

MARY BUCCI McCOY

Cape Ann Contemporary

When people think of the art of Cape Ann, they often imagine the maritime and landscape art for which the region has been known. When they think of contemporary art, they may well cite New York, with its research-based art, site-specific installations, DIY apartment shows, pop-up shows, performance, and video—none traditionally associated with Cape Ann. But this can all be found here if you know where to look. Travel the Essex Coastal Scenic Byway from Beverly to Rocky Neck in Gloucester, following Route 127 along the coast rather than speeding up Route 128, and you will discover an increasingly invigorated contemporary art scene, aligned with what is happening globally today, yet organically intertwined with the region's traditions.

Beverly has had a long history as a manufacturing center, and for the last few decades has been transitioning from a blue- to a white-

collar economy. The downtown area, anchored by Montserrat College of Art, provides the affordable space and community that artists require, and within walking distance of the beach, a half-hour from Boston, and a day trip from New York.

Abstract painter Bea Modisett, a Montserrat graduate from Rhode Island, manages and has her studio at the year-old Studios at Porter Mill, where she also oversees the building's gallery, showing *The Artists of Porter Mill* in June and July. She cites the built-in community of Montserrat graduates who have stayed as key. The collaborative known as [Space], a collective of Montserrat students and recent graduates, has hosted apartment shows and open critique sessions, and has long-range plans including studio, exhibition, and performance spaces offering young artists a transition from school to professional life. Montserrat graduate, painter, and independent curator Bradford

Rusick has found that Beverly is an ideal place to make that transition. He has organized successful shows featuring emerging artists under the assertive name *Art's Not Dead*.

There are also many established artists in Beverly, including Montserrat faculty Barbara Moody and Rose Olson, who have studios in their homes, and Stacy and Len Thomas-Vickery, who opened Blue Box, a collaborative printmaking studio, together with other Montserrat affiliates this past November.

Since moving to Beverly from Seattle in 2010 to become Montserrat's exhibitions manager, Lucas Spivey has developed the 17 Cox Visual Art Center in a building that formerly housed a taxi dispatch office. The savvy shows that Spivey curates have garnered attention from both regional press and the larger art community.

The college has five galleries in the downtown area under the direction of Leonie Bradbury, and this summer their showcase is *Seven: A Performative Drawing Project* with seven artists—Zsuzsanna Szegedi, Dana Woulfe, Eben Kling, Jim Falck, Raul Gonzalez III, Barbara Moody, and Norman Laliberté—each creating a wall drawing, one per week. The public is invited to watch the artists work and attend weekly receptions.

Beverly functions as an incubator, educating young artists and then providing ideal conditions for them. Gloucester has a different energy, one that is generated by location, landscape, and the intersection of past, present, and future.

Residents and conceptual artists Rachel Perry Welty and her mother Sarah Hollis Perry screen their 2011



Eben Kling, *Big Flood*, 2012, watercolor and marker on paper, 22 x 30". Courtesy of Montserrat Gallery.

collaborative *Drawing a Line with the Tide* as part of their exhibition, called *water water*, which opens July 14 at the Cape Ann Museum in downtown Gloucester. The piece looks at the role of the ocean in their daily life: "When you live on the water, so much of your life is regulated by it," says Perry. The museum, under the directorship of Gloucester resident Ronda Faloon, is one of the most visible parts of the Cape Ann art world. Known for their Fitz Henry Lane paintings and maritime artifacts, this show marks the first time they will offer video by contemporary artists.

Another artist who works with the ocean, Rocky Neck Colony president Karen Ristuben, grew up on Cape Ann and has lived there most of her life. After twenty years as a lawyer, she became an art educator and recently completed her MFA. Her research-based performance/lecture piece, *Just One Word...*, draws attention to the pressing issue of plastic pollution in the ocean. She sees herself as working with the same elements as traditional artists, but from a different perspective, and believes that welcoming diversity is the way forward for the Gloucester art community.

One example of diversity is the series of one-day pop-ups organized by the Cape Ann Museum at the eighteenth-century White-Ellery House, located near an area that used to be the Town Green and now is a Route 128 rotary. These installations by invited Cape Ann artists—this year Jenna Powell, Ila Prouty, Elizabeth Alexander, Shep Abbott, and Ana Alakija—occur on the first Saturday of the month, June through October.

The one issue cited by many contemporary artists is the lack of a local outlet for their work. Beverly resident and Montserrat graduate Kathleen Gerdon Archer has found a solution, opening White Bird Gallery to sell her photography on historically traditional Rocky Neck four years ago. And off the beaten track, Jane Deering mounts one or two exhibitions each summer in her home/gallery in the Annisquam section of Gloucester, often by Cape Ann artists. "The area's artists need and deserve attention," says Deering. "Why are we not supporting many more galleries showing



Elizabeth Alexander, *Still Life*, installation view at the Wentworth Coolidge Mansion Museum, 2011, paper, glue.

art that is stretching boundaries and ideas? One of the hurdles for galleries just off the track is to get curators and collectors to come to them. People are looking for a critical mass in order to make the trek."

One of the artists Deering has shown is Gloucester photographer Paul Cary Goldberg, whose current project, *Tutto la Famiglia*, is a black-and-white photographic series of Gloucester's Sicilian community that will be published as a book he is funding through crowdsourcing. Originally from the Bronx, Goldberg cites the quality of life in Gloucester as a key to his work.

Other artists shown by Deering share that sentiment. Susan Erony, currently artist-in-residence at the Gloucester Writer's Center,

cites the tolerance of the city, which has long been a mix of artists, writers, musicians, and fishermen. Erony says, "Gloucester is, at heart, still an island, and there is a sense of interdependence combined with a high tolerance of difference and eccentricity." Mixed-media artist Dawn Southworth, who grew up in Gloucester, perhaps best mystically sums it up as "a place with a true soul. One must live here to feel it."

Mary Bucci McCoy is a 2012 Massachusetts Cultural Council Painting Fellow who has lived and had her studio in Beverly, MA since 2001. She was a member of the Beverly Cultural Council from 2005–2011. She is an adjunct instructor at Montserrat College of Art, and is represented by Kingston Gallery in Boston.