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READING FERRINI : A GALLERY TALK LECTURE FINDING AID & TRANSCRIPT

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Video Description

From 2013 Press Release: The Cape Ann Museum is pleased to present Reading Ferrini, a gallery conversation with Peter Anastas and David Rich on the life and work of writer Vincent Ferrini, on Saturday, September 14 at 2:00 p.m. This program is free for members or with Museum admission.

Space is limited, reservations are required. Anastas and Rich, both established writers in their own right, will lead a discussion on Ferrini (1913-2007), the poet who lived and worked in

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Gloucester for sixty years and whose literary magazine--Four Winds--gave its name to the current Cape Ann Museum

exhibition of avant-garde art from 1950's Rocky Neck, an era in the Rocky Neck art scene that saw Ferrini as a central player. As a compliment to the Four Winds show, the two will reprise their talk presented at the Gloucester Writers Center last spring, which marked the occasion of Ferrini's 100th

birthday. Drawing from the Museum's own archives, they will offer new research on his childhood, political activities in Lynn, his literary friendships and rarely-seen volumes of his early poetry.

Transcription

I'm Courtney Richardson, Director of Education and Public Programs. We're thrilled to be in the *Four Winds* exhibition gallery to listen to "Reading Ferrini with Peter and David." Martha Oakes attended their series at the Writer Center, and was that in the spring? (Yes it was.) And absolutely loved it. And so we were thrilled that they were willing to do it here for us in this special gallery. So without further ado, just welcome Peter Anastas and David Rich, good friends of the Museum and thank you

David Rich 0:47

Well, so the focus of our talk today is Vincent Ferrini, who was a poet who lived in Gloucester for most of his life from 1948 until he passed away not too long ago. And the literary magazine that he edited for three installments, four issues, was called, "*Four Winds*". And that's the title and that's where the title for this show comes from. And he was editing that magazine with several other people at the same time that this art was being created on Rocky Neck. He lived on Liberty Street, which is actually very close to us here, but was very active on Rocky Neck as well as in Rockport in the early 1950s. And his magazine, as well as the Doris Hall Gallery, were hubs in their own way, obviously, Peters lived it, so I'm going to pass it to you for a second.

Peter Anastas1:45

What's so amazing about being here in the middle of this extraordinary show is you get some sense of the atmosphere. One it was wild in those years, in the early 50s. When I first moved to Rocky Neck as a teenager, all around were artists working at the top of their abilities, creating this art and as you can see, a variety of approaches, schools, techniques and the literature, the writing that was going on, was dovetailing with the art. So we'll talk a little bit about that as we go along. Dave's going to give you a little background, going back to Lynn, Massachusetts.

Audience member 2:38

Vincent lived in the house across the street from me on Norwood Court. So I don't know where Liberty Street came from but when he moved in, he was my neighbor for many, many years.

David Rich and Peter Anastas

In East Gloucester. Yes Yeah. Exactly when he first came, he was on Liberty Street first for a few years. And then obviously moved, the family moved to the house across the way from the Fairview Inn in East Gloucester.

Dave Rich 3:09

Vincent was born in 1913 in Saugus and raised in Lynn. His parents were immigrants from mainland Italy. And his, the name that he was christened with, was not Vincent or Vincenzo, but Venanzio, which was the name of the patron saint of the village in Abruzzo, that his father had come from, St. Venantius and that town was Raiano. His father worked as a, who had a fifth grade education and worked his whole life in the shoe factories of Lynn when he got here, he was a stitcher. And the family changed apartments frequently every couple of years in the Lynn area and they lived in what you'd have to call tenement buildings.

3:59

And Vincent explained in his oral history that was conducted in Lynn later on in Vincent's life, I just want to read a paragraph from this oral history where he describes the childhood conditions in that he, he lived,

“My father was unemployed, he had been a shoe worker all his life. And the whole family went on welfare. I would generally go with my mother to the Welfare, and oh, you felt guilty for going. That's the way they made you feel. It was a hard time. Real bitter. The times during the winter, it was really tough. I felt it the most then. I remember, for instance, that the house was always cold. My mother and father never had a warm house until their old age. I used to freeze all the time, and she would get a hot water bottle and put it under our feet. We were always freezing. Sometimes my mother would take these hand irons and heat them up and wrap cloth around them and put them under our feet. We were always freezing. That's the one thing about poverty that I'll never forget,” Vincent said, “is the cold. When we lived on Bedford Street, the stove, which in those apartments would often be the only source of heat would be the stove. The stove exploded. I was next to the highchair. My little brother was underneath the stove. And the little girl, my sister, on the highchair got killed. I've got scars to prove it and it was a hard time. It was a real dose of poverty. That was the bitterest time.”

5:32

Despite growing up in those conditions, Vincent graduated from high school, which was no small achievement in the 1920s and 30s. Because of that high school diploma, he was able to get employment on the white-collar side of the WPA, and his early jobs included cataloguing ships logs at the Peabody Museum in Salem. He also taught night courses on social studies, hygiene and history, and believed so much in the WPA that he became the chairman of the

Lynn branch of the Workers Alliance, which was a group that advocated for the expansion of WPA programs.

