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COMING OF AGE IN THE ROCKY NECK ART SCENE OF THE 1950S LECTURE TRANSCRIPT

Speaker:	Peter Anastas
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Video Description

From 2013 Press Release: Writer and Gloucester native Peter Anastas will give an illustrated talk, "Coming of Age in the East Gloucester Art World of the 1950s" at the Cape Ann Museum on July 13 at 3 p.m. The talk will focus on the artists and writers Anastas knew in and around Rocky Neck. He will describe his journey toward an understanding of the relationship between visual and literary art and the places in which it is created.

He will detail his experience as a young man who reported on the Cape Ann arts community for the Gloucester Daily Times' Cape Ann Summer Sun.

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This program is offered in conjunction with the special exhibition “Four Winds: the Arts and Letters of Rocky Neck during the 1950s.”

Transcription

Courtney Richardson 0:13

Welcome. Full House! I'm Courtney Richardson, Director of Education and Public Programs here at the Cape Ann Museum and I just want to welcome you all. Thank you so much for coming. All thanks to Peter. I want to thank our members because you make programs like this possible and help us do all the things that we do for the community, so thank you. I also just want to let you know that, for those of you who don't know, we will be closing our doors in October to do some major renovations. So come often this summer, enjoy our special exhibitions. On the Third Floor we have Hopper Redux, Photographs by Gail Albert Halaban, and also Four Winds—this wonderful catalog is upstairs for sale in our Museum shop and Peter's essay is amazing. And he just told me that this talk today is not a repeat of what's in the catalog, it takes us to a new place. So this is definitely a keeper because you won't be able to hear—won't be able to know what's in here, from today. Thank you, Peter! So I just want to welcome Peter, I want to thank him for all the work he does for the Cape Ann Museum. As I said he wrote an amazing essay for this special exhibition, last summer he updated his essay for the Marsden Hartley: Soliloquy in Dogtown exhibition catalog. He's done numerous programs with us, he's coming back in September to do a gallery talk with David Rich about Ferrini's poems. So make sure if you think you want to come to that, that you sign up and register for it because space is limited. So we want to be able to get you all in there. He's written numerous novels and other collections like this, his most recent, A Walker in the City: Elegy for Gloucester. And I've seen people running up to him already asking him to sign this. So I'm sure he wouldn't mind if you wanted to do that later. That's all; thank you so much for coming.

Peter Anastas 2:38

Thank you so much. If at any time, you can't hear what I'm saying, please, raise your hand, please tell me. Can you hear me now?

I'd like to take you on a journey back to Gloucester in the 1950s and through my, not necessarily my childhood, but that period after childhood. And it's called “Coming of Age in the Rocky Neck art scene of the 1950s.”

Every time I look at this painting of Bickford's Landing, which was sent 62 years ago to my parents, by Emile and Dorothy Gruppe, as a welcoming gift on the occasion of the opening of Peter's, my father's luncheonette and S.S. Pierce grocery store at one Wonson Street, now Sailor Stans. And it's framed shortly thereafter by poet and frame maker Vincent Ferrini. Every time I look at this painting, I'm carried back to the Rocky Neck of those post-war years, during which I came of age among artists and writers, whose influence and inspiration have remained with me.

3:55

One of the reasons I wanted to show you this is that the frame is very much of its time, isn't it? This is when Vincent first began making those really extraordinary picture frames that many people thought were as fine as, if not finer, than the art. [Crowd Laughter]

My experience with art did not begin when we moved to Rocky Neck in June of 1951. Though the Rocky Neck art colony constituted a new world for my younger brother, Tom and me. I was actually introduced to art in the first grade at Hovey school by the school department's remarkable art supervisor and teacher Hale Anthony, later known to us after her marriage as Mrs. Johnson. When we first graders initially encountered Hale Anthony, who came once a week to teach us how to draw and paint and introduce us to art history, especially to the art being created around Cape Ann,

5:00

it was 1943 and I was six years old. I remember Hale Anthony as having an olive complexion and glossy dark hair. She dressed beautifully, "very artistic", as our envious mothers put it. In colorful clothing much of which she designed and made herself. Let's take a look at the second image.

Courtney Richardson 5:26

I just had a minor technical problem.

Peter Anastas 5:30

Okay, I will show you a picture that I found of Hale Anthony, it was a few years after she'd been my art teacher and I found a picture in the Gloucester Times of her with two other artists, proud to be among them, and they're delivering paintings to the Cape Ann Festival for the Arts.

