Women Artists from the Cape Ann Museum Collection: A Survey Exhibition
October 24, 2009 – January 31, 2010

While women have worked as artists in the region for as long as men and have exhibited their creative output alongside that of their male counterparts for over 100 years, today many of Cape Ann’s most talented women artists, particularly those who worked in the past, remain in the shadows.

With this exhibition, which is made up primarily of works from the Cape Ann Museum’s own collections, it is hoped that new insights will be gained into the accomplishments of these talented individuals and that their artistic achievements will be allotted their proper place within Cape Ann’s artistic history.

The Cape Ann Museum has been collecting artwork and objects related to the history and culture of the area for over 85 years. In terms of works created by women, early gifts were typical of what other historical organizations were receiving, items which are perhaps best categorized as the industrial arts, folk arts or even arts and crafts. Among them were numerous examples of finely wrought needlework from the Colonial and Federal periods including samplers, mourning pictures, embroidered clothing and hand stitched quilts. Not nearly as numerous as the textiles but created with the same painstaking care were volumes of pressed seaweeds and mosses presented to the Museum by the daughters and granddaughters of the women who had collected them. Sprinkled amongst this array of objects was an occasional painting or drawing done by a woman.

One of earliest known paintings by a woman in the collection of the Cape Ann Museum dates to the late 1790s and is most accurately referred to as schoolgirl art. Ruin by a Stream is a small watercolor done by Abigail Somes Davis (1784-1842), a daughter of Gloucester merchant Samuel Somes and his wife Abigail (Bray) Somes. The work was given to the Museum by Alfred Mansfield Brooks who first became involved in the organization in 1937 and went on to serve for many years as its president and curator. Brooks was a scholarly man with a broad vision of what was historically important. He was also related to many of Cape Ann’s oldest families and caretaker of their most treasured possessions. Among his many gifts to the Museum was this small, richly composed allegorical painting done by Davis when she was just 14 years old. As the daughter of a successful merchant, it is likely that Davis attended a girl’s academy, of which there were several on the North Shore, but what her formal education consisted of beyond reading and writing remains unclear. Ruin by a Stream displays little sense of depth or reality and the figures are highly stylized and out of scale. However, there is an endearing quality about the work that has made it a prized possession of the Museum, and before that of its original owners, for over 200 years.

Although not a native of the area like Abigail Somes Davis, Susanna Paine (1792-1862) maintains an important place in the early history of women artists on Cape Ann and in the collections of the Cape Ann Museum. One of the first portrait painters to work in the area —male or female—and the first woman that we know of who was able to support herself as an artist, Paine arrived here in 1833. She was born in Rehoboth, Massachusetts, and attended the “best” girls’ academy in Rhode Island where she learned to read and write and was introduced to the world of art. After a short stint as a school teacher, a failed marriage and the death of an infant son, Paine set her sights on becoming an artist. As an itinerant or traveling painter, she was frequently on the move, advertising her services in local newspapers and boarding with families who commissioned her works.

During the 1830s and 1840s, Susanna Paine visited Cape Ann on several occasions, finding it to be a singular place. The scenery was delightful… the people, just to [her] liking... [and] everything... free, easy and agreeable... Today, the Cape Ann Museum’s holdings include seven portraits by or attributed to Susanna Paine. Rich in detail, bold and forthright, each is a three-quarter or full view of the sitter. Backdrops are dark and sparse leaving the viewer...
to focus solely on the sitter; highlights are concentrated on the subject’s head, a single hand, a bit of lace.

While Paine devoted herself to portraiture (and was able to make her stays on Cape Ann profitable), Mary Blood Mellen who followed in her footsteps concentrated solely on landscape painting. In recent years, Mellen (1819-1886) has emerged as one of the most talented women artists to work in the area in the years immediately preceding the Civil War. The Cape Ann Museum received its first work by her in 1932, a bequest of Miss Catalina Davis, one of the organization’s early financial supporters. In her will, Davis left the Museum three oil paintings attributed at the time to Fitz H. Lane (1804-1865); one has since been reattributed to Mary Blood Mellen, Lane’s most prodigious student. In coming decades, three additional works by Mellen would be added to the Museum’s holdings providing a sizeable enough body of work to truly appreciate the depth of her skills.