Peter Anastas 6:13

One of the most important aspects of Vincent's life in Lynn was his friendship with Truman Nelson, the great American novelist and social historian. Like Vincent, Truman also grew up in poverty. His father was a barber in Lynn. Truman actually didn't graduate from high school, he dropped out to go to work. And he and Vincent met in the Lynn Public Library. They were great readers. And in Henry Ferrini's marvelous film about Vincent Ferrini, "Poet in Action", Truman is interviewed. And if you ever get a chance, if you've seen the film you'll remember it if you ever get a chance to see it on, take a copy out of the library and look at it. Truman is being interviewed and it's toward the end of Truman's life, big, burly, long hair, big beard. Looks like one of the abolitionists that Truman wrote so brilliantly about. And Truman tells the story about how they couldn't afford to go to college. They didn't have the money to go to college. Vincent's father, even when Vincent wanted to be a poet, he said, "You can't be a poet, you come from the wrong class." And they sat down every single day and night in the Lynn Public Library and they devised a college curriculum. Starting at the beginning, going through four years: science, history, literature, and they adhered to this curriculum and they read their way through this curriculum that they had put together for themselves. So, when Vincent says in one of his books that he graduated from the Lynn Public Library...

Truman went on to write three extraordinary novels about American history, about the Boston slave revolt, about the Brook Farm colony, and about John Brown in Kansas. And Truman also wrote some extraordinary books of social history as well. And, and he and Vincent both joined the Communist Party. Dave will say a little bit about Vincent's...

David Rich 8:41

Vincent's early politics are not always easy to piece together. To contextualize it, his father was an anarchist, of a particular brand, that that was not entirely uncommon in Italian-American communities, especially in industrial cities. In 1912, the year before Vincent was born, an extraordinarily militant anarchist, Italian anarchist leader named Luigi Galleani relocated from the quarries of Barre, Vermont to Lynn and he published a newspaper called *Cronaca Sovversiva*, which means "Subversive Chronicle". In this newspaper he would advertise a pamphlet for sale called "La salute e' in voi", that is, "health is within you." This pamphlet was actually a bomb-making manual and Galleani's right hand man was a man named Umberto Custillione, who was actually from the same village Raiano that Vincent's father had come from. So Vincent tells us that his father was that kind of an anarchist. And there had been bombing campaigns supposedly by these anarchists in Vincent's youth. But Vincent's very clear that he always had troubles with his father and part of that rejection of his father would become very clear in his biography, is a renunciation of violence. Vincent throughout his life was a pacifist and at point was also a vegetarian. I don't know if he continued the vegetarianism all through his life (he did) but he didn't believe in taking even animal life. So when he was young, he

migrated over to a literary journal published in San Francisco called “*Man*,” which though anarchistic was also pacifist.

10:35

But in the mid 1930s, when Vincent was in his early 20s, there, as we know there was in Italian-American communities throughout the United States, a great rise in the popularity of Mussolini, that Italian immigrants who had been exploited and made to feel for some reason ashamed of their ethnic origin, felt pride, and the strength, of the projection of strength and power that Mussolini gave, and all through the Northeast, black shirts became visible. They began to patrol neighborhoods. This was real. They committed acts of violence against people who, who were subversive. And even in Gloucester. I mean, this is something we don't talk about in Gloucester, but the 1936 St. Peter's Fiesta, if you go to the newspaper and read the account, was co opted entirely that year as a celebration of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and those who gave speeches, gave speeches praising Mussolini, and according to the *Gloucester Times*, instead of shouting, ‘viva San Pedro’, they were, shouting ‘viva Mussolini, viva Italia.’ So that was, that's the context in which Vincent, seeing the anarchist movement, dissipates in the face of fascist popularity in Lynn and he joined the Communist Party in that context.

12:01

And I'm going to read an early poem that hadn't seen the light of day in many, many decades that was recently republished in this book *Before Gloucester*, that CUNY University in New York has published, edited by Ammiel Alcalay and Kate Tarlow Morgan, and this comes from Vincent's first collection and it was unpublished and it's like, this is the first real publication of many of these poems, called “Waiting”.

“We are the shoe workers, tanners, pick and shovel men, shouldering homes and skies and oppressing cities, bringers of pay and no pay, to the nebula of souls bred by the need of our loins, always returning like the day and night to the hard anxiety of dungeon tenements. We electric men, factory men, coal men, trotting to and fro like stiffs in the streets of these cities, our visages continually bitten by the ungiving ‘morrow, the sight and feel of us everywhere. Hunched by families want, jobless corpses in the shadows of forsaken shops, either morning nor moon, noon nor night, sheltering us. Those working and we others seeking work waiting for what, we familiar in alien streets of the rich, dead lives in a government against us and the unconscious strength of creation in our bodies, in our loins, in our heads. We die year in and year out, we never live. We city men, factory men, construction gangs, fishermen, productive workers of this country, multitudinous as the sands of the great beaches, not together but merging together. Knowing the cities we age in and the crook of them like our unfed bodies, the life of them under the boss's skies, we the shoe workers, the tailors, toolmakers, drain workers, real in this time. How long are we going to wait with our strength, aching to seize the machines of these cities for our resurrection.”

Peter Anastas 14:17

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It's an extraordinary poem written by a very young Vincent Ferrini as you can hear. It's very much in the mode of proletarian writing of the, of the period, as a matter of fact, years later, Walter Lowenfels, a poet and an anthologist, and a scholar, called Vincent the last surviving proletarian poet. But this is a significant period in Vincent's life, but not the only one, Vincent was a person who evolved continually. Vincent met and married an extraordinary woman, Margaret "Peg" Duffy. They met in the communist movement. Peg was a Radcliffe graduate. Her father was a lawyer in Lynn. Her two brothers graduated from Harvard. It was a very different kind of Irish Catholic family than Vincent's Italian Catholic family. And Peg and Vincent, Peg was a teacher, extraordinary teacher, as a matter of fact taught to the end of her life. Was at Hamilton Wenham Regional High School, but there was a period during the McCarthy period in which Peg was blacklisted from teaching. This woman was really one of the great teachers of our region, in that time but was not allowed to teach because she had been a member of the Communist Party.

