

Interview for North Shore Planet Newspaper

CAROL LINSKY is the executive director of the Rockport Art Association, a private, charitable, non-profit, cultural organization dedicated to the advancement and preservation of all phases of the visual arts through exhibitions, lectures, demonstrations, and educational programs for young children and adults for the benefit of the community and the general public.

TH: You've spent most of your life here on Cape Ann, haven't you?

CL: Yes, I was born and raised in Gloucester, and when I got married my husband and I lived in Rockport for twenty-five years and then nine years ago we moved to Gloucester. I worked at Varian for many years, but I have always been interested in art and in 1983 I volunteered at the Rockport Art Association. I enjoyed the work, and eventually I became the operations manager and then the assistant director. Twelve years ago I became the executive director. I must say that my passion for art has increased a thousand fold since then.

TH: What has changed since you first arrived twenty-three years ago?

CL: Some things have not changed, such as the wonderful quality of the art produced by our dedicated artist members. But the organization has grown, and we've become more community oriented. We've expanded our educational programs to include workshops for children and adults, a lecture series, and an art history course. Our museum collection has expanded and we even sent a portion of it on a cross-country tour that lasted two years. We've had world-class exhibitions by some of our founding members including Aldro Hibbard and Anthony Thieme, and a retrospective of the work of Paul Strisik. Daniel Altshuler curated a magnificent sculpture show, a portion of which went on exhibit at the Gloucester City Hall. As a membership organization we of course feature exhibits by our current members, but we have also made an effort to exhibit our museum collection in the context of community education. With every museum collection exhibit we publish a book and create programs, and people come from around the nation to our museum collection exhibits.

TH: The RAA is supported primarily by its artist and contributing members.

CL: Yes, we now have two hundred active artist members and six hundred contributing members. The contributing members are patrons of the arts, and they come to our workshops and support the annual auction. Their contributions have allowed us to make many improvements to our buildings and galleries in the past twenty-three years. When I first came here there was no heat in the Hibbard and Maddocks galleries, for example, and we subsequently received donations which have allowed us to install heating and new electrical systems, new walls and floor in the Maddocks gallery, and much more. Of course these are old buildings, and we go by the "two times" rule: to make any improvement it always takes twice as much money and twice as much time as anticipated.

TH: Tell us something about the artist members.

CL: When the RAA was founded in 1921, membership was originally restricted to Rockport and Gloucester. This was done not to keep people out, but rather to encourage artists on Cape Ann. The idea worked, and Cape Ann has developed a reputation as a haven for artists. Nonetheless, two years ago we opened membership up to any of the New England states.

Today, artists may apply for membership in any of four categories: painting, graphics, sculpture, and photography. An artist submits five pieces of work to the membership jury in one or more categories, but if an artist is accepted as a photographer, for instance, then the member is welcome to exhibit photographs in RAA member shows.

TH: This sounds like a very traditional approach.

CL: In many ways it is, and it illustrates the unique position that the Rockport Art Association occupies. On one hand, the RAA is a source for traditional training that is simply not available elsewhere. We offer workshops in drawing and painting that provide artists with a link to classical techniques, and it's safe to say that many of our artists aspire to become members of the very prestigious National Academy. We are very proud that two of our current members, Don Stone and Thomas Nicholas, are full members of the National Academy. So we see ourselves as preserving a proven body of knowledge, not unlike a guild. On the other hand, in recent years the membership committee has recognized that artists are endlessly inventive and that it is becoming more difficult to make a distinction between different media. This is an issue that is being given sincere consideration.

TH: Do you have any special events coming up this fall?

CL: Everyone is invited to attend The Painted Palette, a fun and festive event on Sunday evening, September 4th. Earlier this spring we invited our artist members to paint standard painter's palettes any way they chose. Many of our members enthusiastically agreed, and we have a stunning collection of ninety-three palettes now on display. They range from charming scenes of Rockport to abstract splashes of paint. There's something for everyone, and collectors will have the opportunity to make the winning bid and take home a painted palette on the evening of September 4th. Of course, we will have delicious hors d'oeuvres, beer and wine, and our own special ARTini to make the event even more fun. All of the palettes are on view on our website, and buyers can make absentee bids anytime. It's a wonderful opportunity to both benefit the RAA and add a very special piece to a home or office collection.

THE ROCKPORT ART ASSOCIATION is located at 12 Main Street in Rockport, and the phone number is (978) 546-6604. The RAA website is www.rockportartassn.org, and the galleries are open Monday through Saturday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, and Sunday 12:00 noon to 5:00 pm.

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