6:00

There she is, there she in the middle. An extraordinary, she was an extraordinary person and she was our first art teacher. We were always excited when our teachers announced that today would be the day Mrs. Johnson was coming to do art with us because she was a lively teacher, who led us in a series of projects such as creating tiger swallowtail and monarch butterflies, whose wings we'd cut out of plywood or thin pine,

6:24

paint with bright colors, rust browns and blacks and glue together at 90 degree angles, their antenna made of black-stained pipe cleaners, to make them look as if they were actually in flight. Once the paint was dried, we proudly took our butterflies home, where they remained objects of pride and delight. At Central Grammar our art teachers were Jean Nugent in seventh grade and Edna Hodgkins in eighth grade. Both were artists themselves, excellent painters and designers, whose classrooms, hung with our drawings and paintings, always look like more like art galleries.

7:01

I remember once when the school was doing a play about George Washington's life, Ms. Nugent asked me to pose in front of our art class in colonial costume, with a wig and white stockings so that the class could draw me. The boys predictively made fun of my legs in those stockings.

7:24

But Ms. Nugent, ever sensitive to the mortification of our pre-adolescent days reminded the class that the overall figure was paramount, not the stockings the model was wearing.

7:36

So it was not without some background in art that I arrived on Rocky Neck in June of 1951. Or as I've said, this storied island that became a peninsula was still a new world for my brother and me. Just imagine two boys from a largely working class Perkins Road down by Blynman Bridge, whose only excitement was high school football in Newell Stadium,

8:00

Fourth of July fireworks at Stage Fort Park, and Fiesta, as soon as the war had ended, being set down in what seemed to us the very exotic world of women artists with stunning long hair and sandals laced up to just below the knee, and the men, who painted outdoors wearing swordfish caps with long bills and smoked curved pipes, all speaking in a language about what they were doing, thinking and dreaming of that I barely understood, but wanted somehow to know and to emulate. That would come later, when I began needing to talk with artists like Gruppe himself at the counter of my father's store, when he came in several times a day for black coffee during breaks from painting. Gruppe spoke in a rough European inflected English. It was said that he'd once been a drinker, but his wife, Dot, had convinced him to stop,

9:00

lengthening his life and enhancing his art. As I've written in my catalog for Four Winds, the first artists I began to meet that island summer were members of the Rocky Neck art group, in particular Tom O'Hara. Let's take a look at the next image. Tom O'Hara, an extraordinary artist who taught at Mass Public Art, and always seemed to have time for an inquisitive boy. Tom's work had a quality to it that was amazing, particularly to me at the time, because there was so much about color and movement and the way that he dealt with shapes. And Bob Bradshaw. Let's take a look at the next page. This is the Doris Hall Gallery, the buildings still exists on Rocky Neck.

10:00

Bob was a professor of art at Rutgers and both Tom and Bob were young artists with growing families whose children mingled with the kids on the Neck. There's one more wonderful watercolor here, if we can see the next image, and it's got a marvelous sense of movement. Both were young with growing families whose children mingled with the kids on the Neck. It

was as quiet in winter as it was frantic in summer. Max and Faye Schwartz, art teachers at the Cambridge Mass public schools, became lifelong friends, were among that group.

10:34

I loved Max's iconic humor. Let's take a look at that in a wonderful drawing of Max's. This is in the Four Winds show, it's a drawing of an artist demonstration at Rocky Neck. Max and Faye visited me in Florence, years later, when I was studying at the university. While I conducted them to the Uffizi Gallery one afternoon, we gossiped among the Giotto's and pianos, not about Italian Art, but about Rocky Neck.

11:07

Also, while I did not meet them until later, during the years of which I am speaking, artists Gordon Goetemann and his wife Judith were studying with extraordinary artist and teacher Umberto Romano at the Gallery of the Moors on Ledge Road. They remain among today's prominent artists on Rocky Neck at the gallery of 37 Rocky Neck Avenue. The artist who inspired me most before I met Albert Alcalay was Virginia Whittingham, a young woman who had just graduated from art school in New York and was spending her first summer on Rocky Neck. Ginnie, as the grown ups called her—I always called her Ms. Whittingham— lived in a small one room studio at West Wharf. With her blue eyes, long blonde hair, and her tan legs, she received a lot of attention from men.

12:04

She wore white tennis shorts with a blue work shirt that was usually stippled with paint. She painted in the morning and spent her afternoons reading in the sun at Niles Beach. On the way back from the beach, she always stopped in at the store for a lime rickey, which our customers insisted be made by my father, while I stood by shyly. I had terrible crush on her. She attempted to draw me out by asking what I was reading. When I mentioned that since seventh grade, I read mostly books about science and science fiction, novels like Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*, L. Sprague de Camp's *Genus Homo*, and of course, Jules Verne, she asked me had I ever heard of Dostoyevsky or Thomas Wolfe. When I said I hadn't, she tore a sheet of paper from her notebook and began in her very distinctive handwriting, a combination of print and cursive, to list some novels by those two writers and others by Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, and Sherwood Anderson, which she recommended.