They moved to Gloucester. Vincent writes in his autobiography, *Hermit of the Clouds*, Greg Gibson published this in 1988. Every single time I open it, I am astounded by the writing. I mean, Vincent was a poet, but he wrote the most amazing prose. And as you will probably see if you've seen the collection that Greg Gibson and I put together for Vincent's 100th birthday, of letters that he wrote to people in Gloucester, he was an extraordinary prose writer. He writes, "January 18, 1948. After a blizzard we moved to Gloucester, 3 Liberty Street from Lynn the shoe city to fishtown. For two years I commute to work by train with a group by car." He was working at that time as a bench-hand at General Electric in Lynn. "For two years I commute to work by train and with a group by car I quit the church of politics."

17:45

Vincent left the Communist Party. He found after many years as a communist, he couldn't take and live with the orthodoxy. The rigidity, the fact that he said the line was established elsewhere. The party would send members to Lynn. Essentially they would be dictated to as to what to say, what to do. In the same way that Vincent found the Catholic Church, in the dogma and doctrine of the Catholic Church insupportable, he also found the Communist Party ultimately insupportable, the church of politics. And then "August 1950, I quit the General Electric Company." He rents a shop that been a home and an artist's studio at 126 East Main Street, and he becomes a picture framer. As many people know, Vincent's picture frames were often more beautiful than the pictures that they contained. Vincent was an extraordinary, extraordinary artist.

No sooner is Vincent in Gloucester than his life changes, his connection to the community changes, his poetry changes. A book published after his move to Gloucester, called *Sea Sprung*, published in 1949, one year after he arrived in Gloucester. Keep in mind the poem that Dave just read to you. This one is called "Fiesta".

"The boats are home, dressed like a woman in her morning beauty. The streets of the crying fish is happy as a circus, and the clowns jump out of the people, writhing like inebriates. The night has no end, any house is yours, wine, beer and pizza, and the old

country pastry, and love, like a squirrel in the hands. And the rooted fish. Jason Priestley has descended into the scarred woods of the boats. And the forthcoming year is blessed with luck.”

It's a very different, it's a very different poem from the hardscrabble, from the hardscrabble poems of Lynn, Massachusetts.

David Rich 20:41

So let's, let's, now that you've heard that poem from *Sea Sprung*, and poems from *Sea Sprung* are posted all around this room. All of them actually come from that same collection. So I'm just going to walk you back as to how this collection fit in with what he'd been writing, and also signaled this break, the political break with some people that he had been affiliated with, with regard to politics. Vincent had really made his name as a particular kind of firebrand, young, angry poet. And you could hear that from that first poem. And he'd been working at the GE plant in Lynn since 1941, working on defense contracts for the war, and also Africa. And he's very prolific during that time.

His first major book was called *No Smoke*, which was comprised of profiles of local people in Lynn and these profiles were identifiable for those who lived there, although the names had been changed. And then he came out with *Injunction*, *Tidal Wave*, *Blood of the Tenement* and *Plow in the Ruins*. And he taught creative writing on Friday evenings at the Samuel Adams School for Social Studies, which was an explicitly progressive night school in Boston. It was located near the Old Granary Burying Ground, and he taught alongside the sculptor, George Arons, whose sculptures are here. And he also taught alongside MIT professor Dirk Jan Struik.

The curriculum, besides creative writing, focused on developmental psychology, but also principles of social change, modern art and the history of American labor, so very much a politically committed school. At the same time, Vincent was politically committed at GE, at local 201 of the United Electrical Workers Union. And he supported a certain left-leaning reformer named Albert J. Fitzgerald, who had risen through the ranks of the Lynn local to topple the longtime union boss, James B. Carey, at the 1941 national UE convention. So that moment in 1947, in a sense, Vincent was riding high in that political movement that comes crashing down the next year. The Samuel Adams school was closed in 1948 after being singled out in anti-communist literature as a communist front, the safety of the staff and the students were under threat.

23:18

And at Lynn Local 201 there was a vicious contest between those who supported Fitzgerald and those who supported Carey. Fitzgerald was ultimately expelled from his own local in 1949. And Vincent has written and told his nephew Henry about the violence and the intimidation that would happen on the shop floor between these contesting groups. And that's the context of him quitting the GE factory and, and committing himself to poems as you see in *Sea Sprung* and in the art movement here. But writing *Sea Sprung*, if you notice, if you look at these poems, there's work but the work is in some way naturalized, it seems natural for the people to do this

work. The work isn't depicted as being in and of itself, exploitation. And that's where you see him getting attacked from the left.

24:15

So, in 1946, because he was a part of a peripheral group of progressives called the People's Culture Union of America, which operated out of Inwood, New York, there's a couple people that had a mimeograph machine and they would hold these recitals and sing progressive songs. It wasn't that big of a group, but because he was affiliated with this independent group, the Communist Party attacked him in the pages of the *New Masses*, which was their premier literary magazine. He was a, "Were his poems even poems, they asked. Is this really art? How dare he write to the average worker in free verse," you know, that kind of thing. And he was initially supported by this People's Culture Union, but when he came out with *Sea Sprung*, they said "Well you've lost the kernel of the class struggle, we can't even be affiliated with you anymore."

