

Artist Colonies in Europe, the United States, and Florida

by

Jennifer L. Aldrich

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Co-Major Professor: Gary Mormino, Ph.D.
Christopher Meindl, Ph.D.
Rose Marie Prins, Ph.D.

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**Florida's Art Communities:
From Rural Artist Colonies to Urban Art Centers**

Jennifer Aldrich

ABSTRACT

During the nineteenth century, an artistic trend spread across Europe. As urban centers housed the majority of professional artists, individuals and groups relocated to remote, bucolic areas to form art colonies. Artist colonies are typically defined as a group of artists, generally painters, writers, and composers who worked and lived as a community for a certain period of time.¹ Artists left their city lifestyles as a response to urbanization and industrialization. In other words, the movement encouraged reform of social, environmental, and economic conditions to prevent the decline of true artisanship. The artistic response personified an underlying utopian theme: preservation of the simple life, nostalgia, and set of values threatened by industrialization. This idyllic impulse eventually spread to America. The American art colonies were mainly located in the Northeastern states, the Southwest and Northern California.

The present study seeks to analyze art colonies' transformation from rural settings to urban art communities, particularly Florida's art centers. The study finds commonality among the artist colonies of yesterday and the modern art enclaves of today. Some common themes include: desire for seclusion, camaraderie with fellow artists, and

¹ Nina Lubben, *Rural Artist Colonies in Europe, 1870-1910* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 2001), 2.

inspiration from a environment and/or nature. Chapter one offers a brief history of art colonies in Europe and the influence of landscapes on artists. Chapter two explores the development of American art colonies and their connection to landscapes and the urban influence of modern art on the artists. Chapter three investigates the history of the most significant art colonies in Florida: St. Augustine, Sarasota, Maitland, and New Smyrna Beach. This chapter also examines how artist enclaves support urban communities economically, culturally, and through diversity; specifically, through examples in small towns transformed into diverse Floridian art communities.

Art has always provided a unique historical record of social, regional, environmental, and creative changes. The art colonies and communities discussed in this thesis show how the artistic impulses for creativity attract individuals to places and transform them into important art centers.

Introduction

The term “art colony” has become a descriptive but somewhat vague notion in the American language, sometimes referring to a place where artists once gathered and worked, sometimes to a place where the one time art colony has evolved into a community in which art and artists are vital to the economy, and, more currently a place where artists and art galleries are concentrated in a particular area of a town or city.

-Steve Shipp,²

Art colonies in the nineteenth century flourished in Europe and spread quickly in America as the artists who formed them continued to seek alternatives to the urban and industrial patterns sweeping across the developed world. The urban ideals of a prudent society, economic growth through industrialization, and institutions of conformity motivated artists to seek out alternative places for creative expression and inspiration with other like-minded individuals. The late nineteenth-century artists’ rebellion lured artists to rural villages and small towns to study the aesthetics of nature and the simplicity of rural life. In the eyes of artists, peasants and villagers represented the common folk, who embodied the purest sense of an idyllic lifestyle. The villagers displayed true craftsmanship through everyday tasks that was not tainted by the destructive nature of urban society and industrialization. The artists’ utopian concept resisted modern industrialization, which paralleled the longing of agrarian romanticism that influenced the creation of artist enclaves in pastoral regions.³

² Steve Shipp, *American Art Colonies, 1850-1930: A Historical Guide to America’s Original Art Colonies and Their Artists* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996), ix-x.

³ Nina Lubben, *Rural Artists’ Colonies in Europe 1870-1910* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 11-13.

The agrarian impulse of the artist colonists in Europe found suitable subjects in the faces of common people as much as they did the rural landscape. In fact, many such artists were landscape painters who often painted the local villagers. Townsfolk were typically curious yet suspicious of the artists at first; however, they welcomed the economic value of artists' presence since artists could afford such a self-directed lifestyle. The relationship with villagers was reciprocal; artists were dependent on the services provided by the local innkeepers, models, and townsfolk, while the townsfolk reshaped their own occupations and their village's infrastructure to accommodate artists and tourists.⁴

Often the interactions between villagers and artists reflected a regional style that was characteristically evident in the artwork. Some artists discovered fishing villages while others sought out rural hamlets. The differences in art colonies depended largely upon their location. Artists with similar European backgrounds found comfort among kindred spirits. The Danish artists of the Skagen, Denmark, colony, located on a peninsula in the North Sea, observed fishermen and their watery world as the most important subjects, but the colony also attracted artists with similar regional heritage such as the Swedes and Norwegians. The portrayal of regional subjects invoked in these artists a romanticism and nostalgia for past places, almost freezing them in time.

This thesis explores the shift of the European artist colony to the United States occurring at the end of the nineteenth century, with specific emphasis on the decline of rural artist colonies and the growth of modern urban art communities as they contributed to the economic and cultural revival of urban centers in the United States. What factors

⁴ Ibid., 38.

explain the transition from rural art colonies to urban art centers? As will be seen, cyclical changes in economics, changes in the arts, cultural mores, urban growth and decline, tourism, and historic preservation all played a role. This paper ultimately focuses on art communities in Florida: from the original art colony of St. Augustine to smaller colonies such as the Maitland Art Center, the Atlantic Center for the Arts in New Smyrna Beach, and a few communities in Sarasota and Sanford, Florida, that became or attempted to become art colonies through redevelopment. These cycles of birth and decline in places where artists congregate are often associated with similar cultural ideals. In other words, what is important or valued by artists at the time? In the nineteenth century, agrarianism motivated artists to hold rural areas in high regard.

Chapters one and two discuss how European and American art colonies shared similar rural and utopian concepts, even if artists in the U.S. later resurrected urban settings as their new home. Artists, who once dutifully avoided the clutter of city life, began to embrace modern conceptual art forms and reclaimed urban life to be their new canvas at the turn of the nineteenth century. What was once the rural utopian ideal and the artist's inclination to rebel from what society represented was urban conformity, mass production, and capitalist-driven culture, transformed into an artistic impulse that informs and defines the urban sensibility, if not reclaims it.

Chapter three examines Florida art colonies' as they developed into modern art centers through urban renewal trends such as historic preservation, attracting arts culture, and nostalgic longing for the past, even if the past does not accurately represent a true

representation.⁵ Social and economic factors that contribute to an art community's success are noted. Artists attracted to decaying urban areas, often attempt to rescue urban spaces, becoming the harbingers for cultural revitalization.

The Renaissance of many once troubled communities in Florida is directly linked to the sweat equity invested by artists who saw potential and beauty amidst, or in spite of, the faded ruins of once glorious, bustling industrial and railroad towns. This creative class of individuals brings resourceful ideas and intellectual capital replacing the archaic need for natural resources and mechanical innovation to drive its economy.⁶ These old towns usually provide cheaper living, an established community, and sometimes business opportunities that large cities cannot affordably offer. Communities revitalized by the arts are too numerous to cover, however, some examples of art communities examined in this thesis are St. Augustine, Maitland, Sanford, Sarasota, and New Smyrna Beach, Florida. These communities share similar traits and are closely connected to their natural environment. All five places represent how art has transformed them into quaint cultural centers supported artists, patrons, and businesses in a cyclical manner of birth, decline, and rebirth.

⁵ David Hamer, *History in Urban Places: The Historic Districts of the United States* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 23.

⁶ Richard Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2005). 144-145.

Chapter One: Artist Colonies of Europe

From 1820 to 1900, popular European cities such as Paris, Florence, and Rome attracted many international artists interested in pursuing art as an academic study. During the nineteenth century, artists from Europe and America descended upon these exotic cities to enhance their artistic abilities and sensibilities. Indeed, an artist's education was not considered complete until they spent time in Europe.⁷ Artists immersed in the European art world often found themselves in a foreign place unable to speak the local language. They frequently gravitated to other artists from their own countries, leading to the development of enclaves of expatriate artists in European cities.⁸ Groups of foreign artists disenchanted with the conventions of academic painting and meaning, and the indoor painting of historical or mythological subjects with artificial light, challenged traditional schools of thought in the cities. Artists who resisted the conventional style of painting created a new way to paint known as open-air or (in French) '*plein-air*' painting. Artists then began to seek rural settings in which to paint in the open-air, which involved natural subjects: landscapes and people in their environment. The popularity of open-air painting led to the creation of rural artist colonies as early as the 1820s.⁹

Three of the most famous European art colonies that produced the most prolific work in the heyday of the 1870s, as a consequence of the open-air movement, were

⁷ Michael Jacobs, *The Good and Simple Life: Artist Colonies in Europe and America* (Oxford: Pahaidon Press Limited, 1985), 9.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Lubbren, 1.

Barbizon and Pont Avon, France, and Skagen, Denmark.¹⁰ These artist villages known for their bucolic landscapes on the outskirts of major European cities flourished as the open-air painters embraced the aesthetics of village life.

Barbizon, France

Located in the forest of Fontainebleau twelve miles south of Paris and on the western plain of Chailly, Barbizon was one of the first rural European art colonies. Beginning in the 1820s, Barbizon's sylvan landscape first evoked the imagination of its artist visitors to a mythical place where druids, elves, and pixies existed. Part of Barbizon's enchanting allure rested in the requirement that visitors needed to be escorted by horse-drawn carriage twelve miles into the tiny forest village.¹¹ The quaint village offered no shops or stores, just a few inns and a few moss-covered thatch roofed homes giving the impression of being suspended in another time.

Barbizon attracted artists from France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, the United States, Italy and Britain. The Americans' fascination with Barbizon's forest of Fontainebleau paralleled that of their own admiration for the virgin forests of the U.S. bringing droves of Yankees to Barbizon.¹² During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Barbizon art colony produced the Barbizon School of Painters, which consisted of mostly French open-air painters. In the 1850s, as open-air painting became more of an accepted practice for art students, the Fontainebleau forest and the village of Barbizon saw the greatest number of artists descend upon its wooded landscape.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Jacobs, 26.

¹² Ibid., 20.