Mellen is thought to have been born in Vermont and to have grown up in Taunton, Massachusetts, where she also attended a girl’s academy and studied, among other subjects, the art of painting in watercolor. She made her way to Gloucester with her husband in the late 1850s and studied under Lane in his harbor front studio. Like many women artists of her generation, Mary Mellen was a copiest, not only working under Lane’s tutelage but apparently using his pencil drawings and his paintings as the basis of her own works. This has made attribution of her paintings a challenge but at the same time speaks to Lane’s respect for her skills. While evocative of Lane’s work, Mellen’s have their own distinct palette, their own treatment of space and their own level of detail. Perhaps the strongest work by Mary Mellen in the Museum’s collection is an oil on canvas of Field Beach on the Western Shore of Gloucester Harbor, a handsomely composed pastoral view, which was given to the Museum by descendants of the painting’s original owners.

In the decades following the Civil War, educational opportunities for women interested in the arts gradually opened up as schools started admitting women, and teachers who offered individualized instruction began taking on female students. Audella Beebe Hyatt (1840-1932), who is represented in the Cape Ann Museum’s collection by seven small watercolors, is one of the many women who benefited from this trend. Born in Kinderhook, New York, Della as she was known attended a local academy as a young woman and, in 1867, married paleontologist Alpheus Hyatt (1838-1902). By 1870, the Hyatts had made Cape Ann their summer home, moving into the old Norwood House at Goose Cove. In addition to assisting her husband with his research, providing illustrations for his books on marine life and doing her own artwork, Della gave birth to four children, two of whom became sculptors: Harriet Hyatt Mayor (1868-1960) and Anna Hyatt Huntington (1876-1973).

Mary Blood Mellen (1819-1886). Field Beach, Stage Fort Park, c.1850s. Oil on canvas. Gift of Mrs. Preston Dise, 1964. [Accession # 2019]


Many individuals in addition to Audella Hyatt benefited from William Morris Hunt's and Helen Knowlton's interest in art instruction for women not the least of them Ellen Day Hale (1855-1940) who was part of Hunt's circle from 1874 to 1877. Hale was a woman of many talents with an oeuvre that included etching, portraiture and mural painting. After studying with Hunt and Knowlton, Hale attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and traveled to Paris to continue her education.

Ellen Day Hale first came to Cape Ann during the mid-1880s with friend and fellow artist Gabrielle de Veaux Clements (1858-1948). In 1913, Hale built a house and studio in the Folly Cove neighborhood; Clements' studio was built on to an old house which she purchased in the same area and had moved away from the busy street. Hale is represented in the Cape Ann Museum by a c.1925 oil portrait of Vera Cheves, the wife of a local quarryman and a librarian at the Boston Public Library. Cheves donated the painting to the Museum in 1996. A charcoal sketch by Ellen Day Hale, done while she was studying with Hunt and Knowlton, is also preserved within the Magnolia Sketch Book. Gabrielle de Veaux Clements is represented within the Museum's holdings by a 9’x13’ mural entitled Harvest, done for the Columbian Exposition of 1893.

As art education opportunities continued to open up in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the number of women artists working and exhibiting on Cape Ann swelled. Many made their way to the area in the company of family and friends while others followed art instructors who organized summer classes in the area. When venues such as the Gallery-on-the-Moors, the Gloucester Society of Artists, the North Shore Art Association and the Rockport Art Association began offering display space during the first two decades of the 20th century, exhibitions were filled with works by women artists, painters and sculptors alike. Among those who discovered the area during this time were several members of The Philadelphia Ten, a group of forward thinking women artists who challenged the prevailing rules of society and the art world by working and exhibiting together. Perhaps best known from this group were Theresa Bernstein (1890-2002) who first visited Cape Ann around 1916; Fern Isabel Coppedge (1888-1951) who arrived in the area at the same time as Bernstein; Emma Fordyce MacRae (1887-1974) who first came to Gloucester in 1914 with her family and returned regularly for the next 40 years; and Elizabeth Wentworth Roberts (1871-1927) who spent summers in Annisquam from the early 1900s on.

One of the most well known women artists to make her way to Cape Ann during this time was Cecilia Beaux (1855-1942) who made her first trip to the area in 1887 staying with her family at the Fairview Inn in East Gloucester and returning for several years on an almost annual basis. In 1903, Beaux gave up the Inn and rented a cottage on nearby Eastern Point; by 1906, she had a new summer home and studio constructed (which she called Green Alley) on the Point and become a regular part of the local art scene.