13:13

Even though I was about to enter high school in September, I felt that such writers might be beyond my comprehension. That was actually my mother's ever-vigilant opinion. I took the bus to Sawyer Free Library the next day and signed out Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*. Reading that novel, and several others on Ms. Whittingham's list, especially Thomas Wolf's *Of Time and the River*, a novel you can probably only read when you're an adolescent, changed my life.

13:45

Naturally, I didn't understand everything I read in *The Idiot*. But I lugged the book to the beach. I read it, I groped my way through Dostoyevsky's spidery sentences. Nor can I claim to have caught what laid behind the contours of events I was able to perceive, or the motivations of the novel's larger than life characters. What I absorbed most fully then was not the story, scarcely the line of an intricate plot. What I absorbed, literally breathed in, was the atmosphere of the novel, and the possibility of the creation of just such atmospheres that would become the provenance, the very thrust of the act of writing for me.

14:35

The next book, I borrowed, was *Of Time and the River*. Just as I'd been transfixed by the lonely fate, the figure of the lone aesthete, misunderstood and ultimately reviled Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*, the description of the young Thomas Wolfe himself at Harvard burned its way into my memory, especially the scene at Widener Library when in his hunger for what they contain, he is pulling books down from their shelves, as though he wishes to devour not only their contents, but their bindings as well. I went on that summer to read some chapters from *Winesburg, Ohio*, which deeply influenced my future writing.

15:18

And I took a peek at John Dos Passos' *U.S.A.*, which I wouldn't actually read until college, when it hit me like a bombshell. All the myths I had been taught to believe about America, falling like scales from my eyes. Those initial readings in Dostoevsky and Thomas Wolfe were the incisive ones. After my encounters with the solitary messianic Russian and the gigantic craving American from the small North Carolina town of Asheville, I would never be the same. Nor would my life, only I wouldn't know that yet.

15:57

Ms. Whittingham never returned to Gloucester, but that one summer during which we talked about art and literature almost daily, and I watched her work evolve from figurative painting to experiments and abstraction was an important part of my education. During the following summer, I became more intimate with and knowledgeable about the Rocky Neck art scene. When as a result of writing for the Gloucester high school newspaper, which printed as a single page every Saturday night in the Gloucester Daily Times, I was asked by editor Paul Kenyon to become the Rocky Neck correspondent for the town. Thus at the age of 14, my formal writing career, writing for publication and getting paid, began.

16:49

The summer of 1952 was the first summer that the Sun was published with the Times, which had been newly acquired by veteran newsman Phil Weld with financial assistance from Gloucester-born economist and philanthropist, Roger Babson. Weld subsequently bought the Beverly Times, Danvers, and Newburyport newspapers, creating a conglomerate, which offered top notch reporting in a newly designed format that featured superb photographs and

thoughtful editorials, many in the Gloucester Times ghostwritten by E. Hyde Cox, a Harvard graduate like Weld who had taught English at Exeter during the war years and was later to become president of the Cape Ann Museum.

17:38

Cox was also an early patron of artist Andrew Wyeth and a close friend of poet Robert Frost, about which I will have more to say. My editor at the Sun was John T. Bethell, a member of the Harvard class in 1954, which included novelists John Updike and Louis Begley, and Essex's Edward Hoagland. John aspired to write for *The New Yorker*, which for him and his contemporaries was the pinnacle of journalism, coupled with exquisite prose. John had shaggy blond hair, and his uniform consisted of wrinkled Brooks Brothers blue button oxford cloth shirt and khakis with ragged cuffs. He walked around the office barefoot when he wasn't sitting on his desk with his legs folded under him.

18:36

John never made it to *The New Yorker*. After graduation he worked on an [?] until he returned to Harvard as editor of the magazine. John always seemed to address this 14 year old with a croak and broad Gloucester accent from a certain height, although he accepted me as a neophyte reporter. My first column, dated June 27, 1952, begins—let's take a look at the column, next slide please. That's my first moment. Quote, "A very charming visitor to Rocky Neck is Mrs. Walsworth Bell of Hampton, England, mother of Mrs. William Sibley.

19:20

Mrs. Walsworth Bell arrived May 13 on the *Queen Mary*, and after a stay of nine weeks, will return on the *Queen Elizabeth*. Both mother and daughter served England during the war and now the two sons have served. The main reason for the visit is to await the birth of a third grandchild." Gathering writer's information, getting the spelling of the names right, and the facts straight was the beginning of my education as a reporter. But there was a learning curve starting with that first column. For example, in that same column, I wrote, quote, "The last few months we have watched with interest as 'Gerry' Hill readied the Bickford Fleet, of harbor cruise and sport fishing boats, for summer duty. The Dorothy, member of the fleet, is 75 years old and is remembered by many of the old timers on the Neck."