In 1848, twenty-eight artists stayed at the Auberge Ganne Inn. By the summer of 1849, their number had increased to forty.¹³ Some artists rented property in the village and settled there permanently. They included Barbizon's most famous artists, Theodore Rousseau, Jean-Francois Millet, and Charles Jacque. By the 1870s, three establishments emerged to cater to artists' needs. These included Ganne's Inn, as well as two new hotels, the Hotel Siron and the appropriately named Villa des Artistes.¹⁴ The artists' world revolved around the village inns. Hotel Siron, for example, offered annual exhibitions in the hotel lobby and social gatherings in the dining rooms where artists decorated the walls with their finished paintings, leaving room for encouraging discussion and critique. The gastronomic center of the village frequently became a focal point of socializing in the rural artist colony.¹⁵ When artists returned from a day of painting in the forest, they gathered in the dining room for coffee, strong spirits, and a leisurely smoke, telling stories and sharing warm and jubilant conversation.¹⁶ These social experiences among artists were part of a pleasant lifestyle, yet, at times, many artists formed their own cliques anchored in shared nationality and similar academic upbringing. Despite the diversity, artists' recollection of summers spent in art colonies share similarities of delight and camaraderie such as this account from American painter Anne Goater's 1885 essay about life at the Hotel de Voyageurs in Pont- Aven, France's art colony:

Russia, Sweden, England, Austria, Germany, France, Australia, and the United States were represented at our table, all as one large family, and striving towards the same goal. After lunch, on pleasant, sunny days, would follow the mid-day chat, as seated outside on hotel stoop and doorway, we leisurely sipped coffee and cognac... Criticism would be

¹³ Lubgren, 166.

¹⁴ Ibid., 166.

¹⁵ Ibid., 24.

¹⁶ Ibid., 26.

freely given and received; all were at liberty to say just what they pleased, and without any ill feeling. They were pleasant hours, indeed, spent around that Breton doorway and not wholly fruitless ones either.¹⁷

In the summer of 1874, an eccentric English artist, R.A.M Stevenson, joined the ranks of Hotel Siron's social crowd. Dressed in striped socks, a huge sombrero and a long thick mustache, the Bohemian Stevenson was a highly regarded artist who influenced many young artists including his younger cousin, the writer Robert Louis Stevenson. Robert lived under the heavy hand of repressive parents and welcomed the invitation from his avant-garde cousin to study in the French forest. It was at Barbizon, immersed in the French countryside, that Robert adopted his writing style.¹⁸

In the Barbizon artist colony, as in all artist colonies, relationships and the creative sociability among artists provided mutual support, structured routine, creative production, and development of style. The Stevensons and their art school acquaintances became known as the "Anglo-Saxons," an avant-garde group and the largest group of English and American artisans to work in the forest of Fontainebleau throughout Barbizon's heyday, from 1840-1910.¹⁹ The Anglo- Saxons shared a romantic style of painting that generated an intense study of color and light. Although they were regarded as the new generation of landscape painters, their contributions are considered noteworthy by art historians for inspiring Impressionism.²⁰ Impressionism is an art term used to define the French style of painting developed around the 1870s, particularly from painter Claude Monet, in which the artist used primary colors for highlighted areas with

¹⁷ Ibid., 26-27.

¹⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁸ Joshua Taylor, *The Fine Arts In America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 130-31.

emphasis on light and visible brush strokes.²¹ The Impressionist movement consequently was named after Monet's signature piece, *Impression soleil levant*, or *Impression Sunrise* in 1872.²²

The Barbizon painters are typically cited as a transcendental generation, helping to bridge the gap between classical landscape painting of the late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Impressionism.²³ Barbizon's artists avoided conventional schools of painting as they carved out their own niche of landscape painting that made an indelible impression upon the emerging artists of the twentieth century and inspired the formation of art colonies throughout Europe and the United States.

Pont-Aven, France

Located in the western part of France, the tidal river port Pont-Aven was even more quaint and mysterious than the forest of Fontainebleau. The mystic landscape was scattered with Celtic druid ruins from the Gaelic Period, roughly 500-1100 AD. The history of this area dates back to the spread of Christianity around 460 AD. The Celts left England to escape the Anglo-Saxon invasion leading them to the Atlantic shores of France where Pont-Aven is located.²⁴ Interestingly enough, the Bretons (Celts) maintained their independence from the French government and joined in the Vendean wars against the Parisian leadership in 1793. Although they were generally independent,

²¹ Ibid., 133.

²² Ibid., 135.

²³ Ibid., 109.

²⁴ Sandra Bardwell, Laurence Billiet, Jean- Bernard Cartillet, Gareth McCormack, Miles Roddis, and Tony Wheeler, *Walking in France, Lonely Planet Guide* (Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2000), 127.

the French government attempted to curtail the Breton language.²⁵ Despite the efforts, the Bretons continued to keep their heritage and spoke both French and Breton to keep the government at bay.

The Brittany coast and the village of Pont-Avon share a rich cultural history and a deep-seated supernatural folklore that also attracted artists to the area. The supernatural lore of fairies, elves, witches, ogres, giants and the like can be linked to stories of events passed down from generation to generation. In 1842, a group of cattle robbers posed as devils in gray canvas dressed like the salt smugglers that lived in the mountain caves who were believed to live among the fairies. Stories of mysterious lights hovering over the cliffside were meant to keep the curious at bay but, of course, only intrigued the visitor even more.²⁶

The charming history and natural attraction to Brittany (Breton), France was analyzed in 1866, by American painter Benjamin Champney. He articulated “the idea of a small oppressed race fighting to keep its national identity had undoubtedly a romantic appeal to artists and tourists alike especially when a spirit of nationalism was spreading all over Europe, coupled with a growing fascination with Celtic art and literature.”²⁷ Just like Pont-Aven’s famous sister art colony, Barbizon, the English and Americans were prominent nationalities among the artist visitors to Pont-Aven in the late nineteenth century.²⁸ Pont-Aven’s similarities in landscape to New England and the English countryside enhanced the fascination with the ostensibly Old-World French village.

²⁵ Jacobs, 43-44.

²⁶ Eugen Weber, *Peasants Into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France 1870-1914* (Palo Alto: California: Stanford University Press, 1976), 23-24.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 43-44.,

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

In 1863, the American artist Robert Wylie visited Pont-Aven as it developed into an artist colony. When Wylie first came to France, he met Charles Way, the son of a wealthy Bostonian. Way introduced Wylie to an American painter named Henry Bacon, who encouraged the men to visit Pont-Aven.²⁹ A year later, the artists went to Pont-Aven and were joined by two Philadelphia artists, Earl Shinn and Howard Roberts. The circle of American artists was expanded again in late summer with Bostonian painter and writer Benjamin Champney and Frederick Bridgeman, an eighteen-year-old Alabaman. The popularity of Pont-Aven grew during the 1870s with the arrival of a railroad into Brittany, which made it more accessible for tourists and artists.

Hotel des Voyageurs and Pension Gloanec provided housing for artists and by the 1880s over one hundred artists lived in the village.³⁰ Part of Pont-Aven's charm consisted not only with the natives and their traditional costumes and headdresses, but the village's myriad of natural subjects ranging from the forest to the river to the seaport, all of which provided countless opportunities to inspire many artists. In 1886, the French painter Paul Gauguin came to Pont-Aven from Paris. Gauguin went on to be Pont-Aven's most internationally renowned artist increasing the colony's reputation. Gauguin's seminal paintings significantly influenced the direction of modern art. He and his pupils' response to romantic and realistic painting developed into a style known as "synthetist or symbolist." Symbolist painting required the use of bold contrasting colors and simple contour lines outlining objects in flat patterns and shapes resulting in an abstract rather than a realistic style.³¹ A great example of this genre is portrayed in Gauguin's famous

²⁹ Ibid., 45-47.

³⁰ Ibid., 50.

³¹ William A. Davis, "Where Gauguin Became Great," *The Boston Globe*, September 12, 2004.

“The Yellow Christ,” inspired by the religious landmarks dotting the rural landscape by the Aven River. The painting features warm colors, few details on the human form, and unusual colors (for the time) for shadows and landscape.

The mystical Pont-Aven landscape inspired artists from the 1860s to the 1910s. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Pont-Aven was no longer dominated by Americans, but included Dutch and French artists such as Gauguin. Hotel des Voyageurs continued to be the center of social life, yet as the older generation of artists like Robert Wylie moved on or passed away, a new era of artists discovered Pont-Aven as a source of inspiration and didactic center for artistic studies.

Skagen, Denmark

In the 1870s, Scandinavian artists found themselves smitten with the picturesque fishing village of Skagen, Denmark, located on the northernmost tip of the Danish peninsula where the North and Baltic Seas meet. Artists appreciated Skagen for its various seascapes, alternating among sand dunes, ships, lighthouses, bright yellow houses, mariners, and fishermen.³² Scandinavian artists typically trained in traditional German art forms quickly embraced the French open air painting style as they set out to preserve their own folk cultures from the encroaching industrial world. In the late 1800s, Danish culture found itself in a great deal of turmoil, almost losing its identity due to the imposition of Swedish customs.³³ This period of cultural history marks a time of change and great introspection for artists, writers, and musicians who came to Skagen.³⁴

³² Jacobs, 92.

³³ Ibid.,90-91.

One of the unique characteristics of the higher latitudes of the Northern Hemisphere is the incredibly long summer hours of daylight, a phenomenon the locals call the “midnight sun.” Day length increases with latitude in the northern hemisphere summer until one reaches the Arctic Circle (66.5 degrees North latitude) where the sun never sets during the summer. Skagen is located roughly at 58 degrees north latitude, giving it more than eighteen hours of summer daylight. The artists’ greatest advantage was being able to paint for long hours during the day; the so-called “blue hour,” around 10 p.m., occurs when the low summer sun transforms the atmosphere into a blue haze, which led artists to produce some distinctive and haunting Scandinavian paintings.³⁵ Yet the long, dark and extremely cold winter made outdoor painting a difficult task. Skagen receives as little as 6.5 hours of daylight during the winter yet this did not deter all artists. Some titled their painting by the temperature outside, such as Victor Westerholm’s painting, *Minus 40 degrees to Minus 37 degrees*.³⁶

Besides the extremely long daylight hours in summer and brutally cold winter, Skagen was a challenging place to work. For instance, it was difficult to get to. The nearest town, Frederikshavn, is located twenty-two miles away. The deep sandy roads leading out to the peninsula made it difficult for stagecoaches to pass through. Another way to get to Skagen was by boat which was not much easier in a rough sea notorious for shipwrecks. Passengers had to wait for low tide to allow the local fishermen to row out to retrieve them, taking them to the beach because there was no harbor.³⁷ Yet the arduous

³⁴ Ibid.,92.

