, organic forms (fig. 11). Similarly to her father, Motherwell is
drawn to the color black and the force it creates when contrasted with other colors.
Apart from black, she looks to colors that exist in the natural world around her. The
artist has stated, in reference to her accomplished father and stepmother,

\[I \text{ may never achieve the renown Helen and my dad enjoyed, but I can work in my own voice, which grows ever more distinct from my earliest influences. Unlike the flatness in my father's paintings or the landscapes of Helen's, my pictures explore a complex space, which yields marvelous surprises that carry me in directions I cannot anticipate. It is like a dance with a creative partner gently leading me into moves I have not yet experienced.}\]

Motherwell simultaneously attributes much of her influence to her father and stepmother but also acknowledges how her work takes on a force that is unique to her as an artist.

Tony Vevers (1926-2008)
Elspeith Halvorsen (1929-)
Tabitha Vevers (1956-)

After leaving England for the United States in 1940, Tony Vevers found himself in
Provincetown with his wife, Elspeith Halvorsen, by the 1950s. Overtime, the couple
purchased the home of Mark Rothko and became permanent residences of the town.
Vevers has become known as one of the colony’s leading figures associated with
Figurative Expressionism, a trend that developed with the postwar generation during
the ‘50s when artists had a newfound interest in depicting the figure. As one of the
rare year-round residents, Vevers’ paintings reveal the seasonal changes that
Provincetown undergoes (fig. 12). When Vevers first arrived on Cape Cod, the Art
Association was still subtly in favor of conservatism despite their efforts years earlier
to be more including of the modernist styles that were emerging. Many figurative
artists, including Vevers, who didn’t fall into the category of conservatism or Abstract
Expressionism, ended up showing their work at the Sun Gallery. Later in the artist’s
career, he began experimenting with abstraction, which involved using found objects
that he could find around Provincetown, such as rope, buoys, and driftwood. These
weathered objects are meant to suggest a paradoxical sense of timelessness that still
has a basis in the real world due to the familiarity of the objects. Vevers is praised for

11 Jeannie
Motherwell, *Study in Yellow #3: Whale’s Tail*,
2014. Acrylic on
Clayboard, 3 x 8 ½ in.
Courtesy of Jeannie
Motherwell Fine Art.
his accomplishments as an artist as well as his contributions to the art colony, including his time with Long Point Gallery and the Art Association.

Halvorsen experimented with photography, painting, and ceramics, yet became primarily known for her multi-media three-dimensional boxes, which she has been creating since the ‘60s (fig. 13). Similarly to her husband, she used found materials, such as wood, copper, shells, sand, and photographs to create a single composition devoted to a single theme or concept. They almost all take on the look of miniature shrines to a specific place or event all contained within these surreal, dream-like environments. Having moved to Provincetown with her husband, Halvorsen found both direct materials and inspiration for her subjects from the art colony. The objects act as clues to involve the viewer and attempt to lead them to the idea behind the work. Her work has been likened to sculptural collage or cabinets of curiosity.24 Halvorsen describes being an artist in Provincetown as “a dream of a utopian community, away from the grit of urban life.”25 Provincetown allowed the couple to explore their separate paths as artists that often found overlap. Halvorsen found inventive ways to unite their practices by saving scraps of her husband’s watercolor paintings that he had ripped up and left around his studio and then incorporating them into her boxes.

According to the couple’s daughter, artist Tabitha Vevers, “all three of us have used our work as a vehicle to express our life and times – our personal and emotional worlds and the times we’re living in.”26 Vevers takes the figurative nudes of her father’s work and places them in the dream-like world of her mother’s work, yet her paintings take on an entirely different approach that distances her from both of them. She places female nudes and other creatures in creamy, surreal environments by the sea that become a strange interplay of seduction and disturbing allure for the viewer (fig. 14). As a woman
trying to make it as an artist in the “70s, she felt an obligation to depict the female body from an entirely female point of view. The compositions often serve as allegorical references to greater social concerns that stem from abuse towards women to environmental issues, all the while under a veil of a mysterious sensuality for the onlooker. Vevers has been vocal about her understanding of the reality of Provincetown becoming a more difficult place for artists to live and work yet the town continues to be of great importance to both her life and work.

