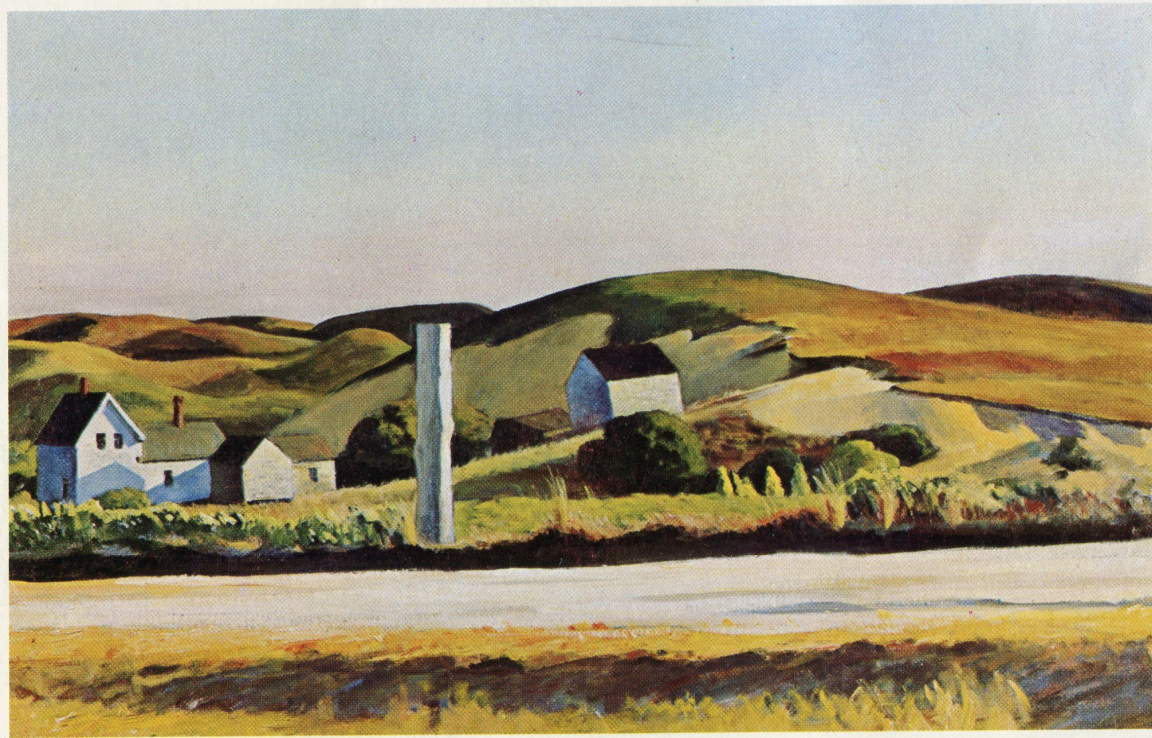


## CAPE COD AS AN ART COLONY





## "AN EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES"

This exhibition can only dimly reflect the ongoing complex that is the art world on Cape Cod. To make a choice of almost sixty serious artists who have lived and worked on Cape Cod is practically impossible. There is an embarrassment of riches. One could easily do an entire show of 19th century work alone, and the number and quality of Cape artists only increases during this century. Charles Demuth typifies the situation. This famous Precisionist did a great deal of work on the Cape, including two of his finest canvases, and the Museum of Modern Art's beautiful watercolor, "Stairs, Provincetown." The work he executed on the Cape is crucial to American Cubism although he usually is not identified with the Cape. Neither is his Stieglitz associate Marsden Hartley, and yet the period Hartley spent on the Cape was vital to his development, and to American art in general. And so it goes. Though only a seasonal phenomenon, the Cape art world lies at the very heart of much that has happened in American art.

Beyond any doubt, the two artists without whom one cannot even conceive of art on Cape Cod were Charles Hawthorne and Hans Hofmann. Each in his different way, both pedagogically and artistically, made such a strong impact here that their effects are still being felt today. Though neither man lived on the Cape year round (Hawthorne spent a winter or two), both ran nationally important art schools and both produced prolifically and well during their time here. Interestingly, despite their divergent approaches to the motif and to painting per se, both of them went out into nature every good day and painted at least one painting before returning home. The best paintings Hawthorne ever did were of local fishermen, shopkeepers, widows and pier workers in and about Province-

town, and, as for Hofmann, his working time, especially during his early years in this country, was primarily the time he lived on the Cape. He went all over the Wellfleet and Truro hills in a big Packard touring car, the top down and the back seat completely packed with gear, including an outdoor easel that he would weigh down with two gallons of drinking water. He would go out there and, as he would say, just swim in color and in the landscape forms. He had about as deep an identification with that landscape as a person could have, never missing a sunset or an opportunity to immerse himself in it.