A Philadelphian by birth, Beaux, like Ellen Day Hale, benefited from formal art instruction on both American soil and abroad. She was also successful as a teacher and at exhibiting her works, something which women artists of an earlier generation were unable to do. Beaux is best known as a portrait painter and her success in that field came early when in 1899 she was awarded a gold medal for her work at the Carnegie Institute. In 1930, working from her home in Gloucester, Beaux published Background with Figures, an autobiography tracing her family history as well as her own encounters with the many “characters of world interest” she met through her long and successful career as an artist.6

In 1980, through the generosity of a family with ties to Manchester, Massachusetts, the Cape Ann Museum received its first oil painting by Cecilia Beaux: a life-size depiction of young Henry Parsons King, Jr., a work which has charmed Museum visitors since it first went on display. In recent years, three additional paintings by Beaux, all with local connections, have been added to the collection: portraits of Congressman and Eastern Point resident A. Piatt Andrew; Colonel Leslie Buswell, a founder of the American Field Service and owner of Stillington Hall in Gloucester; and, most recently, William H. Robinson, a brother-in-law of Buswell.

Margaret Fitzhugh Browne (1884-1972), like Cecilia Beaux, concentrated her artistic talents on portraiture, creating during the course of her long career an untold number of canvases, capturing her sitters in their everyday settings, with their “telling” and sometimes quirky attributes plainly on view. The Cape Ann Museum received its first work by Browne in 1977, an oil on canvas entitled Our Lady of Good Voyage showing the carved wooden statue atop Gloucester's landmark Portuguese church. Browne was no stranger to the Museum. In 1935, she had been invited to speak before a Museum audience, sharing her encounters with the various characters and personalities she had met as a portrait painter. In recent years, the Museum has added several other works by Browne to its collection including a portrait of famed fisherman turned trans-Atlantic solo sailor turned saloon keeper Howard Blackburn; a handsome portrait of engineer John Hays Hammond, Sr., done in 1929; and, more recently, a portrait of the artist’s sister, Emily Browne with a bunch of brightly colored marigolds spread across her lap.

Margaret Fitzhugh Browne was born in Boston and like virtually all the women...
are best categorized as industrial arts. Organized in 1938, the Designers evolved into a group of 43 designer-craftsmen who, under the leadership of Virginia Lee Burton Demetrios, worked together professionally to design and carve linoleum blocks which in turn were used to print fabric and paper. Most members of the group were married women raising children; for many, the only artistic training they had was the design course Demetrios developed and offered to new members. Standards were high and Designers were required to submit their works to a panel of their peers for review and comment. As a result, the works of all the Folly Cove Designers are exceptional. Today, the Cape Ann Museum has the single largest collection of works by the Folly Cove Designers including examples of their carved blocks, samples of their printed materials, their businesses records and other assorted archival records and photographs.

Since receipt of the Folly Cove collection, the Cape Ann Museum has loosened its long-standing policies regarding exhibiting contemporary artists. One result has been the growth of artwork by women in the organization’s holdings. Indeed, the decision to acquire and display works by living artists was hastened by the presence of such esteemed women artists as Katherine Lane Weems (1899-1989) and Nell Blaine (1922-1996) within the local community.

discussed here, came from a social standing which allowed her the privilege of studying art on a formal basis as a young woman. From the 1910s through the end of her life, Browne exhibited her paintings regularly, in Boston galleries and here on Cape Ann. In 1935, she was appointed president of the North Shore Arts Association, a position she held until 1937. Browne maintained a studio in the Fenway Studios in Boston and later in her summer home on River Road in the Annisquam section of Gloucester. She is credited with being creator of the Wax Works, an annual community tableau held as part of the Annisquam Sea Fair.

In 1968-69, when the Folly Cove Designers disbanded and donated their holdings to the Cape Ann Museum, the Museum essentially came full circle taking into its holdings a sizeable collection of works created primarily by women that...
art community, artists who during their lifetimes had become too well known to bypass.