³⁵ Ibid.,91.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Lubbren, 146-47.

journey to Skagen, for the artist, was part of the romance of the experience, and the anticipation became the inspiration.

The remoteness of the Skagen art colony kept artists isolated on the peninsula for extended periods of time creating relationships between the artists and villagers. Skagen's population increased during the summer when artists and vacationing tourists descended upon the Danish shores. The Brondum family, Erik, Anne and their six children, accommodated many artists with warm hospitality and compassion for their artistic endeavors. The Brondums owned an inn and a grocery store that functioned as the local pub and lodge for travelers.³⁸ The Brondum children developed relationships with the artists, too; their son Degn formed friendships with several artists while their daughter Anna, a painter, eventually married a visiting painter named Michael Archer.³⁹ Anna went to drawing school in Copenhagen in the mid-1870s after encouragement from local artists. Anna's two cousins, Henrietta and Martha married visiting painters too. The three women are responsible for enriching the relationships with locals by helping villagers to accept the artists as part of the community.⁴⁰

The most significant artists from Skagen include Scandinavian painters Christian Krohg, Peder Kroyer, Carl Larsson, and Michael and Anna Archer. The relationship between visiting artist Peder Kroyer and Michael Archer and Christian Krohg who became residential artists, proved to be very competitive. Kroyer was the only Danish artist to receive international acclaim. His fame set the stakes higher and promoted the men to compete with one another. Later in his career, Kroyer painted artists' gatherings at

³⁸ Ibid., 73.

³⁹ Jacobs, 96.

⁴⁰ Jacobs, 96.

the inn, this annoyed Archer and Krohg but Kroyer's advantage was that he seemed to effortlessly gain trust of the locals he used as models in his paintings. Archer, Krohg, and Kroyer spent a period painting the locals of Skagen from the fishermen to common craftsmen. The paintings reflected their drive to capture the innocent, almost primitive, lifestyle of the locals rather than the landscape. Other artists captured the landscape through picturesque seascapes and the village's traditional Scandinavian architecture.

Skagen's significance as a prestigious art colony is directly related to its isolated location, the quality and length of daylight in summer, and the interpersonal relationships developed between artists and villagers. Artists emerged in the folkways and traditions of the locals, and they developed a romantic view of Scandinavian tradition, preserving it in time.

The European art colonies declined after 1900 but continued to attract amateur artists and tourists until the 1940s.⁴¹ Alas, the rural art colonies could not prevent modernization from penetrating into the countryside. Developments in transportation and communications made rural areas more accessible with better roads and expanded railways. As a result, the increase in tourism to rural villages forced the need for better accommodations and services leading to development and growth. The new development and growth in rural villages saddened artists looking for contemplative solitude from the hectic urban setting.

Modernity altered artists' utopian ideals of bucolic landscapes once sought after in the rural art colony by the advent of avant-garde art forms and style.⁴² The new century ushered in vastly different, non-traditional art movements beginning in the 1920s. Urban

⁴¹ Lubben, 162.

⁴² Nancy Heller and Julia Williams, *The Regionalists* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1976), 13.

Realism, Surrealism, and Abstract Expressionism signaled other rebellions from younger generations of artists. These new art forms relied on distorting reality through emotion and no logical comprehension, and expressing urban settings with drab realistic colors rather than using romantic perspectives as their nineteenth century predecessors did.⁴³ With the changes in style, artists who studied at the European art colonies returned to the United States eager to define American art forms through their regional writings and paintings leading to the creation of art colonies in the United States.⁴⁴

American art began to emerge independently and claim its own identity during the first half of the twentieth century. During this renaissance period, from the 1920s to the 1960s, American artists thus attained international acclaim and respect from the European art world.

⁴³ John Updike, *Still Looking: Essays on American Art* (New York: Random House, 2005), 102-03.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

Chapter Two: Art Colonies in the United States

Art colonies became popular in the United States in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century when artists returned from their European excursions. Numerous artists who studied abroad in European cultural centers, the gold standard for art education, returned mainly to New England (but also to California and New Mexico) with the desire to establish their own art schools, communities, and style. Many of the artists trained in the French plein-air painting style erected schools and workshops, and painted during summers in small New England villages.⁴⁵ The first North American art colonies established in New England were due to upper-class patrons' generosity, capital, and self-interest, inviting artists to stay at their homes. The homes transformed into colonies were the equivalent of the European inns in which artists worked and lived. Although the American art colonists still practiced French plein-air techniques, the American colonies differed greatly from their European counterparts; they were less traditional and more experimental.⁴⁶ Artists' desire for independence and experimentation with avant-garde techniques germinated aspirations to establish their own style, setting them apart from European painters. The European art colonists steeped in tradition did not experiment with their artwork to the degree that occurred in the North American colonies. This defined the major differences between American and European colonies.

⁴⁵ Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2005), 41-56.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Hudson River School of Painters

From the 1820s to the 1850s, an important group of artists emerged from upstate New York, the Hudson River School of painters. Thomas Cole, the founder of the Hudson River School of painters, infused allegorical meanings to his landscape paintings. For example, he used the various growth stages of a tree to suggest cycles of life and death. He also studied light and captured the moodiness of certain times of the day. The Hudson River Painters also asserted the importance of regionalism, which lends itself to depicting geographic areas. These landscape artists painted the White Mountains of New Hampshire, the Catskills Mountains and Adirondack Mountains of New York and the Hudson River Valley. Their contribution to the American art form is significant for their precise interpretation of geography and regional landscapes. The Hudson painters realized that the American landscape, along with its relatively young history, evoked a tremendous amount of inspiration. The greater American audience embraced the regional art with pride, influenced by the contagious nationalism and agrarianism impulse of the early twentieth century.⁴⁷ In other words, the art reflected how society tried to define its identity with American landscapes during the middle to late 1800s, an identity initially representing innocence and freedom.⁴⁸

New England Colonies

Before American art colonies were established, artists traveled around the New England countryside looking for quaint rural and coastal villages to paint in. In 1877, the

⁴⁷ Joshua C. Taylor, 87-88.

⁴⁸ Heller and Williams, 40-47.

former Barbizon painter William Morris Hunt started one of the first open-air painting schools in the fishing village of Magnolia, Massachusetts. The art colonies at Magnolia and nearby villages such as Gloucester intrigued artists and tourists with outdoor painting sessions.⁴⁹ In the 1880s, another artist, Pont-Aven landscapist William Lamb Picknell joined other Pont-Aven friends, Arthur Wesley Dow and John Kenyon, to reminisce about their painting days in Brittany. They enjoyed Pont-Avenesque painting excursions in Ipswich, Massachusetts, where Dow opened his own painting school.⁵⁰

The three significant rural artist colonies of New England (and there are many others) that played a role in the development of American Impressionism were Yaddo, Mac Dowell, and Old Lyme.⁵¹ The Old Lyme colony began in 1899 when artist Henry Ward Ranger stayed at the home of Florence Griswold in Old Lyme, Connecticut. Located on the mouth of the Connecticut River, Old Lyme was an old shipbuilding town from the Revolutionary War era, but with the advent of the modern steamship, the town's economic stability faltered, eventually reverting to its agricultural roots.⁵² The old shipyards proved to be an excellent resource for artists seeking the romance of maritime nostalgia. Old Lyme reminded Ranger of his days studying abroad in Europe. Ranger convinced Ms. Griswold to turn her old family mansion into a boardinghouse for artists, which, in turn, would help pay her for the upkeep of the family home.⁵³ In 1900, Ranger brought to the mansion a group of painters: Lewis Cohen, Henry Rankin Poore, Louis Paul Dessar, and William Henry Howe. They began the decades long cycle of visiting

⁴⁹ Jacobs, 169.

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid., 170-171.

⁵² Laura Wolfe Scanlan, "High Thinking, and Low Living, the Story of the Old Lyme Art Colony," *Humanities Magazine* (September/October 2007), 26.

⁵³ Ibid., 25.

artists to come to the emerging colony including some of America's finest painters such as Childe Hassam, a leader in Impressionism, and Willard Metcalf, who had the ability to capture sunlight with pastels. The two men are towering figures of early twentieth century American art.⁵⁴

Wealthy patrons started both the Yaddo and MacDowell colonies. In 1881, Sponsor Trask, a financier from New York and his wife, Katrina, a poet, purchased a 400-acre estate in Saratoga Springs, New York and named it Yaddo based on a suggestion by their youngest daughter.⁵⁵ Edward and Marion MacDowell of Peterborough, New Hampshire, started the Mac Dowell art colony in 1907. The old farmstead they purchased in 1896 made a perfect place for a colony with its peaceful surroundings. Edward, a composer, knew that artists of all disciplines benefited from association with one another and helped raise funds for his colony from New York's wealthiest and distinguished citizens such as Grover Cleveland, Andrew Carnegie, and J.P. Morgan.⁵⁶ Yaddo and MacDowell colonies can boast to have housed many renowned and prize-winning visual artists, writers, composers, and filmmakers. Elizabeth Condon, a visual artist and professor at the University of South Florida in Tampa, recently took up residency at Yaddo. Condon says that Yaddo is the queen bee of the art colonies in the Northeast because of its reputation and traditional operation. Condon recalls having dinner with fellow residents. "When you have dinner with writers and composers the wordplay and level of intelligence is inspiring. It made me open my awareness about how

⁵⁴ Ibid., 26-27.

⁵⁵ Yaddo Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, New York Public Library Digital Library Collections accessed, February 29, 2008.
<http://digilib.nypl.org/dynaweb/ead/human/mssyaddo>

⁵⁶ Shipp, 80.

creation happens in all disciplines and reaffirmed to me that their experiences are similar to when I am making a painting.”⁵⁷ The jubilation, camaraderie, and inspiration among artists exist today as much as it did in the 1880s and 1890s when they began. Both Yaddo and Mac Dowell continue to produce award-winning artists internationally, including Guggenheim fellows and Pulitzer Prize winners. Today Yaddo and Mac Dowell continue as residential art colonies however, the Old Lyme colony has become the Florence Griswold Museum of American Impressionism.

Residents of New England farmsteads, villages, and towns kept the company of major and minor artists, from professional Impressionists and Modernists to amateurs alike, but the urban centers of the northeast soon lured artists back to the cities during the 1920s as the art style changed in the 1930s. The urban landscape became avant-garde to artists as American cities developed international attention. Cities such as New York, Boston, and Philadelphia became American cultural centers as museums and art schools were established.

