

# EXHIBITIONISTS

See what art associations provide of collegiality, competition, and commerce

By Jane Roy Brown  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

A few years ago Willow Shire, 59, a consultant who lives in Eastham, wrapped up a big project and decided to try her hand at painting at the Cape Cod Art Association in Barnstable. Today Shire describes herself as an “emerging artist,” and volunteers as vice president of development to support the institution that fostered her new-found passion.

“Painting can be a lonely pursuit,” says Shire. “This place gives you a social connection and exposure to a community of artists.”

Now in its 60th year, that community comprises more than 1,000 members Cape-wide, including 800 juried artist-members, whose work is displayed in more than 15 shows and sales a year in a modern building in Barnstable village. The association also runs classes and workshops for all ages, awards several thousand dollars in art scholarships to area high school students, and sponsors cultural events in surrounding communities, an artist-in-residence program, a photography club, and a group of plein air painters.

Like a large number of similar

organizations throughout New England, including 10 on the Cape alone, this one sprang from an artist-led movement to democratize the arts that spanned the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries. The associations flourished in scenic spots, often where artists’ colonies had sprouted earlier.

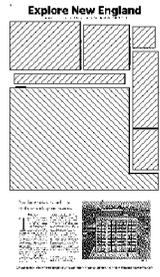
Although many art associations did not survive past the 19th century, several founded in the first half of the 20th are thriving, judging from a recent random sampling in New England. Yet perhaps because of their locally focused missions, art associations are often

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better known to residents than to travelers. Here are a few stand-outs, but many more await discovery with the aid of a trusty Web browser and local tourism bureaus.

### Provincetown Art Association and Museum

In 1916 the Globe proclaimed Provincetown “the biggest art colony in the world.” Two years later a group of renowned painters, including Charles Hawthorne, founded PAAM, which settled down in an 1820 house on Commercial Street. It isn’t surprising that the construction of an adjoining building in 2004-05 sparked a fury, despite a Silver LEED rating



by the US Green Building Council, expanded and renovated gallery space, new studios, improved security, and the first climate-controlled storage in its history. Some citizens disliked the modern wood-and-glass exterior, which they felt clashed with the neighborhood's historic fabric.

But skirmishes over change run through the organization's history, says director Chris McCarthy. "Until the 1930s, exhibitions were dominated by Impressionist and Realist painters. Then along came the Abstract Expressionists, and the museum had to hang two separate shows a year because the factions couldn't mix," says McCarthy.

Since the doors opened, even some of the biggest critics of the expansion have reconsidered. Floor-to-ceiling glass on the street level brings eye-popping art to passersby, yet inside, the galleries are small enough to permit intimate contact with the work. And the new security and climate control allow work by historical Provincetown painters owned by other museums to come home again, if only for a visit.

### Rockport Art Association

This group owes its founding, in 1921, to the painter Aldro T. Hibbard, who was taken with the beauty of this coast. Carol Linsky, the association's executive director, credits him with achieving the goal of "giving the Cape Ann area prominence in the art world." The organization still upholds the high standards of its founding generation. "We're not an association of Sunday painters, but artists who make their living as artists," explains Linsky. "Many of our members are National Academicians, a very select group."

This said, the democratic mission also holds, and the group offers an extensive lineup of workshops, classes, sketch groups, lectures, demonstrations, and children's classes. "We also go into public schools and conduct workshops," Linsky adds. In addition to

exhibiting the work of members, the association has built a collection comprising more than 300 pieces by Cape Ann artists. "We also show works of contemporary artists who may be less well-known," she says.

The facility serves as a community cultural center, hosting theater productions and a chamber music festival, among other activities. "We have so much creativity here," Linsky says. "I think it must be in the drinking water."

### Art Coast Maine

David Patrick Stucky, president of this self-described "lightly held organization of arts groups and individuals committed to marketing the Midcoast as an arts destination," moved to this region six years ago to direct a theater festival and stumbled into "an embarrassment of riches" in the arts among the communities of Belfast, Camden, Rockport, and Rockland.

"In Rockland alone there are two dozen galleries in walking distance from the Farnsworth Museum," says Stucky, who now works as the museum's director of advancement. "And it's not just touristy stuff. You find really fine artwork, and artists are thick on the ground."

Noting the potential of a fledgling economy grounded in cultural tourism, he plunged in to help "tell the story about Maine as an arts destination and to help artists and arts institutions network locally."

The loose consortium of arts organizations has no physical facility, relying on a website to link individual institutions, groups, and galleries in the area. The site posts cultural happenings, venues, maps, and directions.