Weems, who lived and worked for much of her life in Manchester and is author of the book *The Odds Were Against Me*, is best known for her monumental works in bronze including *Dolphins of the Sea* at the New England Aquarium in Boston. At the Cape Ann Museum, she is represented by much smaller works including *Grey Fox*, a bronze donated in 1984 by the artist, and *Rabbit*, a cast stone piece given in 1989 by friend and fellow sculptor Walker Hancock.

Nell Blaine first came to Gloucester in 1943; by the mid-1950s when she began staying in the area on a regular basis she was already a well-established New York artist. In 1974, Blaine purchased a house in East Gloucester which served as her summer residence and studio for the next 22 years. Her works are full of color and excitement and capture the essence of summer on Cape Ann. In 1989, the Museum received its first work by Nell Blaine, an interior view of her West Wharf studio on Rocky Neck. Since that time, a handful of other works by Blaine have been added to the Museum’s holdings along with works by several other New York artists who followed her to the area.

Today, the Cape Ann Museum is committed to collecting the finest examples of artwork in all mediums created by women artists of Cape Ann, past and present, and to sharing them with a wide and appreciative audience. It is an undertaking the organization embraces wholeheartedly and takes great pleasure in doing.

Martha Oaks, Curator
Cape Ann Museum

The Cape Ann Museum acknowledges the research work done in connection with this exhibition by Hannah French, a Connecticut College student who served as an intern at the Museum during the summer of 2009.

1 For as long as the Museum has been collecting objects, it has also been collecting written materials related to the history of the area. Today, the Museum’s holdings include an extensive library which includes an *Artists’ Archives* containing an array of information on the hundreds of artists who spent time in the greater Cape Ann area. Much of the information included in this gallery guide was drawn from that resource.

2 Susanna Paine, *Roses and Thorns or Recollections of an Artist: A Tale of Truth, for the Grave and the Gay* (Providence, B. T. Albro Printer, 1854), p.111-112. Susanna Paine was a writer as well as a painter, publishing poetry and in 1854 an autobiography entitled *Roses and Thorns* in which she recounted her visits to Cape Ann.

3 For more on Mary Blood Mellen see Sarah Dunlap and Stephanie Buck, *Fitz Henry Lane, Family and Friends* (Gloucester, Cape Ann Historical Museum, 2007), and John Wilmerding, *Fitz Henry Lane & Mary Blood Mellen: Old Mysteries and New Discoveries* (New York, Spanierman Gallery, 2007).


7 For more on the Folly Cove Designers see the exhibition catalog *Folly Cove Designers* (Gloucester, Cape Ann Historical Association, 1996).
Hours
The Cape Ann Museum is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. Sundays, 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm. Closed on Mondays, all major holidays, and during the month of February.

Admission
Adults $8.00; Seniors, Students and Cape Ann residents $6.00. Children under 12 and Museum members are free.

Tours
Guided or group tours arranged by appointment; please call 978-283-0455, x11.

Access
The Museum is wheelchair accessible.

Membership
The Museum is supported by donations and annual memberships. Call 978-283-0455, x11 for membership information.

For up-to-date information on exhibitions, special events, and public programs, visit the Museum’s website at capeannmuseum.org or call 978-283-0455.

CAPE ANN MUSEUM
ART HISTORY CULTURE
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MURAL CONSERVATION PROJECT:
Art conservator, Lisa Mehlin, will be working on an 1893 mural by Gabrielle de Veaux Clements in the gallery throughout the exhibition period:
Thursdays and Fridays from 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Saturdays, October 31, November 21, December 12 and January 9 from 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

LECTURE:
What Women Make: How to Educate a “Proper” Woman Artist
Laura Tonelli, Art History Faculty and Dean of Students & Academic Affairs, Montserrat College of Art
Saturday, December 5 at 3:00 p.m.
This program is included with Museum admission. Reservations required. Call 978-283-0455, x11.

CURATOR GALLERY TOUR:
Martha Oaks, Curator, Cape Ann Museum
Saturday, January 2 at 9:30 a.m.
This program is included with Museum admission. Reservations required. Call 978-283-0455, x11.

DOCENT TOURS:
Highlights of the Collection tours include an overview of the exhibition. Tours are offered every Friday and Saturday at 11:00 a.m. and on Sunday at 2:00 p.m., and are included with Museum admission.

MUSEUM INFORMATION