Upstate New York Colonies to the City

With the first painting schools, a steady influx of artists came to New York state establishing their own art enclaves. The Byrdscliffe art colony emerged in Woodstock, New York, founded by utopian idealist Ralph Radcliffe Whitehead in 1902. Whitehead shared beliefs similar to those of the Arts and Crafts Movement that began in England in the 1880s, under its founder John Ruskin. The movement was a response to the

⁵⁷ Interview with Elizabeth Condon, Assistant Professor of Art, University of South Florida, Tampa, February 10, 2008.

perceived negative effects of modernization and industrialization on true artisanship.⁵⁸ Woodstock became the epicenter for the movement and sparked the careers of famous artists such as Robert Henri and his pupils George Bellows, William Glackens, George Luks, Everett Shinn, and John Sloan. They called themselves *the six* and formed the Ashcan school of painters around 1900 when they moved to New York City.⁵⁹ They embraced the urban setting represented in realistic paintings of city life often known as Urban Realism.⁶⁰ Urban Realism emphasized the expressive nature of life and character rather than romantic beauty and traditional academic style.⁶¹ American cities thus began to attract artists who craved the realistic urban side of life rather than the isolated and idyllic landscapes of rural art colonies.

At the turn of the century, New York was America's most cosmopolitan city. It was the portal for new beginnings and the hub of fashion and the arts. New York's polyglot enclaves of European immigrants inspired many artist enclaves in Greenwich Village, SoHo, and East Hampton on Long Island. Greenwich Village and SoHo were more secular and ethnic art enclaves than an actual art colony like that of the one in East Hampton out on Long Island. The enclaves located in the city painted cityscapes while East Hampton became the "American Barbizon."⁶²

East Hampton, like Barbizon, France, attracted artists searching for meaning in the rural lifestyle of the local residents who lived a supposed noble and honorable life before industrialization. Despite the fact that most of the locals lived in poverty, the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 170; Heller and Williams, 114-15.

⁵⁹ Rebecca Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2006), 41.

⁶⁰ Updike, 109-117; Zurier, 23-24.

⁶¹ Zurier, 23.

⁶² Helen A. Harrison and Constance Ayers Denne, *Hampton's Bohemia: Two Centuries of Artists and Writers on the Beach*, (San Francisco, California: Chronicle Books, 2002), 44.

paintings often portrayed a naiveté or an innocent version of their lives.⁶³ Noteworthy late nineteenth-century artists on the island were William Merritt Chase and Thomas Moran. Moran, mostly known for his dramatic panoramas of Yellowstone National Park, enjoyed the more simplistic and intimate landscapes of the seaside rather than the majestic mountain landscapes he painted prior to his arrival in East Hampton. In 1884, he erected the first studio-residence on Long Island which still stands today at 229 Main Street in East Hampton.⁶⁴ Moran's studio served as the gathering place for artists and other guests, which made it an art colony almost instantaneously.⁶⁵ The colony provided a tranquil haven as well as a unique quality of light, which inspired the urbanites who wanted to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city. East Hampton became the epicenter for socialization and camaraderie among artists and writers until the late 1960s, when escalating land values drove artists out. As with other artist colonies, urbanization took its toll on the landscape as farmland disappeared, making room for housing, resorts, and tourists, which started the decline of the Hampton colony. However, some artists who could afford to live there (like Jackson Pollack) stayed permanently. Writers John Steinbeck and Truman Capote came to the island in the late 1950s and wrote some of their best pieces. Steinbeck knew he was dying of cancer so in 1960 he decided to travel around the United States with his dog Charley in a pick-up truck camper to see the country one last time. In 1962, he released his book *Travels With Charley*, before his death in 1968.⁶⁶ In his observations of individuals he met, he noted that "I saw in their eyes something I was to see over and over in every part of the nation-- a burning desire to

⁶³ Ibid., 43.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 86-89.

go, to move, to get under way, anyplace, away from any here.”⁶⁷ Steinbeck captured the desire for wanderlust and it was definitely a trait shared by the artists of the East Hampton art colony. Other modern artists such as abstract painter Jackson Pollock, William de Kooning, Lee Krasner, and pop artist Roy Lichtenstein to name a few, lived on the island during the zenith of their careers.

Western U.S. Art Colonies

The western part of the United States enticed artists during the westward migration of the nineteenth century to places like Taos, New Mexico, and Monterey, California. The appetite for adventure and majestic landscapes propelled artists to move to these sparsely populated areas. Beginning in 1875, the seaside communities of Carmel, Pacific Grove, and Monterey in northern California, attracted artists after painter and explorer Jules Tavernier discovered unique landscapes and seascapes around the craggy cliffs of the Pacific coast.⁶⁸ The Monterey peninsula harbored artists for decades after the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco, a great influx of San Franciscan artists relocated to the peninsula.⁶⁹ This would bond the Monterey Coast art scene with San Francisco’s, even though one was urban and the other rural, much like the art scene in East Hampton, Long Island, and in New York City. Wanderlust brought both artists and writers to the region for a number of reasons: the camaraderie, the beauty of the landscape, simplicity of rural life, inspiration of nature, and timing for establishing a “ground floor” art community. During the late 1800s, California was still a young state with artistic potential beckoning

⁶⁷ John Steinbeck, *Travels With Charley: In Search of America* (New York: Viking Press, 1962), 225.

⁶⁸ Scott A. Shields, *Artists at Continent’s End: The Monterey Peninsula Art Colony, 1875-1907*, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2006), 11.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

creative minds to tap its beauty. According to Eloise J. Roorbach, writer for the *Craftsmen Journal*, “The work of the California landscape, man is of native growth and inspiration, springing from the soil with that marvelous spontaneity that is only seen in young lands and with youthful genius.”⁷⁰ Writers and painters’ inspired by the mountains searching for meaning and communion with nature found California’s Monterey coast fulfilled their creative longing. The California coastal region shared some coastal characteristics of the Mediterranean but the bright colorations and the harsh sunlight of Southern Europe did not fit the often misty and muted sunlight of the California coast. Some of the first interpretive paintings of California lacked their own style looking similar to European landscapes of harsher light like that of Greece.⁷¹

Among the most important California artists who often worked in Monterey were Jules Tavernier, William Keith, Arthur Mathews, and photographer Arnold Genthe.⁷² Another relevant Monterey artist visitor was George Inness. Inness spent time at several art colonies throughout the United States. His paintings were lauded by the locals for their accurate color, surfaces, and techniques, exemplified in the painting *Near Monterey*, which resembled the style of early European and first American art colonies of the nineteenth century. Clearly, California’s artists shared the anti-modern or utopian ideal of embracing nature and the rural lifestyle for inspiration. Moreover, California’s Spanish and Mexican settlements exemplified the romantic ideal of the noble lifestyle of the local

⁷⁰Ibid., 4.

⁷¹ Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1973). 300-02.

⁷² Ibid., 2.

peasant. Even after the gold rush of the 1850s, the Monterey peninsula remained mostly untouched with its quaint Spanish adobes and haciendas.⁷³

California landscapes, blessed as they were with mountains, coastline, rolling hills, and old trees embodied the spirit and transcendentalist beliefs that many explorers, naturalists, and artists shared during the late 1890s. The transcendentalist ideal connected human spirituality and the divinity of nature.⁷⁴ Transcendentalism became popular especially in California where industrialization had not spread nearly as much as along the eastern coast of the U.S. The movement spurred the writing careers of intellectuals such Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Both writers compared the majestic qualities of nature to the human spirit.⁷⁵ An appreciation for natural landscapes prevailed in California and the man who delivered transcendentalism to the mainstream was conservationist John Muir, who withdrew from modern civilization to explore the Sierras, a spiritual retreat he thought to be divine. Muir's philosophy to value nature coincided with the utopian ideals of artists.⁷⁶ Many painters, writers, and photographers depicted the places Muir fought to preserve through their artwork; places such as Yosemite National Park, the Sierra Nevada Mountains, Muir Woods, and Big Basin Redwoods State Park.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, California's artists began to include the Western frontier with paintings of the pioneers and cowboys, Native Americans, buffalo, horses, covered wagons, and prairies. The transition from coastal landscapes to western

⁷³ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 148-160.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 154.

⁷⁶ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1982), 124-125.

frontier landscapes arrived in the 1920s as the Santa Fe Railroad reached the greater West and Southwest areas of the U.S. The period encouraged the romanticism of the American Western Art Movement.⁷⁷

California's art scene dwindled during the Depression years and a new hub for art came to fruition in the urban setting of Los Angeles and Hollywood. As Hollywood's population and fame increased as a performing arts center, so too did the aristocracy of art buying by wealthy movie stars. Collecting art became a trendy hobby of actors and actresses and their collections were directly responsible for the building of museums and galleries in a town where acting was king.⁷⁸

Taos and Santa Fe, New Mexico

Meanwhile, in the Southwest, parts of New Mexico became significant arts centers. Santa Fe and Taos had the largest concentration of artists but they exuded different landscape qualities. Santa Fe, the territorial and later state capital is located in the juniper foothills and eventually became a railroad destination. Taos, located 70 miles north of Santa Fe, is on a 7000-foot pueblo and old pioneer outpost in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Taos was explored by sketch artists Joseph Henry Sharp and John Hauser in 1893. They discovered the grandeur of the semi-desert landscape, finding it to be an extraordinary place to paint with its warm colored sand and rocks enhanced by the western sun.⁷⁹ In 1914, two of Sharp's paintings published in *Harper's Weekly* brought

⁷⁷ Judith A. Barter, "Chicago and the Art of the Western Frontier- Museums Today," *USA Today*, July, 2003.

⁷⁸ Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920's* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 325-333.

⁷⁹ Shipp, 109-113.

international recognition and stirred interest in the Taos area.⁸⁰ Taos and Santa Fe continued to attract artists who traveled by train in the early twentieth century. By 1915, Sharp joined the Taos Society of Painters and established an artist colony. A year later Mabel Dodge, a famous, wealthy New York socialite and her husband, artist Maurice Sterne, moved to Taos. Dodge later divorced Sterne and married a Pueblo Indian, Tony Lucerne. She is credited for starting the first literary colony in Taos and recruiting artists to relocate there, including New Mexico's most famous artist, Georgia O'Keefe.⁸¹ Dodge's exquisite home and inn hosted several famous artists including photographer Ansel Adams, writer Virginia Woolf, and painter Edward Hopper.