20:17

Innocuous enough it would seem, the minute the Sun hit the street, Jerry was on the phone, "Are you out of your mind, reporting that the Dorothy is 75 years old? No one would want to board her, she'll sink!" So I had my first lesson in journalism, that not in every case do you report just the facts, some judgment is required, as when four summers later I became editor of the Sun, and was also reporting for the Times. Paul Kenyon had me call the parking lot attendant at Good Harbor to ask him about beach traffic. I swear that I heard him say, "The parking lot was full but there was room for more cars." So I reported it. With his name attached.

21:17

The next day he calls Paul, furious that we made a fool of him. “What do you mean ‘the lot was full but there was room for more cars?’ How could that be? Your report made me out to be an idiot.” Looking through the microfilms, other times during that first summer, I’m amazed at the history I inadvertently recorded. Smelt fishing from Bickford’s Landing, for example. Baseball might be the national pastime elsewhere, but it is definitely not in Rocky Neck. A pastime of young and old alike is smelt fishing. George McClinton, Reggie Jackson, Robert Gruppe and Sally Anderson exhibit great skill as they land many a steaker, a steaker was a term at that time to for a well fleshed fish.

22:09

In my column for July 11 1952—we can take a little peak at that in a second, next image— I wrote, quote, that “Mrs. William Bradford Green arrived last week from her Connecticut home in a fine new car. Mrs. Green converted the Giles Chapel on Wonson Street—some think to pronounce it Giles—into a gallery of paintings by her late husband.” Had I been a more conscientious reporter, I might have told what make of car Mrs. Green was driving and where in Connecticut she lived in the winter, indeed what her husband's name was and what sort of paintings he did, but that would come with time and experience. Giles chapel is now the Rocky Neck Cultural Center.

22:58

I also remember but did not write about, that Mrs. Green was a fine pianist, it was said that she had once sung professionally. Each morning one would hear her playing the magnificent Steinway grand piano that sat in the front of the Chapel. Another piece of history that I recorded, quote, “Mr. And Mrs. Gordon Grant arrived from New York to spend the season at the Rockaway Hotel. Gordon Grant is a well-known painter and illustrator.” No Bohemian studio for the affluent Grants, rather the Rockaway with its fading [?], grand and continental cuisine.

23:40

My brother and I would play for tea dances at the hotel in the years to come. Me on piano, Tom on saxophone and clarinet, which he’d been taught to play by painter and musician Dorothy Primm from Bickford Way, and on drums, Bob Shores, whose father owned Shores Wharf on East Main Street. Our performances always beginning and ending with the Elizabeth Waltz, said to have been composed in honor of Mrs. Publicover, the owner's wife. Nor can I forget the Rockaway Rocker that always got the older guests out of their rocking chairs and up onto the dance floor for a brisk Foxtrot.

24:28

I worked on other things during the first summer as a young reporter and columnist. As I've written in my catalog essay for Four Winds, I had become a regular visitor to the Cape Ann Society of Modern Artists, CASMA. It was gathering in the old ballroom of the Hawthorne Inn Casino, was one of my daily routes to Niles Beach. It was at that gallery—they had a second one

at Red Men's Hall in Rockport, and Doris Hall's Gallery and coffee house on Rocky Neck—that I got my introduction to contemporary art of a modernist and experimental nature, and it gripped my imagination by stimulating desire in me to know more about this new art and the people who created it.

25:13

Along with experimentalism in the visual arts came new expression in writing. Two summers in a row Vincent Ferrini, who had moved to Gloucester from Lynn in 1948 leaving behind work as a bench hand at GE to open his own picture frame shop at 126 East Main Street, now the home of the Gloucester Writer's Center, gave a reading at CASMA. That summer also Ferrini, and his wife Margaret, David and Ilmi Meddaugh, and Mary Shore launched Four Winds, a local literary magazine with international outreach. In an unsigned article, the Cape Ann Summer Sun welcomed what the paper called the first native magazine in the headline of a long, informative, and positive article. Let's take a peek—next. That's the article that welcomed this first issue of the local Gloucester magazine. I do not recall reading that article, but I do remember that I found a copy of the magazine cover. It's quite attractive.

26:30

And, what amazes me so much is this is the actual magazine from 1952 that I bought. Look at the condition that it's in, wonderful paper, wonderful stock, it just shows you how these things stood out. I found a copy of the magazine on the book and magazine table at the Doris Hall Gallery and bought it for 75 cents, rushing home to spend the rest of the day and night pouring over it.

26:59

I've written at length about this singular encounter in my essay for the exhibition. Though my reading and Dostoevsky had prepared me for literature that was more demanding than the science fiction novels I'd been devouring, I was not prepared for the poetry of Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Denise Levertov, the great German poet and physician Gottfried Benn, or Ferrini himself that I found in Four Winds, nor for the experimental fiction that magazine also printed. There is a moment in a young person's life—but remember, I did not know yet, my major interest until then were the sciences—when he or she comes upon something entirely unexpected. A book, a painting, a song, a poem that excites you unaccountably and changes the way you see yourself and the world.