### Newport Art Museum & Art Association

Born of its founder's desire to "uplift the masses" through education, this association started in 1913. There was blue blood aplenty among both early patrons and

exhibitors. The opening show featured artists including Childe Hassam and Mary Cassatt, and its founder, Boston-born Maud Howe Elliott, was a suffragist and journalist who won the Pulitzer Prize for her biography of her mother, Julia Ward Howe, a leading reformer who established the Girl Scouts. The fledgling association received a boost when summer resident and sculptor Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney joined its council in 1915.

Griswold House, a Stick-style mansion designed in 1862 by Gilded Age architect Richard Morris Hunt, contains galleries, a children's art classroom, administrative offices, and retail shops. Now a National Historic Landmark, the building is surrounded by a park and sculpture garden that host summer outdoor programs. An art school occupies another building, and a renovated stable houses a lecture hall. Says curator Nancy Grinnell, "Our lecture series goes back to the 'teens, when the association once featured pro and con speakers on evolution."

## Washington Art Association

Located in the lush countryside of Litchfield County, Conn., this organization in Washington Depot has benefited from its proximity to New York since forming in 1952. Artists affiliated with the early association include Alexander Calder, André Masson, and Yves Tanguy. Lynn Baldwin, who promotes the association, says the scenic route from Boston (about 3 1/2 hours) traverses Route 4 across Connecticut's midsection and continues on Routes 44 and 7. "There are inns, B&Bs, restaurants, and wonderful scenery along the Farmington and Connecticut rivers," she says. "And the town of Kent nearby also has an art association with a long history rooted in American Impressionism."

In addition to running monthly exhibitions and year-round classes, the association hosts regular lectures by artists from all over the

country and spearheads a self-guided local gallery tour.

Despite its New York stars, the group also emphasizes the work of students and other emerging artists. "If you've never shown before it's a wonderful thing to have a venue," says Baldwin, who recently had the experience herself. "It means you've arrived."

## Sharon Arts Center

Now celebrating its 60th year, the Sharon Arts Center of Peterborough and Sharon, N.H., taps the abundant local talent of the Monadnock region in southern New Hampshire. The center's chic art gallery and crafts store, occupying a renovated building in downtown Peterborough, could hold its own on Newbury Street. Polished wood floors bounce light onto white walls hung with scenes of farms, lakes, and forests. The ceramics, jewelry, woven goods, glass, and woodenware in the crafts store downstairs from the gallery dazzle not only with their quality, but also with their relatively modest prices.

In the neighboring community of Sharon, the center's School of Arts and Crafts offers classes and after-school programs for teenagers, professional development workshops for teachers, and a host of affordable courses ranging from digital photography and jewelry making to meditative drawing.

*Jane Roy Brown, a writer in Western Massachusetts, can be reached at janerobrown@verizon.net.*

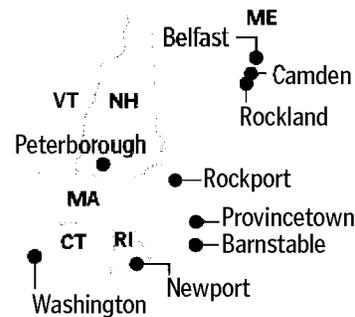
## If you go . . .

### Cape Cod Art Association

3480 Route 6A  
Barnstable Village  
508-362-2909  
capecodartassoc.org

### Provincetown Art Association and Museum

460 Commercial St.  
Provincetown  
508-487-1750



SOURCE: ESRI, TeleAtlas

GLOBE STAFF

paam.org

## Rockport Art Association

12 Main St., Rockport

978-546-6604

rockportartassn.org

## Art Coast Maine

207-596-6457, ext. 115

artcoastmaine.com

Online guide to art venues  
and events.

## Newport Art Museum & Art Association

76 Bellevue Ave.

Newport, R.I.

401-848-8200

newportartmuseum.org

## Washington Art Association

Bryan Memorial Plaza

(Routes 47 and 109)

Washington Depot, Conn.

860-868-2878

washingtonart.org

## Sharon Arts Center

Fine Art Galleries:

30 Grove St.

Peterborough, N.H.

603-924-7676

Fine Gallery & Artists' Resource  
Center:

20-40 Depot Square

Peterborough

603-924-2787

School of Arts and Crafts:

457 NH Route 123

Sharon, N.H.

603-924-7256

sharonarts.org



PHOTOS BY BILL REGAN/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The Sharon Arts Center in Peterborough, N.H., features a gallery and crafts store in a renovated building. The Provincetown Art Association and Museum (below) expanded to a new building.







PHOTOS BY BILL REGAN/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Artists have long congregated and formed groups such as the Sharon Arts Center in Peterborough, N.H., (left), the Provincetown Art Association and Museum (top left), and the Cape Cod Art Association, where Beverly Godine of Harwich works on a landscape.