And a friend of his named Ensi Huerta[?], who is a Finnish-American labor organizer, wrote him a letter that's in the archive of this museum, talking about *Sea Sprung*, he says "more serious than anything else in this volume compared to your previous writing is a lack of a fighting militant spirit. You describe things, but not with penetrating hatred, or optimism, the class struggle is missing. Are all captains like them you described to be looked upon as fathers or to be fought because they urge speed up or exploit the crew. From this point of view," Huerta[?] continued, "this book is an ideological retreat from your previous levels, not serious, as yet, but an observable tendency, just the same." And that's really around this book *Sea Sprung*, I mean, coming to Gloucester, he probably was just happier here than in Lynn. And so the happiness is probably reflected in the poems, right? And that's really where you see the break. And it's not just a political break, but it's also an artistic break.

Peter Anastas 26:13

You can see these, how Vincent found these ideological struggles really unnatural. I mean, he was a free spirit. He was a poet. And coming to Gloucester for him was an extraordinary adventure and change. He comes to Gloucester. What does he find? He finds a working fishing community. Not unlike the working community in Lynn but different in many ways. He finds the natural beauty and extraordinary poems begin to show the natural beauty of Gloucester and then what he finds, he finds this artistic community. He meets the painters. He meets the painters and the sculptors that you are seeing in this show, he begins to meet them. Dave just emailed me something very interesting yesterday that you had discovered that Vincent and Peg had actually been friends with Harold Rotenberg.

David Rich 27:17

Yeah, when they first came here. So this show to my knowledge is more like what, mid-50s, (yes) mid- to late 50s. And when they first show up, they migrate, in a sense to Rockport socially, and they become acquainted with Harold Rotenberg and Abraham Rosenthal. And there were certain rooming houses in Pigeon Cove where there'd be cultural evenings, you

know, music and poetry recitals and that kind of thing. And that's, that was his first kind of artistic sustenance for the first few years when they came here.

Peter Anastas 27:47

Rotenberg was an extraordinary, very son of Cezanne-esque painter. The Rockport Art Association did a retrospective a couple of years ago of his work. He was 100 years old at the time, still alive, living in Florida, still painting and progressive politically, avant-garde artistically, well traveled. I interviewed him in the 1950s when I worked for the *Gloucester Times*, and he traveled all over Europe and was beginning then very interestingly to go to Israel to paint. And I saw some extraordinary paintings that he was doing at that time, coming from his experiences in Israel. Well, it was the friendship with Harold, it was the friendship with artists like Nathaniel Dirk, Mary Shore, who had founded the Cape Ann Society of Modern Artists in the early 1950s. They had a gallery in the ballroom of the Hawthorne Inn Casino on Eastern Point Road, and they also had a gallery at the Red Men's Hall in Rockport. These were very, very avant-garde artists in a number of different media and techniques.

29:18

In 1951, Vincent gave a reading of his poetry, the first public reading that I'm able to document after his move to Gloucester, at the Hawthorne Inn Casino, and Bill Meyerowitz, William Meyerowitz the painter who was the husband of Theresa Bernstein, sang folk songs, and Vincent read his poetry. And so here we have, we have this art. We have the poetry readings and we had the reading group, out of which comes the magazine *Four Winds*, which is edited, the first, it's the summer of 1952, it's edited by Vincent Ferrini, David Meddaugh, who was an English teacher at Gloucester High School, Ilmi Meddaugh who was his wife, also a teacher. They were, they were really extraordinarily bright, interesting, literate people. Mary Shore, who was a very, very significant painter and assemblage artist and also a writer and Peg Ferrini, Vincent's wife. They edited it, put it together and they have a statement, a mission statement for the magazine.

“The function of the small magazine is that it stimulates the literary circulation of a nation by providing an opportunity for new voices. The belief that a wide exchange of creative talent can contribute to understanding between peoples, between groups within peoples and that our future, the world's future, is dependent upon the activity and the encouragement of creative individuals, led to the starting of *Four Winds*. We are germinating from one of the most famous islands on the globe. Emerson, Kipling, Longfellow, Conrad, TS Eliot, Olson, to mention a few, have found inspiration here. The name *Four Winds* came in the wake of an exchange of ideas, and since symbols manage in some magical way to provide identity, the image of wind evoked the old idea of the invisible life force of the world, and the life breath of people, and this brought to mind the world's four corners and foreign places.”

David Rich and Peter Anastas 32:05

So, interestingly, the magazine, as I say, I was going to say, was financially supported. Yes, yes, this magazine was by. So there's a list of local businesses. Yes

David Rich

You see the Epstein's Gloucester Delicatessen, EA Grill, Inc., Mello's Lobsters, Perkins and Corliss, Santoro's Delicatessen. So the business, there are businesses who supported it, but then also donors, donors, yeah.

Peter Anastas

Dr. Bernard Cohen, who was a dentist in Gloucester, and one of the biggest art, most serious art collectors in Gloucester. And Harold Bell, at that time, a principal in Mighty Mac. Kitty Parsons Recchia, who was a poet, whose husband was an artist in Rockport. Dorothy Segal, who was an artist in Gloucester. Ruth Barofsky, who was a psycho-therapist and really wonderful. Mrs. Alphonse Lagasse. And her husband was a Gloucester businessman and she was a Gloucester businesswoman. So here are these folks all supporting this literary magazine.