27:58

It's an experience that you're not even aware you've been seeking, and yet all your life you have been preparing for it. This is what happened to me when I first read Four Winds. I can't say that I understood all the poetry or the fiction in the magazine. What I can recall is that immersing myself in such lines as these from Denise Levertov's "Only the Heavy Groves." "Nothing moves under stare of the sun. The bones of time are white, strewn on burnt turf, the shore surface." Reading such lines as that, or reading phrases out of a poem within the magazine,

28:46

I felt I had found what I had been waiting for all my life. This is a brief Ferrini poem, which is in the magazine. “I pass by day and night, no one has seen me. If you ever want to find me and know me, leave behind yourself and enter the caves of other people, there you will find me who is yourself.” It was a call, reading this magazine, my invitation to be me, even though I barely knew who I was or what I would become. Such is the impact, the value, of art and literature, which has been so sadly sidelined today in public education, such is the impact and value of art and literature. And I'd been given that gift not only in the city where I was born but in my own Rocky Neck neighborhood. That summer at the age of 14 I did not yet know or imagine that I would become a writer.

30:01

Now I was already writing and getting paid for it, but the seeds were sown, seeds that would take me many, many more years to mature and germinate. A few months later I would meet Ferrini, forming a lifelong friendship. Four Winds would lead to me other friendships, with painter Mary Shore, with Albert Alcalay, whose work is the central focus of the “Four Winds” exhibition, and with Charles Olson, whose writing and whose mentoring had the most profound impact on me of anyone I had ever known. There was something else to be written that summer when I was 14, and it also had to do with Four Winds and the Cape Ann Summer Sun.

30:42

Having welcomed the magazine on July 18, a week later the Sun published a highly critical review signed by editor Bethell charging that, of the poetry and prose, quote, “Almost all follow the same line of precious avant garde affected writing, and a few, a few are inarticulate to the point of absurdity.” Bethell, who just completed his second year of college, advises the poets, three of whom, Olson, Creeley, and Levertov, would become among the country's most distinguished poets, to write, quote, “in a less limiting form than free verse,” and he dismisses editor Ferrini's poem that I just read to you, quote, “as a reflection of some confusion in the poet's mind.”

31:45

Concluding, quote, “Four Winds is in main trivial and unpleasant. “Some of its writing is poor, some inexcusable. “There is a point in “Sophie”—that's a story by Dan Curley, a new professor at Syracuse Dan was, who had already published in The Atlantic Monthly. The review says, “There's a point in the story when the young medical student comes face to face with a female and is sick out of the window into her garden. After reading Four Winds,” Bethell wrote, “you should see mine.” While in retrospect Bethell's review can be charitably described as sophomoric, there was a dark dimension to it.

32:34

My own reaction to his review was, how can writing that has moved and excited me be judged so negatively and disparagingly by someone, especially a Harvard student who is older than I

am and must know more than I do? If this is so, what is wrong with me? Does this mean that I lacked judgment or I was stupid? It was a situation I would face many times in the years to come when my taste in art or literature, diverging from the mainstream, would come under such criticism.

33:11

As I grew older, I would gain a larger understanding of the forces that created taste and how critical academic and political establishments police their culture. What I did not know or understand at 14 was that behind Bethell's criticism lay not only a cultural but a political agenda. Bethell's essay can be read in its entirety as an exercise in anti-avant gardism that masks the author's and the newspaper's anti-communism. His review, received from an understanding within the new editorial hierarchy of the newspaper that at least two of the editors of Four Winds, in this case the Ferrinis, whose names had surfaced during recent government investigations into radical political activity, were believed to have ties to the American Communist Party, and the magazine's mission to promote international understanding and friendship through the dissemination of diverse ideas and points of view was a Soviet strategy that must be exposed and countered.

34:28

Such an assumption lay at the heart of the Cold War and became a motivating factor in Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist crusade. I understood nothing of this at the time. But when in a few years I went away to college, I found myself absorbing the same Cold War values that underlay Bethell's essay and much of the editorial policy, not only of the Gloucester Times, but of the American press in general. Coupled with that anti-communism was a literary conservatism—Bethell's essay is a prime example—proceeding from what was then called a new criticism, whose defining principles we were taught to accept in our college English and literature classes during the 50s, i.e., the poem or the novel under scrutiny was not to be looked at through the lens of history, biography, psychology, politics, or economics. A work of art is a self-contained system of images, symbols, and myths to be decoded using principles articulated by the new critics. Foremost among them, the southern agrarian pro-fascists, John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, and Allen Tate.

35:51

In other words, everything relevant to literature in the real world was read out of the poem, thereby neutering and de-politicizing it. Can you picture the impact the Beats had when their work exploded in the mid 50s into a literary culture, largely dominated by the new criticism? When we started reading Allen Ginsberg's Howl, Jack Kerouac's On the Road, our teachers became absolutely apoplectic in opposition to this violent new writing.