Georgia O'Keefe first came to Taos in 1929 and visited every summer until 1946 when she moved permanently to a town southwest of Taos called Abiquiu, New Mexico, after the death of her husband and photographer, Alfred Steiglitz. In 1924, O'Keefe began as a watercolor artist in New York when a friend brought her work to Steiglitz's Studio 291, where he offered to show her watercolors and sketches. In the late 1920s, her paintings were inspired by a circle of artists she socialized with such as Paul Strand and Edward Steichen. She began to use oil paints and focused on subjects as if they were under a microscope, painting on a much larger scale. O'Keefe's modernistic approach to the New Mexican landscape became her iconic abstract style of sun-drenched flowers, adobes, animal bones, and sky.⁸² O'Keefe also redefined the image of the body. She successfully used abstraction to feminize her subjects, as in her 1925 painting, *Red Canna*, a flower made to represent the female labia. This disturbed many male art critics

⁸⁰ Ibid., 109.

⁸¹ Ibid., 119.

⁸² Ibid., 120.

who often tried to discredit her work. O'Keefe's sexualized paintings assured her a place in the modernist art world and broke the barriers of what was proper for women to paint.⁸³

Taos and Santa Fe, New Mexico, continued to attract artists throughout the twentieth century. New Mexico fostered respect for the highly regarded contributions of the Indian artists such as Allan Houser, Michael Naranjo, and Pablita Velarde. Taos and Santa Fe are still important art destinations complete with museums, galleries, schools, and historical sites pertaining to the arts and famous artists and patrons.

From Haystacks to Soup Cans: American Modern Art

World War I, the Great Depression, and yet another World War in the 1940s all changed the American art scene dramatically during the first half the twentieth century. The American painters were well on their way to setting themselves apart from their European ancestors in the twentieth century.⁸⁴ Rather than resist modernity as the nineteenth century open-air painters did, American artists confronted the transition to increasing urbanization with new styles of art such as Urban Realism and Abstract Expressionism, which changed the concept of what constitutes art.

The world was in a whirlwind of change and turmoil leading up to World War I. The war influenced American art by institutionalizing patriotism and encouraging xenophobia against foreign communism. Non-traditional art came to be considered

⁸³ Frances K.Pohl, *Framing America: A Social History of America* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 334-335.

⁸⁴ David Rosand, *The Invention of Painting in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 116.

radical and fascist.⁸⁵ Most of the art created during this time promoted patriotism through military posters and paintings portraying American life. After the war ended in 1918, artists remained mostly conservative. In the 1930s, American artists went to work for the government through the Federal Art Project of the Work Projects Administration (WPA) during the Great Depression. President Franklin Roosevelt's WPA programs put artists and writers to work creating murals, sculptures, recordings, photographs, beautification projects, and written collections of American culture with an unspoken effort to preserve history.⁸⁶ The Federal Art Project gave artists a sense of professionalism through its commissions allowing artists freedom and individuality to pursue art as a means to make a living. This period turned out to be a pivotal point for strengthening American art and leading to modernist movements on the American art scene.

As most of the old artist colonies faded, art clubs and associations formed where artists supported each other in local communities. By the 1940s, World War II again engendered patriotic and propaganda art for mass culture. Adolph Hitler's demise and the dawn of the nuclear age brought a new sense of utopianism to the modernist art movement. Artists portrayed the era's consciousness with new art forms and techniques while adapting to the urbanization and maturing American nation. Artists' individuality was inspired and relished in the pursuit of wealth and personal recognition.⁸⁷ This did not fit the communal utopian ideal of the rural artist colony. By the 1950s, many of the

⁸⁵ Ibid., 113.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 123-24.

⁸⁷ Edward Rothstein, *The New York Times Guide to the Arts of the Twentieth Century* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2002) Vol.2, 794-95.

original artist colonies disbanded as the landscapes in which they painted were reconfigured into urban areas.

The last few decades of the twentieth century climaxed with an explosion of artistic innovation known as postmodernism.⁸⁸ Artists of the new frontier of the nuclear age were recognized as innovative. A leading example of the new generation of modern artists can be found in abstract artist Jackson Pollock with his unorthodox paint dripping technique. Pollock objected to the traditional painting style of his mentor, Thomas Hart Benton, which typified what Pollock called the “American scene.”⁸⁹ The 1960s ushered in commercial artists like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein who brought Pop Art to the forefront of the cultural art scene and once again challenged what was accepted as art. Warhol used iconic figures like Marilyn Monroe and the common Campbell’s soup can, and turned them into art with repetitive patterns and loud colors. These artists turned to popular culture for inspiration rather than to the landscape.⁹⁰ The landscape offered little relevance to the revolutionary social upheaval of the 1960s, leaving the traditional artist colony to fade into history.

⁸⁸ Robert Williams, *Art Theory: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford, Britain: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 224-25.

⁸⁹ Rothstein, 894.

⁹⁰ Harrison and Denne, 103-109

Chapter Three: Florida's Artist Colonies

The first professional artist to produce art in the New World was French artist Jacques LeMoyne. In 1564, LeMoyne crossed the Atlantic Ocean with French Huguenot expeditionary leader, Rene Laudonniere, to claim land for a French settlement in Florida.⁹¹ LeMoyne, a trained sketch artist, surveyed and recorded the exotic landscape and native Floridians through etchings. He depicted natives adorned in colorful animal pelts, bird feathers, shells, bones, trinkets, and tattoo- like designs on their bodies. It is unknown how accurate these engravings are because the depictions of arrow quivers and planted fields resemble that of European quivers and fields. Some anthropologists contend that LeMoyne Europeanized many depictions.⁹² An example of questioning his accuracy is an engraving of a Timucuan executioner with a paddle-shaped club, which he used to bludgeon a kneeling man. The club that the executioner used is a style of weaponry that comes from South America, particularly coastal Brazil according to scholars of anthropology.⁹³ Despite the contention surrounding the engravings' accuracy, in 1591, Flemish writer and engraver Theodore De Bry published a book of Le Moyne's woodcuts in two volumes, one called *Brevis Narratio eorum quae in Floridae Americae provincial Galle* and the other entitled *Historia Americae*.⁹⁴ The first volume showed scenes of Ribault's first Florida voyage which LeMoyne was not part of. The second

⁹¹ Gordon Patterson, "LeMoyne's Florida, Europe's First Pictures from America" *FEH Forum* (Spring 1991), 5-7.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Miles Harvey, *Painter in a Savage Land: The Saga of the First European Artist in North America*, (New York: Random House, 2008), 220.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

volume depicted LeMoyne's historical scenes of Native American social hierarchy, food gathering rituals, and healing medicinal practices.⁹⁵

With the exception of a few artifacts left behind from St. Augustine's Spanish missions, art in Florida barely existed throughout its first few centuries of settlement by Europeans.⁹⁶ Explorers came to the unfamiliar landscape of Florida and found it to be a natural science laboratory due to uncharted areas where nature was left unto itself. In the 1730s to late 1740s, Mark Catesby, an English journalist, created depictions of the American Southeast's subtropical environment in a natural history journal. The journal contained colorful sketches of birds, insects, animals, fish, serpents, and flora and fauna.⁹⁷ Art was still relatively sparse until 1832, when painter and naturalist John James Audubon came to Florida to do research for his book, *The Birds of America*.⁹⁸ Audubon wrote incessantly, and with fervor and astonishment, about the behavior of the flocks of ibis, spoonbills, egrets, and other birds. He hired a taxidermist and Swiss landscape painter George Lehman to accompany him in the backwoods and swamps of northeast Florida near the St. Johns River. Their days were spent drawing and tracking their specimens. Audubon also reported upon Florida's citrus fruit, observing that, "Nothing can be more gladdening to the traveler, when passing through the uninhabited woods of East Florida, than the wild orange groves which he sometimes meets with. As I approached them, the rich perfume of the blossoms, the golden hue of the fruits, that hung on every twig, and lay scattered on the ground and the deep green of the glossy

⁹⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁹⁶ Works Projects Administration, *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 157.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 159.

⁹⁸ Richard Rhodes, *John James Audubon: The Making of an American*, (New York: Random House, 2004), 358.

leaves, never failed to produce the most pleasing effect on my mind.”⁹⁹ Audubon’s accurate representation of specimens and Lehman’s detailed landscape illustrations combined were among the finest contributions to any visual naturalist or historical guides of Florida at this time.¹⁰⁰

In 1877, George Inness moved to Tarpon Springs to retire on the Anclote River. Inness frequented many art colonies including Monterey, California and Barbizon, France where he learned to study light. Inness focused his painting on atmospheric studies of early morning misty pine forests and late afternoon storm clouds indicative of Florida’s stormy summer weather rather than the usual fascination with palm trees, as with later landscape painters. Inness’ son George Jr. was also a landscape artist and he is recognized for his collection of paintings that are on display at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Tarpon Springs. George Junior painted mostly maritime scenes of shrimp boats and sponge docks yet still displayed his father’s influence by engaging in atmospheric interpretations of light in his Florida paintings.

Most of the American artists who came to Florida adopted the motif of open-air landscape painting, leaving classical portrait painting behind.¹⁰¹ However, George Catlin of the Hudson River School of painters, contributed a series of Seminole Indian portraits for the U.S. government including his most famous painting of Indian leader Osceola.¹⁰² Like European and other American artist colonists, Catlin immersed himself in the local culture using nearby Indian tribes for his paintings. Indeed, fascination with the South

⁹⁹ John J Audubon, as quoted in Rhodes, 360.

¹⁰⁰ Ann Vileisis, *Discovering the Unknown Landscape: A History of Americas’s Wetlands*, (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1997), 56-57.

¹⁰¹ Works Progress Administration, 158.