33:28

And the magazine kicks, off there is a *Boston Globe* review. The title is, "Four Winds to carry Gloucester's literary fame around the world." And, the *Cape Ann Summer Sun*, July 18 1952. First, there's an article welcoming the magazine before it's published, "First native magazine to appear during week", then there's a review. There's a review in the *Cape Ann Summer Sun*, which was the summer supplement of the *Gloucester Daily Times*. And this review says, "Unfortunately, there is little talent in *Four Winds* that is worth contributing to anything. After saying in the lead editorial, the editor states that 'one function of the small magazine is to provide a wide exchange of creative talent in order to contribute to understanding between peoples'" and that's then it goes on to say. "Unfortunately, there is little talent in *Four Winds* that is worth contributing to anything." The articles, because it's interesting that the reviewer calls these articles. They are stories and poems. They're not articles. "The articles almost follow the same line of precious avant-garde affected writing and few are inarticulate to the point of absurdity." The conclusion of this review is, "*Four Winds* is in the main trivial and unpleasant. Some of this writing is poor, some inexcusable."

35:20

Taking a look at the table of contents, the visual art, there's visual art by Albert Alcalay, who's represented in the show behind us, became one of the most significant visual artists in America, taught for many, many, many years at the Carpenter Center at Harvard. Stephen Antonokos, who just died, his obituary was in the *New York Times* last week. Major American artist, was working with, very interesting, with neon, neon tubing and neon lights at the end of his life. Those are just two of the artists represented. Let's look at the poetry. There's a poem in here by Robert Creeley. Creeley became one of the most important poets in America. There is a poem, there's poetry in here by Charles Olson, I needn't explain to you who Charles Olson was and about Olson's fame and significance. There's a poem in here by Denise Levertov. Denise Levertov again was one, another one of the most important American poets. Sid Korman, the

editor of the magazine *Origin*. A story, a very interesting short story in this magazine by Jerre Mangione. Jerre Mangione wrote the definitive history of the WPA and was a teacher at the University of Pennsylvania. This is the caliber of people...

David Rich 37:32

And he wrote that famous autobiographical novel of Italian-American life called *Mount Allegro*. (Yes, yes, yes.) So with that negative publicity, so you take the negative publicity that came through the *Summer Sun*, we look at the subsequent issues of *Four Winds*. There's no more financial support from the business owners, everyone's name is off, there's no more Harold Bell, there's no more Kitty Parsons Recchia, everyone seems to have pulled their support. And so they have to wait for enough time, enough money to do a second installment which is a double issue, volume Two-hyphen-Three, and by the time they come to issue Four, it's on noticeably cheaper quality paper. Although wonderful, I mean extraordinary artistic work.

Peter Anastas 38:38

Yes, Leonard Baskin. A magazine, a magazine that publishes, that prints some of the graphic work of Leonard Baskin, who was one of the very, very, very great graphic artists of our time, is not an amateur churlish magazine. The magazine closes with an extraordinary poem by Vincent, which many of you know, but which I read and then Dave will talk about some of the other reactions. "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 your self." Again, I read to you from the review in the *Gloucester Times*, "Unfortunately there's little talent worth contributing to anything."

David Rich 40:00

So, you have, Vincent, you could, you could write a whole biography of Vincent Ferrini could easily take as its theme this persecution on some level, because so there was a, there was a bad review in the local newspaper, right. But there was a much more long-lasting attack on *Four Winds*, committed to verse, by one of his own contributors, Charles Olson, who wrote an eight-page screed actually against Vincent and the magazine, and which is, constitutes the fifth letter of the *Maximus* poems. So, well 'Letter Five' of the *Maximus* poems dismisses the *Summer Sun* review, saying the *Four Winds* had been "sillily reviewed in the local press", Olson harps on Vincent having put *Four Winds* in a display in the Brown's Department Store window, that really like that just ignites the ire of Charles Olson for some reason. He also attacks Vincent "for the nerve" of putting the magazine, quote, "upon the public street." So it's clear if you read the poems clear he's attacking that double issue two to three, in which the likes of Robert Creeley or Denise Levertov, or Albert Alcalay, Jerre Mangione, Gottfried Benn, those types of prominent (Gottfried Benn, the greatest living poet of Germany at the time.)

41:30

The likes of those writers or artists don't show up in the second installment. And the mission statement that you see in the first issue about trying to get unknown writers, young writers, publishing and writing that really becomes a focus of the second installment. So Olson is pretty

clearly upset that he's sharing space with young up-and-comers. So 'Letter Five' is a performance of Olson's displeasure with the way the magazine came out. But it's also a strange performance and says, you know, we're both local guys. Olson grew up in Worcester, and it's a strange performance of like local knowledge. He has to prove that he knows more about Gloucester than Vincent Ferrini. It's all this name dropping, Ben Pine, the schooner races, the *Bluenose*, this store, that inn, this bar, is peppered all through this poem. And so I'll just I'll read a little bit of this because it becomes such a, like this poem is more famous than the magazine that instigated it.