36:26

Before I conclude, with some stories about my own editorship of the Summer Sun, and the writers and artists I met while working for the Times, I'd like to say a very brief word about two important friendships of those years. During my junior year in high school, I met the sculptor

Walker Hancock through high school classmate, who was posing for one of Hancock's monumental pieces. Walker often use local men and women as models. We'd swim at Walker's quarry for a bit, along with the neighborhood kids. And after a swim, we'd join Walker in his Lanesville studio where we watched him work. Walker liked company while he was modeling clay, and he would explain his process as he worked, often with reference to many books of art history contained in his large and varied library. Visiting Walker was like entering the workshop of a Renaissance master. I had little experience in sculpture at the time, but after years of watching Walker work and listening to his stories of the artists he'd met in Europe when he was Artist in Residence at the American Academy in Rome, was an important preparation for my own encounters with painting and sculpture in Italy. Fascinating as well, were Walker's stories of the immediate post-war when he was a member of a Monuments Men, an international commission of artists, art historians, diplomats and military personnel that traveled through war-torn northern Europe finding and repatriating some of the great works of art that had been stolen by the Nazis.

38:17

At Walker's we met his friend Hyde Cox, who like Walker had a remarkable personal library containing such treasures as first editions of Ulysses and Finnegans Wake, and every book that Robert Frost had published including Broadides and Christmas cards. Hyde, who had done scholarly work on the poet, Emily Dickinson, had met Frost when Frost taught at Harvard, and they remained friends until Frost's death. Hyde was instrumental in bringing Frost to Gloucester to read at the Cape Ann Festival of the Arts during the summer of 1954, and later to Bowdoin when I was an undergraduate.

38:56

I met at Frost during his 1954 reading at the Gloucester High School auditorium and a year later, on December 28, 1955, when Hyde invited me and two of my classmates, high school classmates Ron Atwood and Tony Lovasco, to his house on Crow Island in Manchester for dinner with the poet. By that time, Frost was no longer the early modernist who Pound, Ezra Pound, had admired and helped launch, the author of such enigmatic poems as "Neither Out Far Nor In Deep."

39:32

He had become the nation's most popular and beloved poet, a role he played to the hilt, later reading at John F. Kennedy's inauguration and going on a goodwill trip to the Soviet Union, where he attempted to lecture Nikita Khrushchev on world peace, embarrassing Kennedy and nearly creating an international incident. While enthralled by his craggy face and gravelly voice, we were saddened to find the octogenarian poet repetitive.

40:05

By that time, one had heard enough of his dictum, that writing free verse was like playing tennis with the net down. We were equally offended by his offhand remarks about writers we admired like Hemingway and Wallace Stevens, whom Frost had come to know during winters in

Key West in the 1930s. Here's a picture of me with Walker Hancock and Hyde Cox, all three of us on the 1955 Festival of Arts steering committee. I of course was a junior member.

40:45

It had been the custom at the time, which was really amazing for our education, to recruit students to serve with adults on committees, giving us an opportunity to participate and to learn about organizing such events. During the summer of 1956 and my first and second year in college, I was asked to edit the Cape Ann Summer Sun. Editing the Times' Summer Sun, aside from giving me the kind of hands-on education and writing in journalism no school can offer, also threw me directly into the art world of Cape Ann.

41:26

This is when I met Albert Alcalay as the result of a story. This is the next one. My associate, Andy Leaf, son of Monroe, the author, the story for—and they lived on Rocky Neck, they had a summer house on Rocky Neck. And Andy was my co-author on Cape Ann Summer Sun. “Albert Alcalay’s America Shown In Color and Design,” the first story written about Albert in Gloucester. Andy wrote it, and through Albert, I was introduced to other modernist or Avant-garde artists whose work I encountered when I reviewed the shows of the Cape Ann Society of Modern Artists and the festival itself.

42:07

One especially was Nathaniel Dirk, cultural chairman of CASMA and a noted New York artist who summered in Rockport for decades. I met Dirk when I wrote my first review of CASMA’s opening show at Red Men’s Hall in Rockport. Next image please. My review, “Probing Paintings Depict Vital Aspects of Life at Modern Artists Show.” I wrote that headline myself. I was drawn to his marine-like watercolors of local marine life. Let's look at the second one. I was drawn to his marine-like watercolors of local marine life, but it was also drawn to Dirk himself—next image—for his open and forthright espousal of modernist principles That's a WPA photograph. He was a member of the WPA artist group for the WPA in New York. And that's an example of the kind of painting that he was doing at the time in the 30s, and even into the early 40s at the time of the WPA.