Salvatore Del Deo (1928-)
Romolo Del Deo (1959-)

As a native of Providence, Rhode Island, Salvatore Del Deo did not have to travel too far to get to both New York and Provincetown. He first came to Provincetown in 1946 to study under Hensche for three years before becoming his assistant. Del Deo was one of the more conservative painters of the time, content with the boats, fishermen, and the overall landscape as his subjects (fig. 15). He felt a particular affinity towards the fishing community after having worked in the industry for a short period and gaining direct insight into the strenuous process. After permanently relocating to Provincetown in 1954, Del Deo became an active member of the art community, which is why he has become particularly cynical towards the changes the town has undergone since his arrival, from the lack of space for young artists arriving in town to the modern renovation of the Art Association. His images are quite simple, a pleasant reflection of the town’s unpretentious quality that he values. His approach to painting can be summed up in the way he speaks about the Cape’s appeal, “The Cape isn’t a pretty place, but it is bleakly beautiful.” Its beauty is not a spectacle; rather, its beauty is raw and often desolate. His work is a reflection of this subtle distinction.
Del Deo’s son, Romolo, gained a deep appreciation for Provincetown only when he returned to live there permanently in his adulthood. Deciding at an early age that his artistic approach would extend into a completely different direction than his father’s, the younger Del Deo, just out of high school, traveled to Europe to learn the classical bronze-casting technique in Italy. He combined the skills he learned abroad with the more modern approach he learned upon his return to school at Harvard University. After college, he spent 20 years in New York before returning back to his home. The return completely transformed his work as he began to physically incorporate sand, the literal framework of the town, into the casting process of his sculptures. When speaking of his home, Del Deo states, “Living here is like living on a constantly changing natural sculpture, its shifting sands lose and gain over three feet of coastline yearly. Watching it accumulate into dunes and carve away cliff sides, I have always been aware of this sculptural environment.”

This idea is translated into his work by making his sculptures take on an unfinished appearance, or “partial shapes,” much like sand when it is molded. His completed sculptures appear as though they could be from antiquity, expressing a passage of time (fig. 16). His process is aligned with his father’s view towards beauty and Cape Cod. The younger Del Deo is not trying to achieve a preconceived notion of beauty; rather, his work is disintegrating and broken. Del Deo did not need to discover Provincetown because his father gave it to him. He felt a restless need to leave but eventually felt the same restlessness to return, “I found something here I was looking for that I didn’t know I was missing until I came back.”

Max Bohm (1986-1923)
Anne Packard (1933–)
Cynthia Packard (1957–)

Much like the Malicoat family, the Bohm and Packard family tree is especially unique because the artists span three generations beginning in the very early days of the art colony through to modern day. Max Bohm was an American Romantic Impressionist artist who came to Provincetown in the early 20th century after spending time teaching painting in London. His practice extends back to the 19th century where his work was exhibited at the Paris Salons. He is known for his landscapes, seascapes, and portraiture even before his arrival in Provincetown.

Bohm passed away in 1923, before his granddaughter was born. Anne Packard summered in Provincetown before permanently moving to the town in 1977 from New York. She considers herself a traditionalist, aligned with the style of her grandfather. However, Packard makes an effort to note that she has always felt separate from the art colony, uninterested in becoming involved with any of the
institutions aside from her own gallery where she shows with her two daughters. Her paintings are subdued, peaceful depictions of the land and sea (fig. 17), primarily of Provincetown but sometimes she paints from her sketchbooks that she brought to Europe. When explaining her own process and intentions, she states, “When I paint a boat it’s not a painting of just a boat. The boat is my vehicle to get to this feeling I have – I love boats – less is more. And the mood. It’s the mood I seem to paint over and over. It’s solitary; it’s not lonely.” Much of Packard’s practice is about achieving a reaction or feeling around her work that begins and evolves from the horizon line. The finished product is almost secondary to the painting process, as Packard attempts to uncover how each composition is meant to look and feel when it is finally completed.