42:37

So first he just attacks Vincent for having a job on land. "There's our take it as I know you have to take it. Land wise, making frames over East Main Street, the wife tutoring, the two of you with children to bring to bring up, you are more like Gloucester now is than I who hark back to an older *polis*, who has this tie to a time when the port I have not named Maximus for no cause." So it goes on, so even though Olson's father didn't fish he had this one, Olson had this one, you know, excursion on a swordfishing boat that I gave a whole lecture about earlier at this museum. But he himself at this time had gotten or he'd gone to college and doctoral program at Harvard, when he was teaching at a college in North Carolina, he wasn't himself a fisherman. So then, he keeps on going. It's really extraordinary how he just wouldn't let this go. So page 25 the bottom, yeah, there's a real viciousness to it. So that was also the beauty of the poem is somehow in this viciousness. It's an interesting, so page 25 finally after eight-page screed, he says, "It's no use. There is no place we can meet. You have left Gloucester. You are not here, you are anywhere where there are little magazines will publish you." (The poem dates from) 1953, when he wrote it right after the magazine was published.

Peter Anastas 44:15

It's an extraordinary, active hypocrisy on Olson's part because Olson published in every one of these magazines, in each of the three installments, Olson was prominent. This, I mean, this is not the place to go into it, some, some other time, Dave and I will give a talk. But this poem did more, not only to hurt Vincent over the years of his poetic life, but to misrepresent him and for all of those, that all of us for whom Olson is very important, this is something that simply cannot be brushed aside. It can't be denied. it can't be brushed aside, it was really one of the most incredible acts of...

David Rich 45:14

Olson was also highly competitive. Yeah. And this, this poem where he attacks Vincent, he's bringing out Ben Pine and the schooner races. Well, that's a form of competition. That's right. So the subtext is there, he just can't stand that this magazine is clearly significant, you know, the people who are being published ensure this magazine is an internationally significant magazine, and Olson also really thought of Gloucester as his. It was his territory. He had been coming here as a summer resident, you know, since he was like five years old. And so he really felt possessive.

Peter Anastas

This poem comes out. It's published in a two-volume edition of the early *Maximus* poems that the publisher, a giant poet Jonathan Williams, Jargon Press had handset and printed in Germany. On the books, it's worth a fortune day. The Sawyer Free Library has copies and I do believe this museum has copies if you want to take a look at it. At any rate, when the book came to Gloucester, all of Vincent's friends gathered, they were furious. They wanted Vincent to respond. They wanted him to respond publicly. They wanted him to attack Olson. Vincent refused to do it. Their friendship was significant to him. After all, it was Olson who visited Vincent on Liberty Street. Before Olson moved to Gloucester, Olson had read some poems of Vincent's in a magazine and came to Vincent's house to meet him, to pay what he called a fan visit to him. So it was, it was a significant friendship. So what Vincent did instead was write a small book called, *In The Arriving*, to respond to Olson, dedicated the book to Olson. "This poem is addressed to Charles Olson, whose drive, insight and perception are the mark of the maker, the poet, or the voice most original, provocative and contagious." This is an act of love on Vincent's part. I'll read a few lines from the book.

"That beginning night the moon came over from the damp sky to Liberty Street. I took you as you were as I still do today, taking you as you are and what my dreams tell me in green mornings, the full man as he is round, tall and many dimensioned, imperfect as and of the heart rooting up sky down in earth a man tree with its unforeseen tributaries stretching for room to unravel. Halt whomever and whatever with, this is my many me and this is the key I use."

48:20

So it's a very loving, it's not an attack, it's not a tit for tat and he goes on in the book. It's a very very rare little book that was that was printed in England. The museum has a copy in its, in its collection, if you want to look at it sometime. It's very beautiful. And so we bring Vincent, we bring Vincent to Gloucester at the time of this show, with *Four Winds* having been published, the Olson-Ferrini controversy having been taken to the point where Vincent responds with love, not with anger and malice, and we thank you very much for coming and we'd be happy to entertain any, any questions that you might have.

Audience Member 49:21

Peter, two or three comments as an eyewitness to all of this. Back when Charles Allen Windsor[?] and John Stowe were doing illustrations for the *Masses*, Max Eastman refused their works because they weren't political enough. They took exception to this, quit and came to Gloucester where they were both going to continue to live here and be rid of New York and its influences, number one. Number two, I saw the show in Rockport, and there were other artists other than some of the more extreme ones, for example, Ann Fisk's father showed there, Gifford Beals showed there, they did this as to support this other group because they knew that they wouldn't be able to pay their rent in the rented hall on their own, which today is still in Rockport, but it's a convenience station down there near Front Beach. And let's see one more, one that you had.

The fellow that went to Israel. (Rotenberg). My brother and I were members of the Rockport when Rotenberg's two children came and the parents and the children wanted to join the yacht club. The children were accepted, but the parents were rejected. That however, didn't, wasn't the reason for the Rotenbergs to separate. Mrs. Rotenberg had established a pot shop in Boston right after the war and it was tremendously successful with that with people coming in and having establish homes. And to house her stone wares, she bought a group of buildings on Newbury Street, which they, which they still own. And when Harold went, for some reason, I was named executor of his will. And one of the things he said in it that there was a particular rock in Dogtown, which he wanted to be moved from Dogtown and have his name inscribed on it. I thought, boy, if this ever happened, I better find that rock. So I wandered all around Dogtown looking for this rock he had lovingly described in his will.

Peter Anastas 51:57

Those are wonderful stories, Bill. (I have one more). Please, please. This is very important, Bill, you were, you were here. You were on site, it's very important to have your witness to this.