43:26

After reading my first review of CASMA, Dirk took me aside. He said in a thick New York accent, “I’ve got a couple of books for you to read,” and he sent me Herbert Read’s *The Philosophy of Modern Art* and Clive Bell’s *Art*. Those two books gave me not only the means to understand the art that was being created around me, but the tools to write about it. In 1957, I was back at the Sun for my second summer as editor. Once more my sidekick was Andy Leaf, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed after his first year at Harvard, welcoming Albert Alcalay and his family back to the Neck for their second year, let’s have the next image, “Albert Alcalay Back on Rocky Neck; Stresses Teaching Student to Look.”

44:22

Welcoming Albert and his family back to the Neck for their second year, Andy set the scene for what was to be our critical push for the summer as we covered the various gallery openings and Cape Ann Festival of the Arts, describing now in this quote, “One of the very few artists who exhibited really serious modern work in the face of a lot of conventional feeling and traditional painting,” Andy laid down the gauntlet. After a summer of reviewing exhibitions at local galleries and art associations, we had had our fill of schooners under full sail, fishing vessels making into port trailed by seagulls, flower arrangements, and pet dogs.

45:11

We were both yearning to experience an art beyond the traditional, which we felt one found amply at Cape Ann Society of Modern Artists and we hoped to find at the upcoming Cape Ann Festival of the Arts. It fell on me to review the visual arts exhibition at the Festival. I must confess, I, too, had my John Bethell moment. Except, while John upheld the papers of aesthetic conservatism, my tendency was toward the absent traditional. I attended the opening show, found its preponderance of mainstream work disappointing, and wrote against deadline a review, which Times editor Paul Kenyon, borrowing from a phrase in my piece, headlined, “Long Lines of Drear,”—there it is— while warning that there would be repercussions.

46:21

Among a number of disparaging comments, I wrote that the show contained, quote, “Some of the most unimaginative, poorly hung, and in general sloppily executed paintings that have ever graced, or rather disgraced the walls of the Cape Ann Festival of the Arts.” To bring home my point and to probably taunt the traditionalists, I illustrated my review with the reproduction of modernist Tom O’Hara’s satirical impression of a festival visitor. Tom did this, and it satirizes the kinds of people that were going to the Festival. It didn’t sit well. You can imagine the reaction.

47:14

Calls and letters poured into the Times taking issue with my review and calling into question my credentials. There were some responses in my favor, but the consensus was that in highlighting the more experimental work, I had slighted some of Cape Ann’s most august artists. It got so nasty that a group of the Rocky Neck artists including Elizabeth Veek [?] and Arthur Stratton [?], whose work I had neglected to mention, threatened to boycott my father’s business. Just as Ferrini’s Four Winds had elicited Cold War anti-modernism, so was non-objective art accompanied by accusations that it was communist inspired. Many times I heard some of the experimental painters I most admired referred to as “those damn Commies.”

48:11

Ironically, while American cold warriors claimed that abstract art was quote, “communist inspired,” the Soviet bureaucracy referred to it as “bourgeois decadence.” Damage control was needed. So Phil Weld and Paul Kenyon called in Hyde Cox to help me craft a response to the attacks and to mollify the artists who felt left out or insulted. Hyde and I spent the better part

of a hot summer afternoon drafting a long second part to my review, in which I articulated my own principles without giving ground, and moved on to write about the rest of the Festival.

48:58

It smarted to have my wrists slapped by my bosses. And they had my friend Hyde recruited as my instructor in the apology, but it was a learning experience I've never forgotten. That bold review of mine was not without its defenders. One of them turned out to be an artist who called himself Pico Miran. He had another name, his real name was actually Arthur Winslow Wilson. Let's take a look at the next image. This is a portrait of Winslow Wilson by Rockport artist Eleanor Hill. Wilson, a native of Texas, where his father was said to have [?], had been the poet E.E. Cummings' classmate at Harvard where each served as editor of the Harvard Monthly. After college in the war. Wilson served in the Air Force, Cummings drove an ambulance, they moved to Paris in 1923 to paint. They shared a studio, back to New York, where they again shared a studio in the village.

50:04

Cummings, who has been sadly neglected, was one of our finest early modernist poets. The late Stephen Scotti said some of his poems are the most extraordinary he's seen. Cummings was also a considerable painter who showed in major galleries. Wilson, who retained studio at Carnegie Hall in New York, and another on Cape Ann beginning in the 1940s, taught portrait and landscape painting classes at the Rockport Art Association and showed portraits and seascapes from Rockport. But he also did another kind of painting, which in a catalog for a 1951 exhibition of his work at the American Art Gallery in New York, he called post modern art, employing the term which the poet Charles Olson brought into currency at the same time.