¹⁰² Ibid.

became more and more enchanting to the northern artist. The antebellum South consisted of many people of Anglo-Saxon, African, French, Spanish, Creole, and Native American descent and was an intriguing place to paint.¹⁰³

Along with ethnic diversity came the uncultivated landscape known as swamps. The swamps' mysterious aura inspired artists not through romance but curiosity. Art and literature connected the experience of swamps through folklore and its strange beauty making it accessible for people to discover. Artist William Morris Hunt captured the mysterious essence of swamps with his 1874 painting, *Governor's Creek, Florida*.¹⁰⁴ The thick foliage and contrast of deep shadows to light areas spurred the imagination. Humanity versus nature was a common theme, but swamps and marshes not easily accessible or tamed by people created a mystical and majestic character to its landscape.¹⁰⁵ Florida attracted a diverse group of artists and landscape painters who ventured into its swamps and marshes and produced works unlike anything seen before in the American art scene. Another trait that attracted artists was Florida's compelling luminosity with its dramatic sunrises and sunsets and atmospheric changes, all of which contributed to the uniqueness of Florida landscape paintings.

There are too many art colonies and communities to discuss in this chapter. The following art colonies and communities were chosen: St. Augustine, Sarasota, Maitland, and New Smyrna Beach. All of these places share similar characteristics concerning their relationship to nature, the type of artists who lived there particularly landscape painters,

¹⁰³ Estill Curtis Pennington, "Southern Landscape Painting, 1865-1925," *American Art Review*, Vol.XI No. 6, (1999), 131.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁰⁵ Ann Vileisis, 95-100.

and the fact that the art colony continues to function either an art colony or has developed into an art community.

St. Augustine Art Colony

Despite humanity's inability to conquer swamps in the middle of the nineteenth century, it did not stop people from settling the rest of Florida. The state attracted capitalists who saw the potential to create a paradise such as oil tycoon Henry Morrison Flagler in the 1880s. Flagler built his railroad down the East Coast and saw the potential for tourism and leisure in Florida's tropical and exotic landscape, while his railroads allowed travelers to reach destinations previously unattainable. In 1887, Flagler built the most luxurious hotel of the Gilded Age, the Ponce de Leon. He promoted his luxury hotel, in St. Augustine, as a place where tourists could experience the Old World. His hotel offered a variety of arts and culture and encouraged northern artists to come paint in the sunshine and fresh air.¹⁰⁶ Artists fascinated by Florida's varied landscapes and the rawness of the unsettled place came to Florida to paint in the winters. Starting in the 1890s, the Ponce de Leon became the centerpiece of the St. Augustine artist colony.

Tucked in between two rivers and the Atlantic Ocean, St. Augustine the oldest European settlement in the U.S., (established by Pedro Menendez de Aviles in 1565), was the most popular winter vacation spot for northern tourists from the 1890s to the 1910s. Flagler's hotel provided guests with a Renaissance atmosphere and cultural activities, and included seven art studios for vacationing artists in the winter. The steady patronage of

¹⁰⁶ Tiffany Aumann, "Reclaiming A Forgotten Past," *St Augustine Record*, October 5, 2001.

wealthy guests provided a reasonable income for artists.¹⁰⁷ Flagler was an art connoisseur and collector and promoted the resort hotel to be the “closest thing to painting in Europe.”¹⁰⁸ He even sponsored a monthly newspaper called *The Tatler*, which featured the latest artists in residence and promoted the sale of their artwork. His familiarity with northern artists allowed him to entice prestigious artists to stay at the Ponce de Leon. Moreover, the famous Hudson River School landscape painter, Martin Johnson Heade (1819-1904), settled in St. Augustine in 1883. Heade created several paintings of orchids and seascapes but his most famous Florida painting is “The Great Florida Marsh” (1885).¹⁰⁹ International artist Thomas Moran created a monumental historical Florida painting, *Ponce de Leon in Florida*, which was inspired by the forests surrounding the St. Johns River. Moran depicted a romantic painting of Ponce de Leon, the Spanish conquistador, exploring a clearing in the midst of the forest with live oaks covered in Spanish moss and soldiers trading with native Floridians. In reality, Ponce de Leon had mostly hostile interactions with the native peoples rather than Moran’s cordial portrayal.

The St. Augustine art colony declined during the late 1890s when a national economic downturn and devastating freezes occurred, leading remaining vacationers to migrate southward to new resorts. Flagler’s railroad brought tourists south to new destinations like Palm Beach and, eventually, the Keys. Yet artists continued to pass through St. Augustine and in 1924, they created the Pen and Brush Club.¹¹⁰ The Pen and Brush Club consisted of twenty local writers, painters, sculptors, and photographers. Club

¹⁰⁷ Robert Torchia, *Lost Colony: The Artists of St. Augustine, 1930-195* (St. Augustine, Florida: Lightner Museum, 2001). 8-9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁰⁹ Edward Gomez, “Where Exuberant Dreams Often Sink Out of Sight,” *New York Times*, April 8, 2001.

¹¹⁰ Torchia, 10.

members later that year changed the name to the Galleon Club and started an art school under the direction of Chicago sculptor Adele Barrett. The group then became the Galleon Art School and nominated Hildegarde Muller-Uri to direct the art club.¹¹¹ Within a few years the artist club abandoned its original focus and became more of a social club. In 1931, Muller-Uri and amateur painter J. Dexter Phinney put together the St. Augustine Arts Club. Phinney, a local jeweler, encouraged the business community to support the Arts Club.¹¹² The new Arts Club advertised in the community newspaper (*The St. Augustine Record*) which helped steadily build its reputation in the community. Between the *Record* and the business community, the St. Augustine Arts Club attracted many new members, some of which were businesspersons who turned to art as a hobby or an alternative career after retirement. The Arts Club began to have regular exhibitions creating a need for an art center and some of the historic buildings like the Davenport Park Clubhouse were used for club meetings, classes, and exhibitions.¹¹³

By the early 1940s, the Art Club had roughly sixty members. It grew to 532 members by 1949, and became nationally known in the American arts community. Also in 1949, *Art Digest* printed an advertisement for the St. Augustine Chamber of Commerce, which attempted to entice artists to come “paint like you are in Europe.” Throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, the Club prospered and evolved into the Arts Association, but it gradually declined in the late 1950s.¹¹⁴ The decline of the artist colony was due to social and political conflicts among the Arts Association members and

¹¹¹ Ibid.,10.

¹¹² Ibid.,11.

¹¹³ Ibid, 12

¹¹⁴ Torchia, 38

the community.¹¹⁵ According to Robert Torchia, author of St. Augustine's *Lost Colony*, "as the group of artists grew so did the politics, fighting erupted over acceptance of modern art and backing from local businesses became a 'double-edged deal,' with expectations placed on the type of art the painters created." The artists tried to recapture the magic of the Flagler era but it was an elusive goal.¹¹⁶

The colony declined despite the efforts of many community members. According to 74 year old William Puckett, native St. Augustinian, artist and gallery owner, "World War II contributed to the decline of the colony. It adversely affected tourism and winter visitors to Florida. The original 1930s artists of the art colony began to retire and some passed away. It took a lot to rebuild the art community and we never have, to that caliber."¹¹⁷ Puckett grew up in St. Augustine and was a young man during the art colony (1930-1950s). He remembers wanting to be an artist and actively apprenticed some of the local artists, helping them hang shows and doing whatever needed to be done at the Art Association. His parents sent him to architecture school at the University of Florida but later he attended the Ringling School of Art after local artist Emmitt Smith helped convince Puckett's parents that their son was a talented artist.¹¹⁸ Puckett is currently a prominent local artist and owner of the Aviles Street Gallery in the historic Aviles Street district. Puckett adds, "In the last ten to fifteen years artists continually moved to St. Augustine; an artist can find an aesthetic and charming quality in the architecture, small streets, beaches, maritime scenes and the St. John's River to the West. There is a lot to

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 49.

¹¹⁶ Robert Torchia quoted in Aumann, 8-9

¹¹⁷ William Puckett, St. Augustine artist and Aviles Street Gallery owner, interview by author, May 14, 2008.

¹¹⁸ Torchia, 49.

offer artists here from architecture and landscapes to the forty to fifty galleries dedicated to local and regional art.”¹¹⁹

Like the art colonies of the nineteenth century, the past remained a central focus as did the landscape and architecture. Despite the Art Club’s demise in the late 1950s, the arts continued to flourish in St. Augustine. Even the original Arts Association is active today and is supported by members that host several art exhibitions, gallery walks, and galas. The St. Augustine artists of today still steep themselves in the traditional plein-air painting style of the original art colony. In 2006, a group of thirty artists captured outdoor scenes for the nearby Crescent Beach Paint Out.¹²⁰ The artists set out to paint various landscapes around Crescent Beach Island, enjoying the camaraderie of other artists and the sense of urgency to finish their work. One artist opined, “So much of Florida is being eaten up by developers that we want to capture the raw nature of Florida while it’s still with us.” The development of Florida was a concern to the nineteenth century painters as much as it is to artists today. The beauty of Florida has captured artists’ fancy for generations and the nostalgic longing for the past keeps artists coming back to the oldest city supported by a community that understands the value of art.

Maitland Art Colony

In an area northeast of Orlando, Florida, is the quaint, hilly, little town of Maitland. One of the oldest towns in central Florida, the community dates back to 1838, when it became a post for the U.S. Army during the Second Seminole War. The rich

¹¹⁹ William Puckett, Interview.

¹²⁰ Lori Pounder, “Florida Painters Gather in St. Augustine to Pursue Plein Air Art,” *St. Augustine Record*, August 13, 2006.

landscape, dotted with lakes and hills along the Central Florida ridge and considered the state's Fertile Crescent, was a major orange producing area in the 1870s.¹²¹ After a series of devastating freezes in the 1880s-1890s, many of the orange growers left but the town continued to be a winter vacation spot for wealthy travelers.

Maitland later became known as an art colony thanks to Florida winter visitor Jules Andre Smith. In 1880, Smith was born in Hong Kong to Danish parents. He grew up in Germany and New York and graduated from Cornell University with a Masters of Science in architecture. His artistic skills brought him to France during World War I with the American Expeditionary Forces where he and eight other artists' mission was to sketch battles for publication.¹²² After the war, Smith returned to the United States and designed sets for the Parish Players Theater Company in Stony Creek, Connecticut. He frequently traveled to artist colonies in both Europe and the United States.

During the 1930s, Smith became a winter resident of Maitland. Through his connections in New York, he met Annie Russell, a New York actress who was a professor of Theatre Arts at Rollins College in neighboring Winter Park. Smith built sets for Ms. Russell's productions at the college and they later became romantically involved.¹²³ In 1937, Smith purchased land in Maitland next to Lake Sybellia. He said the light there would be perfect for an art studio since the sunset cast a pinkish light over the lake in the winter afternoons.¹²⁴ In 1938, he added a gallery and another studio with the financial help of Mary Curtis Blok, a patron of Rollins College. Blok admired Smith and encouraged him to explore the art problems of the day, therefore his new studio

¹²¹ Richard Colvin, curator of collections, Maitland Art Center, taped interview by author, June 4, 2008.