Audience Member

My wife is unfortunately not here, probably with regret, I tell you. Vincent wrote her a whole lot of love letters. And I've teased her about it, saying that they were on mimeograph paper. He called her one day and come over and see something. And when he got there, his pants were opened and he tried to kiss her, and she went out the door and wouldn't have anything to do with him after that. So we were out sailing one day. And Vincent had on the tiniest bikini that one can imagine and he was standing on the bowsprit, hanging on to the forestay, and he saw my wife and started shouting, "Rose vita, Rose vita". With that, he let go of the forestay and fell in. My wife's comment was "keep on going."

Thanks for that bill. Anybody else have a question or comment before we adjourn today?

Audience Member 53:15

How widely known was Vincent in his time? I mean his poetry, beyond Gloucester

David Rich

Yes, we all knew him in Gloucester but outside of Gloucester, he traveled throughout the country. He had friends in San Francisco and in Washington state, in the south and he was published in magazines like *Origin* that were major for the 1950s. Do you have a sense Peter of

Peter Anastas

Vincent had one of those underground reputations. There are, there are artists whose work is reviewed in, in the major media, and ultimately, Olson was reviewed in the *New York Times* although the New York Times always had a version, not aversion, a version but they always had a particular line they followed when they reviewed Olson and the Black Mountain writers, placing them in with the Beats, always somehow disreputable, always somehow the line was that Olson had somehow failed. But Vincent, first of all, it's very significant that his selected

poems were published by the University of Illinois in the American Recovery series. This was a series of books edited by major scholars that we're bringing back into the public domain, the poetry and fiction of writers like Vincent. So I would say that people who knew the kind of poetry that Vincent wrote, knew who he was. People who read the various anthologies that Vincent was in, the analogies of Italian American poetry, of anthologies of proletarian poetry, knew Vincent. But Vincent's great notoriety was in Gloucester. The story that Bill told is another aspect of Vincent in Gloucester, which Dave and I have talked about in previous talks. And which Henry Ferrini incidentally dramatizes very beautifully in his films. So you must see that film, if you haven't seen it already.

Unknown Speaker 55:34

Yeah. How did Olson and Ferrini resolve their differences?

Peter Anastas 55:39

Well, they did. I mean, this book, this book broke the ice. And, and, I mean, there was always a sort of tension between Olson and Ferrini, there was, as Dave says, competition, as there are among many artists and writers, but I think really, they, Vincent was one of the last people at Olson's bedside when he died. And Vincent was a pallbearer at Olson's funeral here in Gloucester. Peter, you wanted to say something?

Audience Member 56:13

I was in San Francisco in my kid's book department of Community Thrift. And I was going through the aisles and there was this guy there, and I told him I was from Gloucester, the person that he met was Jack Micheline. And he said, Vinnie, you know, immediately I think, I think it's kind of that what you're saying about the self. And the way he comes across when you just read to me was the essential social work values, as you accept people as they present themselves, as they are, you don't make judgments ahead of time. I think that that's always a conflict, trying to stay, you know, accessible or live in Gloucester is how you're accepted. And then the authenticity that you always have to provide in some way to show that you're connected and who that has meaning for around here, is huge. Olson, I think, was probably very intimidating, he was to me. And I think Vincent wasn't in that way. As they said when you know, that the reason why George Bush got elected, is that he's the type of guy that you want to have a beer with, it matters after that fashion I think because how you present, how your self is presented and received around here as much as anything and by whom. And I think Olson never cut it in that way as he assumed that he did but I think that Vincent did because, you know, basically his shop was open and you could go in there and you can do business or just, you know, shoot the shit with him because that was what he very, very much about.

Peter Anastas and Audience Member

There was an openness to Vincent. (Yeah.) An extraordinary openness to experience, to people, to everything. (He liked everybody.) Yes. Yeah, I never met Olson but I certainly met Vincent a lot. Vincent liked me and I like him, instantly. Vincent liked people and he was open to people. And he was interested in a way that Olson was not interested in people, Olson was interested in

what you knew that he could learn from or what he could tell you. But Vincent was ever open.
Jay

Audience Member

Part of the contrast between the way, Ferrini was looked at, as a poet, sort of around poet circles and maybe known in San Francisco and, you know, in some scattered places, and the local figure that he cut is actually something very interesting. In the 70s, I went with a friend to a City Hall meeting in Gloucester. And there was a very fierce fight going on, as usual, about something on the waterfront and people were actually coming nearly two blows, and it went on and on and this meeting was just filled with this tension. And some guy got up in back and said, "I think this poem might help us. And Vincent read an unusually murky poem. I mean, I think nobody in the room knew what it meant. But what struck me as somebody just coming on that scene was the deep reverence with which all these quarreling people listened to this impenetrable poem and if it was as though he were like the anointed local sage. So that there was something like that in the Gloucester side of him.

Peter Anastas 59:30

I think you're right. Gus Foote, a great city councilor, Gosh, he said, I don't understand what Ferrini is writing about but I love the guy. But I think that's a very good (One minute left.)

Audience Member

He had an association with The Church in East Gloucester, with Reverend Emmanuel, and you didn't say anything about that. I thought that was a big part of his whole life in East Gloucester.

Peter Anastas

It was a small part. It was, it was, it was, I shouldn't say small. I mean, it was, it was, it was a significant part, but not a part that that continued. I think like anybody else who came Gloucester, Richard came to Gloucester founding a church. Vincent was always open to helping people. Anybody who came to Gloucester, Vincent would be your friend in helping you get started. He might not continue to be your friend but, but he helped Richard get started and he participated in in the programs at the Church.