51:00

First, let's take a look at the note that that Winslow Wilson wrote to himself. He mentions the critic Lawrence Dame. Lawrence Dame was a very well known critic at that time. He wrote for the Boston Herald and later for the New York Herald Tribune. But what Winslow Wilson, alias Pico Miran, wrote here is that if Dame did not write about modernist painting that summer, he would have to take it upon himself to take his work to New York. And, let's take a look at the next image.

51:48

And he did exactly what he said he was going to do. This is the cover of the catalog, 1951, Manifesto for Post-Modern Art, the first exhibition of post-modern art, and it's dated November 27 through December of 1951. In his catalog for the exhibition, Wilson wrote, "The new art will be Gothic American in the sense that it will brush aside all soft precedent in the whole life span of art, and treat forbidden truth, and be moltenly ductile to the shape of realities never before considered proper for painting." That's a very interesting, brave statement. Wilson also showed his highly experimental new work at CASMA, where he was

known as Pico Miran, a name he derived from the Florentine Renaissance humanist philosopher and poet, Pico della Mirandola.

52:52

At first glance—let's take a look. These are four paintings that Wilson was exhibiting in New York. At first glance, one might consider the paintings inspired by surrealism. But Wilson eschewed the term. "My drawing is straight classical naturalism," he wrote in a letter to the editor from that summer, "the very kind the surrealist set violently rejected. My art has no relation to that Salvador Dali, whom I knew in Paris," end quote.

53:31

And I responded to Wilson's letter to the editor, and we exchanged several communications that summer before he invited me to his studio in the Bradford Building on Main Street. What I discovered was a conventionally dressed older man with thinning hair, brown beret. He ushered me into his sparsely furnished two room apartment in an old Gloucester red brick downtown building that would sadly be demolished after a fire in the early 1960s, a conflagration in which Wilson lost the only copy of an autobiography he had been working on. We sat in the front room, there were no paintings in evidence. He gestured at the door towards the other room where he said he painted.

54:15

At the time I did not know that Winslow Wilson and Pico Miran were the same person. We sat and talked in a room that smelled faintly of turpentine and linseed oil. He told me about his friendship with Cummings with whom he was still in touch. Cummings had been a poet I discovered and read principally during my first year in college. He asked me if I had read anything by Samuel Beckett. I told him I had read *Waiting for Godot* and Beckett's trilogy of novels, including *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*, which had been recommended to me the previous summer by Albert Alcalay.

54:52

He told me, Wilson told me that living in the Bradford Building among single old men was like inhabiting a Beckett novel. He also told me that he had been corresponding for a long time with the American philosopher and critic Kenneth Burke. Wilson's conversation was as literate and knowledgeable as his letters. He explained to me that one of the themes that played behind his paintings was the fear of a nuclear holocaust and its subsequent annihilation of all forms of life. He said it's what drove him away from figurative painting, from the more kinds of pictorial painting, to the kind of painting he was doing, called post-modern.

55:37

He said it was the reigning anxiety of our age, that Beckett's novels written in French during and after the war were the primary art of our post-war post-atomic bomb worlds. Here's another of his paintings. This belief was reflected in the title of the bottom left painting, "Apocalyptic

Galaxy with the Little Doors to Nowhere.” Each one of these paintings has the most extraordinary—the titles are as interesting as the paintings themselves.

56:17

My meetings and talks with Wilson Miran brought to a close the summer of 1957, after which I returned to college. Wilson and I corresponded over the next several years. He sent me two books by Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change* and *Philosophy the Literary Form*, which had a significant impact on my thinking about literature.

56:39

During subsequent summers, I worked on the Gloucester waterfront, while continuing to spend time on the Neck meeting new artists including Leonard Creo, the Brooklyn-born and in Mexico City educated painter and graphic artist who spent his winters in Rome. during the summer of 1959 after I graduated from college, I met the Italian master printmaker Emiliano Sorrini, a close friend of the Alcalays who had relocated to America and was working that summer at a studio on Rocky Neck before moving to New York. Emiliano and I exchanged lessons in English and Italian, a language I first started speaking with Vera and Albert Alcalay. It was at Albert’s studio during the summer of 1959 that I finally met Charles and Betty Olson on the eve of my departure for Italy, where I would be studying medieval literature at the University of Florence. I write in the catalog essay about the first night of meeting Charles and Betty.

57:38

I had been preparing for Italy, both language and art history, in Gloucester and on Rocky Neck in particular, through the artists I met and knew through Walter Hancock and Albert Alcalay, conversations we engaged, and books that had been recommended to me. Moving to the Neck with my family in 1951 had been a life-enhancing, life-changing experience. I was excited about leaving for Italy. Last image. I was excited about leaving for Italy on my first trip abroad.

58:12

But even as I prepared to embark for Florence, Rocky Neck and my hometown were poised to draw me back. By carrying these places and the people I had met and learned from in my heart and mind during my travels in Europe, after I returned home in the summer of 1962, it was only with great reluctance that I ever left again.