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid

would essentially become a “laboratory” for modern art.¹²⁵ He named it the Research Studio. The Research studio’s gardens and courtyards were a marvel of stucco buildings carved with murals, etchings, and statues of Aztec and Mayan motifs. The compound itself was truly a work of art with its unique ornamented architecture.¹²⁶

Smith invited prominent artists to stay at his compound such as Ralston Crawford, David Burluik, Earnest Roth, Milton Avery, Arnold Blanch, Doris Lee, and Harold McIntosh. He personally selected them to work at the Research Studio based on personal connections to the artists and to their dedication and innovative approach to modern art. He encouraged artistic experimentation with his resident colonists. His art colony differed greatly from other art colonies of this era because of his “invitation only” model. Although the artists were not solely plein-air painters, they did have the benefits of seclusion and a beautiful landscape to inspire them, like the painters in the northern colonies. Smith’s goal was to provide a place where an artist could focus on their work and be able to experiment without judgment or distraction. It was his dream to create a place where artists could learn and be inspired in a beautiful setting. Community was important to Smith, so he often invited the public to view the artwork being created through exhibitions and open house parties. He was also a humanitarian of sorts. The nearest town, Eatonville, an African American town and home to writer Zora Neale Hurston, was a favorite place for Smith to paint. He often painted black laborers working the fields and was rumored to visit with Ms. Hurston.¹²⁷ Before Eatonville was established in 1887, black settlers in the area lived in Maitland. The white townspeople of

¹²⁵ Anonymous “Research Studio Plans Enlarged”, *Winter Park Topics: A Weekly Review of Social and Cultural Activities During Winter Resort Season*, (Winter Park, Florida, March 6, 1937) Vol.4, No. 9, 1-4.

¹²⁶ Chuck Twardy, “Spreading the Word about Andre Smith” *Orlando Sentinel*, December 8, 1991.

¹²⁷ Colvin, interview.

Maitland treated blacks better than most areas of the South at the time. The townsfolk decided to create a formal government and in 1884, they elected a black man named Tony Taylor as the first mayor of Maitland.¹²⁸

Andre Smith died in 1959 with the hope that the Research Studio would continue to be a place where artists could create and experiment. After his death, he left no heirs and the art center remained closed for ten years and was eventually purchased by the city of Maitland. In 1971, a group of concerned citizens created a non-profit art association to lease the property and reopen it as an art center. Today Smith's artistic dream is kept alive by support from the community, local artists, the sites historical recognition, and art education. The compound has a museum gallery for permanent and rotating collections, a research library, museum store, and studios for art classes. Despite, the great effort to preserve the Maitland compound, Andre Smith is not well known outside of central Florida. Many of his works are in storage, waiting to be restored and properly appraised.¹²⁹ In 1982, the art center became one of Florida's official Historical Sites and entered the National Register of Historic Places.

Sarasota Arts Community

The history of visual arts in Sarasota, Florida, has a profound beginning. In the 1840s, in the midst of the Seminole Indian war, the U.S Army's infantry division was stationed at Fort Amstead in Sarasota. A young artist soldier from West Point named Seth Eastman was assigned to document this area while the army's war against the

¹²⁸ Valerie Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 20-23.

¹²⁹ Ibid

Seminole Indians raged on. Painting in the midst of the hot humid climate of Florida, proved to be challenging for Eastman's health and the natives eluded the army easily through the swampy land. Using mainly watercolors, he documented the connection between the native people and their environment. He noted how the army spent the majority of their time seeking the Seminoles, rather than interacting or fighting with them.¹³⁰ Eastman gained national recognition for his study and depictions of Native Americans from his assignments in Texas, Florida, and Minnesota.¹³¹

Eastman's artistic legacy inspired others a century later to develop Sarasota into the arts capital of Florida. Several people helped to put Sarasota on the map: Oil tycoon William Selby and his wife Marie; Ralph Copes, a railroad magnate; Bertha Palmer, a wealthy socialite; and John and Mable Ringling, art collectors and philanthropists.¹³² All were national figures noted for their ideas, business sense, and lavish taste. Their passion and dedication to the community led to the creation of Sarasota's future development.¹³³

Each of them came to Sarasota around 1900 and fell in love with its natural beauty. In an editorial written in an Indiana newspaper in 1931, an unknown author characterized Sarasota to be "Florida's Queen City," adding that "There is everything here to delight the heart of a man who loves nature and seeks communion with her visible forms."¹³⁴ The Selbys came to Sarasota in 1909 and lived part time on a houseboat in Sarasota Bay. William Selby and his wife Marie purchased land near the bay and

¹³⁰ Sarah E. Boehme, *Seth Eastman: A Portfolio of North American Indians* (Afton, Minnesota: Afton Historical Society Press, 1995), 11-13.

¹³¹ Pat Ringling Buck, et al., *A History of the Visual Arts in Sarasota* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003), 1.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³⁴ Unknown author, "Sarasota Pictured as Florida's Queen City By Indiana Newspaper," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, January 15, 1931.

enjoyed the outdoors. They could often be found gardening at their estate, boating, fishing, and riding horses. Despite their wealth from oil and mining, the Selby's lived modestly and did not participate in the Sarasota social scene.¹³⁵ William died in 1956 and upon Marie's death in 1971, her estate was donated to the city of Sarasota and would eventually become the Selby Botanical Gardens.

Another important Sarasota figure was Bertha Honore Palmer. She first visited Sarasota in 1910 from Chicago. After the death of her wealthy husband Potter in 1902, she inherited his wealth and put it to use. Palmer, a savvy businesswoman, real estate investor and socialite, fell in love with Sarasota's charm and purchased almost 80,000 acres of land.¹³⁶ Her investments influenced the development of some of Sarasota's most cherished historic neighborhoods such as Spanish Point and Osprey Point where her residence was appropriately named "the Oaks." Palmer was a huge patron of the arts and she purchased and put together a collection of Impressionist paintings with the guidance of artist Mary Cassatt, and displayed them in Chicago's Columbian Exposition in 1900.¹³⁷ Palmer later displayed them at her home in Sarasota. The collection was donated to the Art Institute of Chicago after her death in 1918. Palmer was an innovative woman for her time and her investments in Sarasota inspired others to invest in the new community.

Probably the most nationally known contributors to Sarasota's visual arts were John and Mable Ringling. Born in 1866, John Ringling grew up in McGregor, Iowa, and

¹³⁵ Ibid., 3-7

¹³⁶ Hope L. Black, "Mounted on a Pedestal, Bertha Honore Palmer" (master's thesis, University of South Florida, 2007) 1-3.

¹³⁷ Gioia Dilberto, "A Painter and Her Patron: Two Modern Women, *New York Times*, December 20, 1998.

later moved to Baraboo, Wisconsin, with his six brothers and two sisters.¹³⁸ He and his brothers organized town hall concerts and comedy shows during the winter and traveled by train visiting and entertaining small towns. In 1884, the Ringling brothers teamed up with experienced showman Yankee Robinson and organized a circus. By 1906, the Ringling Brothers Inc. Circus was a tremendous success in the Midwest. Eventually, John realized he no longer wanted to be a clown and so he continued with a more traditional business role for the circus while investing his wealth in oil and other interests.¹³⁹ Ringling, a traveling bachelor until his late thirties, married Mable Burton in 1905, in Hoboken, New Jersey. The couple, the Ringling brothers, and their families spent winters in Sarasota, finding it to be one of the “fairest places of all.” John Ringling did not initially plan to invest in Sarasota because of his extensive travel schedule in New York and the daily circus activities, but Mable wanted to settle down and they managed to visit Sarasota more often.¹⁴⁰ During World War I, because of restricted travel, John was unable to travel extensively, so he purchased thousands of acres in Sarasota and several barrier islands. He decided investing in the county would be a good business decision.¹⁴¹ In 1926, he built a causeway linking the mainland and small islands and later built a Ritz- Carlton Hotel on the south end of Long Boat Key.¹⁴² In 1927, Ringling began to build the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art to house his extensive baroque art collection. The museum, designed as an Italian Renaissance style villa, reflected the couple’s love affair with Italy. His art collection of Italian Baroque is the

¹³⁸ David C. Weeks, *Ringling, The Florida Years 1911-1936*, (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1993), xv.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-17.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

¹⁴¹ Buck, 6.

¹⁴² Weeks, 104.

largest such collection outside of Italy. Italian art authority and collector Baron Von Hadeln visited the Ringling's during the building of the museum. He stated, "Mr. and Mrs. Ringling are to be the means of making Sarasota the art center of the entire South and one of the leading art centers of the world."¹⁴³ Following through with his plans, the museum later expanded to house the Ringling Brothers Circus memorabilia. Then in 1931, Ringling dedicated the School of Fine and Applied Arts to Sarasota. He donated \$45,000 along with the former Bay Haven Hotel to house the school.¹⁴⁴ Shortly after the school opened, according to the instructors "the type of work being done by these students here in Sarasota is as good as that of any art school in the country."¹⁴⁵ Today the school is named the Ringling College of Art and Design, and it is considered a prestigious and successful school of the arts.

In the 1930s, despite the Great Depression, Sarasota attracted many artists from the Northeast and Midwest. With the construction of the Ringling School of Fine and Applied Arts and the Ringling Museum, the community hoped to become a mecca for the arts. The creation of the Sarasota Art Association in the 1940s signaled the presence of a strong organization in the community with many members who contributed financially and artistically.

Wells Sawyer, also a painter, moved to Sarasota in 1945, only to eventually become the dean of the Sarasota art colony. Sawyer, born in 1863, studied law while attending art classes at the Chicago Art Institute. His first job as an illustrator for the U.S.

¹⁴³Floyd Bell, "Ringling Museum to Make Sarasota Center of Art" *Sarasota Herald Tribune*, February 17, 1927.

¹⁴⁴Jeff La Hurd, *Sarasota: A History*, (Charleston, South Carolina: History Press, 2006), 110.