Packard’s daughter, Cynthia, was not raised in Provincetown but arrived shortly after graduating from Massachusetts College of Art in 1980. She was a student of Fritz Bultman, an Abstract Expressionist painter who studied under Hofmann in both New York and Provincetown. If her mother’s work is considered still and peaceful, the younger Packard’s work exudes the complete opposite. There is an intensity and frantic quality to her work where the viewer can sense the physical process that goes into creating her paintings. She uses a wide range of materials beyond oil paint, such as tar, plaster, wax, and often a blowtorch to create a more distressed and explosive composition. The process became so action-oriented that she had to switch to plywood after damaging too many of her canvases. While most of Packard's work is of models and still lifes (fig. 18), some of her work takes on greater themes that have to do with the abuse of young girls. She incorporates lace into these compositions to signify the innocence and femininity of the subject. Although the difference between the two Packards is aesthetically obvious, the younger Packard has attempted to create a union between the two practices, “In some ways there is a similarity between my mother and me in the broad spaces and solitude. And I look like her and talk like her.” The joking tone of the statement signifies how she has to dig

17  Anne Packard, Yellow Sky. Oil on canvas, 36 x 24 in. Courtesy of the Packard Gallery.

18  Cynthia Packard, Nude. Oil on board, 48 x 36 in. Courtesy of the Packard Gallery.
deep to formulate a real similarity between them. It is undeniable that both of their work is aesthetically pleasing in different ways, evoking a different emotional response.

Robert Cardinal (1936-)
Julian Cardinal (1988-)

A native of Montreal, Robert Cardinal spent time in Greenwich Village and Paris before making his way to Provincetown in the 1960s. Coming to Provincetown completely changed the way Cardinal painted, in large part due to the profound effect of light on the surrounding landscape. He has come to be known for his moody, almost silhouetted depictions of boats, barns, lighthouses, and the numerous cottages found throughout Cape Cod. The absence of detail allows the colors, lighting, and shadowing to dictate the mood of the compositions (fig. 19). He has become known as the local artist with the illuminating skies. Beginning on a dark brown-painted canvas, the purples, blues, yellows, and pinks completely transform the scene. The subjects, whether a boat or a building, come through as meticulously painted geometric shapes isolated within an expansive sky. He sticks to a fairly limited palette, stating, “Color is the most personal thing an artist has in his arsenal.”

Color is the driving force of his compositions. Often working on several paintings at once, Cardinal primarily works from photographs that he took himself at very specific times of day when the lighting is just right and then works off of them in his studio in North Truro. His work evokes simplicity while also creating drama with his lighting technique.

“My dad would say I was a natural with color. He taught me a lot about color. We use pretty much the same palette. I learned color choice and shadowing from him. But my own work is different. I wanted to be distinct.” Julian Cardinal, born and raised on Cape Cod, did not consider becoming an artist until he moved away to college in Vermont. His earlier work is aligned with his father’s in both subject matter and use of color, but as the younger Cardinal has matured, his work has gotten increasingly more distinct. The practices share a lack of attention to detail, yet the younger Cardinal’s brushstrokes are less meticulous. He similarly begins on a brown canvas, yet the subject takes center stage over the background, which he pays little attention to. Cardinal paints dreamy figures, looking to vintage fashion photographs for poses that he is drawn to and giving his loose interpretations of them. His overall goal as an artist is to create work that
combines “the vintage style of fashion with contemporary Expressionism.” His figures are left anonymous, lacking any facial features or with their backs completely to the viewer (fig. 20). For Cardinal, it is more about the rendering of the pose and the play of colors. The lack of specificity allows the onlookers to create their own personal connections to the work.

“Still the Place to Paint and to Party?”

A.J. Philpott begins and ends his 1916 Boston Globe article with a lighthearted, somewhat sarcastic comment about the art colony. The first is in reference to Provincetown’s Pilgrim Monument (fig. 21), the only structure with any real height in the town, making it immediately stick out along the skyline. The monument is modeled after the Torre del Mangia in Siena, Italy that was constructed in the 12th century. The irony is that the well-known beacon of Provincetown to celebrate their founders, who were the ultimate originals, was based off of an already existing structure. Since the monument has been around so long, it is difficult to imagine the town without it. Objectively speaking, the monument looks random and out of place, which makes sense because to Philpott’s point, the town is defined by its innovative spirit and not as a community of followers. The acceptance of the design of the monument only adds to the town’s quirkiness and “anything goes” mentality.