For a while. At a certain point though he dropped out or wouldn't you say, you know, it's been a very big part of Annie's life. I would think yes. Annie, who is the one of the co-directors of the Writers Center, and Richard Emmanuel and that's a whole other story that maybe needs to be looked at some time, brought a very interesting piece of the '60s to Gloucester at that time.

Well, thank you very much for being with us. If you haven't seen the show, do take a stroll. Because these works really do represent the atmosphere in which a lot of this work took place these this, these magazines were published about an extraordinary man, the poems are terrible. It's an extraordinary show. I mean, it it, it takes you back to an amazing time in Cape Ann history, and thanks again for coming.

Subject List; people and places mentioned

People

Venanzio, christening name of Vincent Ferrini, named after St. Venantius, patron saint of Raiano, Italy
Workers Alliance of WPA
Truman Nelson
Henry Ferrini--Vincent Ferrini's nephew
Luigi Galleani
Umberto Custilliona
Benito Moussolini
Walter Lowenfels
Margaret "Peg" Duffy--Vincent Ferrini's wife
Senator Joseph McCarthy
George Aarons
Dirk Jan Struik
Alfred J. Fitzgerald
James B. Carey
Ensi Wirta ?
Harold "Hal" Rotenberg
Abraham Rosenthal
Nathaniel Dirk
Mary Shore
William "Bill" Meyerowitz
Teresa Bernstein
Ralph Waldo Emerson
Rudyard Kipling
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
Joseph Conrad
T. S. Eliot
Charles Olson
Albert S. Alcalay
Stephen Antonakos
Robert Creeley
Denise Levertov
Cid (Sidney) Corman
Jerre Mangione
Leonard Baskin
Gottfried Benn
Benn Pine

Charles Allen Winter
John Sloan
Max Forrester Eastman
Ann Lindenmuth Fisk & her father Tod Lindenmuth
Gifford Reynolds Beal
Bill _____? and wife Rosevita
Jack Micheline
George Bush
John "Gus" Foote
"Reverend" Richard Emmanuel
Annie Thomas

Places

Four Winds Exhibition Gallery, Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, MA
Liberty Street, Gloucester, MA
Rocky Neck, Gloucester, MA
Doris Hall Gallery, Rocky Neck, Gloucester, MA
Bedford St., Lynn, MA
Norwood Court, East Gloucester, MA
Fairview Inn, East Gloucester, MA
Saugus, MA
Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA
Lynn Public Library, Lynn, MA
Barre, Vermont
Hamilton Wenham Regional High School, South Hamilton, MA
3 Liberty Street, Gloucester, MA
GE (General Electric), Lynn, MA
126 East Main Street, Gloucester, MA
Samuel Adams School for Social Studies, Boston, MA
Old Granary Burying Ground
MIT, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA
Israel
Pigeon Cove, Rockport, MA
Hawthorne Inn Casino, Eastern Point Road, Gloucester, MA
Red Men's Hall, 5 Beach St., Rockport, MA
Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, 24 Quincy St., Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
University of Pennsylvania
North Carolina
England
New York
Front Beach, Rockport, MA
Dogtown, Gloucester, MA
Newbury St., Boston, MA

Washington State
the South
Community Thrift Store, San Francisco, CA
City Hall, 9 Dale Ave., Gloucester, MA
The Church, 149 East Main St., Gloucester, MA
Gloucester Writers Center, 126 Main St., Gloucester, MA

Magazines, Journals, Books by Vincent Ferrini

Four Winds
Before Gloucester
Hermit of the Clouds: The Autobiography of Vincent Ferrini
Sea Sprung
No Smoke
Injunction
Tidal Wave
Blood of the Tenement
Plow in the Ruins
Four Winds 2-3
In the Arriving
University of Illinois American Recovery Series

Magazines, Journals, Pamphlets, Books by Others

3 novels by Truman Nelson
 The Sin of the Prophet--Boston slave revolt
 The Passion by the Brook--Brook Farm colony
 The Surveyor--John Brown's abolition efforts in Kansas
Subversive Chronicle/Cronaca Sovversiva newspaper
Health is Within You/La Salute e' in Voi pamphlet
Man anarchist & pacifist journal
New Masses communist literary magazine
Boston Globe
Cape Ann Summer Sun
Gloucester Daily Times
New York Times
Origin magazine
WPA history, see also: <https://www.americanheritage.com/dream-and-deal>
Mount Allegro
Maximus
University of Illinois American Recovery Series selected poems by Vincent Ferrini
Italian American poetry anthologies, selected poems by Vincent Ferrini
Proletarian poetry anthologies, selected poems by Vincent Ferrini

2 Poems by Vincent Ferrini, 1 by Charles Olson

"Waiting"

"Fiesta"

"Letter Five" of *Maximus* by Charles Olson

Ideologies & Groups

Communist Party--"church of politics"

Black Shirts

Anarchists

Pacifists

Fascists

Militants

Proletarians

Local 201 United Electrical Workers Union, Lynn, MA

Peoples Cultured Union of America, Inwood, NY

Finnish-American Labor movement

Cape Ann Society of Modern Artists

Sandy Bay Yacht Club, 5 T-Wharf, Rockport, MA

Black Mountain Writers

The Beats

Events

St. Peter's (San Pedro) Fiesta 1936

Italian invasion of Ethiopia

United Electrical Workers Union National Convention 1941

schooner races

Misc.

Vincent Ferrini: Poet in Action movie

The *Bluenose* schooner