The art schools Hawthorne and Hofmann established were vital to the lower Cape for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the simple one of introducing to the Cape artists who fell in love with it and stayed on. Hawthorne taught Edwin Dickinson, who still exhibits and lives here, and Dickinson taught Philip Malicoat who has always lived in Provincetown year round. Hawthorne also taught Ross Moffett, who wrote a romance of Cape art entitled "*ART IN NARROW STREETS*" that is still an underground favorite in the art world. Moffett taught Jack Tworikov who summers on the Cape and remains an important force on the scene here as well as in New York. Hawthorne also taught Henry Hensche, who continues to run a school in Provincetown, and who, in turn, taught Franz Kline. Giorgio Cavallon, another Abstract Expressionist, also studied with Hawthorne and Hofmann and returns here year after year. In fact most of the Abstract Expressionists lived or worked here for some time. Adolph Gottlieb painted here, Franz Kline and Mark Rothko owned homes and spent many a summer in Provincetown, and of course Robert Motherwell still does. One could write a book on Abstract Expressionism on the Cape. Hans

Hofmann's students are legion, but his formulation of the "push-pull" esthetic underpinning for Abstract Expressionism is perhaps an even more important and far-reaching result of all his many years of teaching.

When Fritz Bultman first came to the Cape, to study with Hans Hofmann, it was by train over the marshes with the Provincetown monument slipping in and out of sight. On his way to Hofmann's school, which is now where Morris Davidson has his school, Fritz Bultman went by accident to the old Hawthorne house just opposite where he now lives on Miller Hill Road. The sight of the bay spread out before him made this young artist decide that the Cape would be his home. Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock loved the same spot and almost bought that piece of land when they were visiting the Hofmanns in 1944. Pollock was not a student of Hofmann; instead, the two men had long fruitful discussions about modern art, and the role of the unconscious in art, which were apparently germinal for the evolution of Abstract Expressionism.

Fritz Bultman ultimately decided to live on the Cape year round and did so for most of the 40's. Part of the reason for this decision was the rich mixture of artists and ideas he found here that first summer. He met Dickinson then, and Charles Frazier, a Hawthorne student who had a Cape extension of the Rhode Island School of Design in Provincetown. Gil Franklin, now a sculptor, studied with Frazier and still runs the Art Department at Rhode Island School of Design, which now has a summer school housed in the building of the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. Fritz Bultman, Budd Hopkins, Judith Rothschild, Jack Tworikov, Richard Pepitone and other long timers on the Cape



teach there on occasion. The Center runs an art gallery on the premises during the summer and sponsors speakers and panel discussions which augment the activities of the Provincetown Art Association in the various arts. In the winter the Center is a mecca for writers all over the country and turns into a predominantly literary community, but its painting community has its own vitality.

Actually Cape writers are probably even better known than Cape painters: Eugene O'Neill, Conrad Aiken, Edmund Wilson, from the past, and, presently, Norman Mailer, B.H. Friedman, Robert J. Lifton, Marge Piercy and Rachelle Owen. Brion Gysin spent a winter here; John Dos Passos who had a house in Provincetown did illustrations and paintings here as well as writing; Tennessee Williams finished "*THE GLASS MENAGERIE*" on Fritz Bultman's typewriter; Mary McCarthy's "*CHARMED LIFE*" is based on life in the Wellfleet ponds and woods, and Svetlana Stalin came to South Wellfleet to have her memoirs translated by Nina Chavchavadze. Mme. Chavchavadze was a Romanoff princess. With their meeting, the only two women in the United States who had been raised inside the Kremlin walls were under the same Cape Cod roof!

Summertime Provincetown art schools remain a vital force on the Cape, though the loss of Leo Manso and Victor Candell's school will be a great one. Their space will be occupied from now on by the Long Point Gallery where artists like Motherwell, Bultman, Hopkins, Rothschild, Manso, Ed Giobbi, Nora Speyer and Sideo Fromboluti will be showing, and thereby doing a great deal to revitalize the gallery scene in Provincetown. The schools of Henry Hensche, Seong Moy, Morris Davidson and the Truro

Center for the Arts are nevertheless ongoing institutions.