The second comment is at the very end of the article where he states, “All these things and people have so featured the staid old town that the authorities have found it necessary to double the police force. The town formerly had one policeman – now it has two.” Philpott is lightheartedly commenting on the changes that occurred in Provincetown once the art colony was fully underway by 1916. Artists from all over were descending upon the town and taking over. They formed groups, began clubs, and bought property to live in or open institutions. The punch line is that it was not much of an invasion. For the most part, these artists were harmless and only added an extra charm to the town.

Many of Philpott’s musings can still be applied today. Yes, there is a proper police force with arrests made and a summer season that is infamous for the traffic that extends along the entire strip of the Cape. Since the population grows from a miniscule 3,000 to over 60,000 during the summer months, it seems absurd that anyone would think that the town is suffering in any way. Of course, not all of these people are coming specifically to buy art or to partake in the art and theater programs offered, but upon visiting, the artistic presence in the town becomes unavoidable. Whether it’s stepping into the galleries that align Commercial Street or merely enjoying the numerous beaches, a part of the art colony is being experienced and appreciated.
When writer Michael Cunningham was asked to articulate the common thread that has brought all of these different types of people and artists, from the Pilgrims first landing in the 17th century to Motherwell arriving in the 1940s, he responded with “You know, it’s slightly mysterious, Provincetown’s allure. And I’m perfectly content with it as a mystery. It’s remote. It’s a little bit wild. There’s something about it that’s hard to put your finger on.” His own confusion and inability to make a concise statement is exactly what makes Provincetown so special. The inability to truly express exactly why people have been drawn to it for so long is exactly where it’s allure stems from. Through its simplicity and natural beauty yet simultaneous liveliness, Provincetown has provided something different and necessary for those who have come across it.

Provincetown may not be the leader of the contemporary art world or a thrilling place for emerging artists to come to anymore, but it is a historically significant town that strives to keep some semblance of its traditional identity. It takes pride in preserving that identity. Artists in Provincetown still value the patience of their craft, whether it’s sitting through lessons or exploring the personal creative process that takes place at the easel or in the studio. As an artist and member of the Provincetown Art Commission, Stephen Borkowski puts it, “It’s never going to be 1916 again. Rents are never going to be $25 for the summer. But that sense of community, that sense of artists being informed by other artists’ work, continues. There’s an alchemy here you can’t quite explain, but people know it’s worth fighting to sustain it.”

Every generation who has come to the art colony has viewed their time as being the peak and as they get older they become slightly bitter towards the changes and claim that the colony is no longer what it once was. They look back nostalgically on their first couple of decades, new to the town, to the light, to the opportunities it offered them. This is an ongoing cycle that exists with many of life’s defining experiences and the inevitable passing of time. Provincetown is a place where reinvention is, for the most part, widely accepted. Part of that cynicism towards the changes in the art colony become slightly diminished when you have a parent connecting you to the past or a child connecting you to the present and future state of the colony. These connections allow artists to feel involved beyond their own time.

Notes


3 Brett Sokol, “Provincetown: Still the Place to Paint and to Party,” The New York Times, August 11, 2016, accessed November 30, 2016,


8 Ibid., 41.


13 Ibid., 60.


21 Ibid., 201-207.


23 Ibid.


25 Ibid., 55.

26 Forman, *Perspectives on the Provincetown Art Colony, Volume II: Mid-Century to*
2010, 186.

27 Ibid., 182.


30 Ibid., 66.


32 Noelle, The Tides of Provincetown, 143.

33 Forman, Perspectives on the Provincetown Art Colony, Volume II: Mid-Century to 2010, 192.


35 Ibid., 208.


37 Ibid., 138.


39 Sokol, “Provincetown: Still the Place to Paint and to Party.”

40 A.J. Philpott, “Biggest Art Colony in the World at Provincetown.”

41 Sokol, “Provincetown: Still the Place to Paint and to Party.”


43 Sokol, “Provincetown: Still the Place to Paint and to Party.”
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