The Cape is such an amazing place. The Artists Leger, Leonid and Tchelitchev, Attorney General Francis Biddle and Supreme Court Justice William Douglas all have vacationed here. Sculptor Tony Smith built Fritz Bultman's studio, and, speaking of architects, who are better known than Marcel Breuer, Serge Chermayeff, and Eero Saarinen, who built houses in the Wellfleet ponds area? Marcel Breuer has left a considerable mark on Cape architecture, at least on the lower Cape, as a result of having been an early influence on Charles Zehnder, whose many houses grace the hills of Truro and Wellfleet, and Robert Tieger, whose work is mainly to be seen in Provincetown.

Although artists like Ed Corbett, Maurice Sterne, Karl Knaths, Paul Burlin and Alvin Ross were all extremely close to the Cape, there are two painters so deeply identified with it that the Cape's image in the public mind is their image of it. Milton Avery's stark condensations of the high dunes of Truro have almost become trademarks for the lower Cape landscape, and Edward Hopper is its most famous "portraitist." He has painted the faces of Provincetown, Truro, Wellfleet and Orleans hundreds of times—the Methodist Church, Commercial Street, the old ice houses in Eastham, Cobb's farm in Truro, the BP gas station on Route 6, Wellfleet Harbor, houses in Eastham. The house he lived in during the summers on the bay in Truro should eventually be made a national monument. He designed it himself in the traditional Cape Cod saltbox mode, but with the modification of a huge many-paneled window on the sea facing Provincetown, in front of which he set up his easel. Hopper was notorious for being

close with the dollar. His garage attic in Truro contained hundreds of old Lavis bottles he had saved, and some of his drawing studies for paintings were executed on the backs of book request slips from the Truro library where he went to research details for his paintings. He drove an unsafe old car in a blatantly unorthodox manner to the Truro post office for his mail and to the Lighthouse restaurant in Wellfleet for his nightly chicken-a-la-king dinners. His lack of automotive finesse caused many a fist to be shaken at him and many an anxious look from people worried about his welfare. He was the cliché crotchety old New Englander, reclusive and spartan in his austere little house on a treeless dune far from his neighbors and not communicating with them. His trips out in the car for food were his only "extravagance," but they were essential because his wife usually refused to cook his meals. Needless to say, he always ordered the least expensive things on the menu.

Jo Hopper, his wife, was an artist in her own right, though not particularly original, and apparently a fairly liberated woman. Many excellent women artists have worked and lived on the Cape over the years. Mercedes Matter, who was so close to Dickinson and Hofmann, lived here year round for a while. Linda Lindeberg, Helen Frankenthaler, Mary Frank, and Marcia Marcus spring to mind, and currently Elise Asher, Nora Speyer, Lila Katzen, and Judith Rothschild spend working summers here.

In the early days there was not much communication between the artists. It was casual and private, with only the Provincetown Art Association for showing work, until the Shore Studio was started by Donald Witherstine in 1947.



"Forum '49" brought people from all over the Cape together for the first time in 1949. It was organized by Hans Hofmann, Fritz Bultman, Weldon Keyes, Adolph Gottlieb, Karl Knaths and Cecil Hemley, with panel discussions in architecture by Serge Chermayeff and Marcel Breuer, movies by Helen Levitt and Joseph Cornell, a political talk by Dwight MacDonald and a controversial early discussion on European versus American modern art, plus exhibitions that included just about every practicing artist then on the Cape. It was the beginning of the public art life of Provincetown. A few years later Sam Kootz opened his gallery, to be followed in rapid succession by the Sun Gallery, Martha Jackson, Norman Halper's HCE, Paul Kessler, and by the Tirca Karlis Gallery in 1958, the same year that Walter Chrysler opened his Museum in the landmark Methodist church in the center of town.

At the beginning of modernism, on the Cape as in the art world at large, there was a great sense of antagonism between traditionalists and modernists, but as time has gone on each side has grown to see that art making is the issue, not schools. Hofmann encouraged this broader outlook with his open attitude, his acceptance of Hawthorne and Dickinson's academicism (he even wrote an appreciation of Hawthorne for an early show of his work at the Art Association), and his simultaneous commitment to avant-garde modernist thinking. He realized, as anyone who comes to know the Cape understands so well, that it is a melting pot in the arts, just as New York was for nationalities. It is so because the strands that compose it are too intricately interwoven to permit undivided loyalties or singleminded approaches to the art scene. Just as you can in a single afternoon swim in a pond, the bay, the ocean, or a pool;

walk in the jungle-like White Cedar swamp or the desert-like North Truro dunes, so can you move freely about in every sort of art manifestation, from Hawthorne to Douglas Huebler's conceptual art, within a single afternoon in the Cape's museums, galleries, and art schools. As Jacques Brown said when he visited here from France in 1960: "There hasn't been an artist's life like this since the time of the Impressionists."

April Kingsley in collaboration with  
Fritz Bultman, April 1977