¹⁴⁵"Ringling Art Students Open Their Exhibit, Second Display of School Marked Advance in Quality Work" *Sarasota Herald Tribune*, March 20, 1932.

Geological Survey provided him with an opportunity to go on an archeological expedition to San Marco, Florida. The archeologists found many Calusa Indian artifacts and Sawyer recorded them in his sketchbook. Unfortunately, when some of the unearthed artifacts were exposed to air, they disintegrated, leaving Sawyer's drawings the only historical record of the Calusa's masks and woodcarvings. His drawings and watercolor painting are now in the collections of the Smithsonian Institute.¹⁴⁶

Wells Sawyer's daughter Helen Sawyer was also a painter and became the beacon for women artists in Sarasota. Helen was born in 1898 in Washington D.C. and she developed a talent for painting at a young age. She remembered her father taking her on a trip to Europe to see the famous masterpieces in the great museums of Europe.¹⁴⁷ At the age of sixteen, one of her landscape paintings was accepted in a juried art show at the National Academy of Design in New York. Her early success in the New York art scene catapulted her painting career. She moved to Sarasota in 1925, and later married portrait artist Jerry Farnsworth. In 1939, they founded a successful art school, the Farnsworth School of Art, which lasted for over thirty years educating over 5,000 students from all over the world.¹⁴⁸ She and her husband became known as the "mother and father" of Sarasota's artist colony.¹⁴⁹ In the 1940s, Sawyer rediscovered spiritual themes that artists of the previous century explored in Florida landscapes. She painted elaborate floral paintings, circus clowns, and melancholic representations of light in her landscape

¹⁴⁶ Buck., 58

¹⁴⁷ Marcia Corbino, *Helen Sawyer: Memories of a Morning Star* (Sarasota, Florida: Corbino Galleries, 1995), 12.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

¹⁴⁹ Buck, 57.

paintings of Sarasota's waterfront and Siesta Key.¹⁵⁰ In 1941, she and Farnsworth organized and helped raise money for Sarasota's Ringling School of Fine and Applied Arts and the Sarasota Art Association. Sawyer was also one of the first members of the all women's painting club, the Petticoat Painters, and remained active in the community until her death in 1993.

One of the most important Sarasota artists of all time was Lois Bartlett Tracy. Born in 1901 in Jackson, Michigan, she and her family visited Florida for winter vacations and eventually moved to Winter Park. Her father invested in real estate and owned over 40,000 acres in Sarasota, DeSoto, and Highland counties.¹⁵¹ Bartlett married William Tracy and attended Rollins College. Together they ran her father's hotel, the Myakka Hotel in Venice to make ends meet. Summertime brought the Tracys to New Hampshire where they purchased a farmstead in hills of the White Mountains and turned the buildings into studio spaces to form a small art colony called Tall Timbers. Tall Timbers paid for itself through the art gallery, Lois's painting classes, and visiting artists. In 1939, she received a gold medal for her Florida landscape paintings in New York's World's Fair.¹⁵² After her New Hampshire art studio burned down, she made her permanent home in Englewood, a suburb of Sarasota. Mrs. Tracy eventually created another art colony on her wooded acreage in southern Sarasota County called Artists Acres. Artists Acres had a gallery, an art studio and nine cottages for visiting artists. Tracey was a pioneer in the Sarasota art scene; her passion for art and zest for life made her one of the most influential patrons of the arts in Sarasota. She continued to be the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 30-35.

¹⁵¹ Obituary "Love of Painting led Artist, 106, to Inspire and Teach," *Herald-Tribune*, April 30, 2008.

¹⁵² Buck, 59.

president of Florida Artists Association well into her eighties. At the age of 99, she was declared legally blind, so she gave up painting and took up writing. She continued her role in the Sarasota art scene up until her death in 2008, at the age of 106.¹⁵³

Sarasota certainly had its share of strong and talented women leaving a legacy of female community pioneers, entrepreneurs, businesswomen, and artists. Another group of women to succeed in Sarasota's art world was the Petticoat Painters formed in 1953. These ladies capped their membership at twenty and produced a large volume of artwork. The annual exhibitions were held close to Valentine's Day, complete with invitations of pink stock, frills, and angels. Their husbands put each year's event together and they served punch and cookies to the guests. It was unlike any other art show, being exclusively for female artists. The Petticoat Painters continue to be one of the oldest and still exhibiting women's art clubs in the United States, and it continues to cap its membership to twenty artists.¹⁵⁴

Finally, Sarasota is home to yet another artist colony called Towles Court. In 1995, a real estate and mortgage broker named N.J. Oliveri saw potential in leasing a group of derelict cottages to artists to live, work and exhibit their handiwork.¹⁵⁵ The cottages were built in the 1920s by a developer named William B. Towles near the downtown Main Street district. Over time, the buildings and neighborhood fell into disrepair and this ushered in crime. Then Oliveri renovated the cottages and convinced the city to change the zoning restrictions to allow businesses to combine retail space and living space. It took a lot of lobbying and then attracting artists to come and live there.

¹⁵³ Ibid

¹⁵⁴ Amy A. Elder, *Images of America: Sarasota 1940-2005*. (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 47-55.

¹⁵⁵ Elizabeth Maupin, "A Haven for Artists: They Live, Work and Exhibit in Sarasota Colony," *Orlando Sentinel*, December 10, 2000.

Eventually artists purchased cottages for \$70,000 to \$90,000 but today those same cottages sell for \$280,000 to \$300,000.¹⁵⁶ Towles Court has fifteen cottages and some carriage houses featuring studios, galleries, and living spaces for painters, sculptors, printmakers, photographers, and a few other non-art businesses. Other buildings in the area have been renovated for art studios and living space creating a dramatic resurrection of the once dilapidated downtown neighborhood.

Sarasota attracted artists for an entire century and built its reputation as the art capital of Florida. Nevertheless, why did so many people come to Sarasota with so many beautiful areas in Florida to choose from? The quality of light. Sarasota claims to have a better quality of light and is an energy vortex or “power spot.”¹⁵⁷ The better quality of light may be due to less air pollution in Sarasota and Manatee Counties than its northern neighboring counties, Hillsborough and Pinellas County. According to Carl Keeler, professor of Biology at Manatee Community College agrees, “Our light is brighter, because it has less particle matter aloft, in other words, less pollution blocking the sun.”¹⁵⁸ Sarasota painter Maggie Davis claims that the sun shines brighter here than in Miami. A Long Island native who lived on Florida’s east coast claims, “It took almost ten years to make a shift in palette from north to south. However, it did not happen in Miami, I did not make the shift until I came to Sarasota. The light here has a physical impact that you have to answer. It is too brilliant, too startling, too dazzling to ignore. I used to paint in earth tones, now I can’t live without cadmium red.” As far as Sarasota being a “power spot” one explanation maybe that the beach sand, made of crushed quartz crystals can

¹⁵⁶ Ibid

¹⁵⁷ Joan Altabe, “Let There Be Light: Light’s Spectrum Attracts Artists to Sarasota,” *Sarasota Herald Tribune*. August, 31, 2000.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid

change the molecular structure of water and the human body is mostly water therefore, “We can be affected too,” claims Mary Jane Wilson, a local mystic and rock shop owner.¹⁵⁹ Power spots or energy vortexes are believed to be areas where temples like Stonehenge are built upon because of the physical energy witnessed there. Whatever the reason citizens and artists live in the Sarasota area, it is still home to a potentially growing arts community.

Towles Court and Other Art Communities

Communities in Florida have taken notice of Sarasota’s Towles Court as a model for redevelopment. Tom Kohler, president of Orlando’s Downtown Development Board, helped bring in developers to renovate downtown Orlando neighborhoods and business districts.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, he hoped to create an affordable arts district. At the same time, Kohler realized the possibility that wealthier people might discover the area and out-bid artists. An example of what can happen during urban renewal is SoHo, New York, a once run-down Manhattan warehouse district, where artists moved into old buildings, turned them into studios, galleries, and living spaces, and created an international art enclave that eventually became unaffordable for artists to live in. The restoration of inner cities brings a sense of nostalgia and excitement by breathing life back into urban areas left to decay. Florida’s cities as well as others in the United States find this same pattern of redevelopment taking place. What makes this phenomenon continue in the twenty-first century as it did in previous generations of art colonies? As we look at the previous

¹⁵⁹ Ibid

¹⁶⁰ Amy A. Elder, 65-70.

chapters about European and American art colonies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the same factors attracted artists to live and create in the bucolic setting. Artists longed for authenticity and quality of artisanship, the so-called noble lifestyle of rural folk, and purity of the landscape. This utopian ideal became manifest in the creation of rural art colonies. Nevertheless, what factors determine how an urban setting becomes an art enclave? Aesthetics, location, nostalgia, and now more than in the past, economics, contribute to art districts. In urban places where there is no art scene and no aesthetically pleasing rural landscape to draw inspiration from, there can still be characteristics which make an art enclave possible. Unlike a rural colony, the natural landscape is not usually available in an urban area but there is a different landscape, a cityscape. The cityscape includes the downtown or central area, buildings, architecture, people, and even the natural landscape upon which it was built. The urban artist who is inspired by the cityscape may look at it through nostalgic or romantic eyes, seeing beauty in the same way as a rural artist finds beauty in villages and sylvan landscapes.

Yet it is possible to combine rural and urban landscapes as Doris Leeper did in 1977, when she founded the Atlantic Center of the Arts (ACA) in New Smyrna Beach, Florida.

¹⁶¹ Leeper was an artist, activist, and environmentalist, and she believed that artists' communities should share a commitment to artists and their work, artistic excellence, and a strong connection to the environment. Whether situated in the mountains, framed in farmlands or shaped by a city's concrete confines, most residency programs have a symbiotic relationship with their surroundings.¹⁶² Leeper was a visionary, combining art

¹⁶¹ Elmar Fetscher, *The Second Decade 1987-1997* (New Smyrna Beach, FL: Atlantic Center for the Arts, 1998), ix.

¹⁶² Jim Frost, ACA Residency and Marketing Manager, Interview by author on March 4, 2008.

and environmentalism. She purchased thousands of acres of wetlands turning them into a nature preserve (Spruce Creek Preserve), and devoted a small portion of her land for the ACA on Turnbull Bay. The ACA is a sustainable and green environment with buildings made of recycled materials that interact with nature.¹⁶³

The ACA has no utopian ideal or nostalgic influence but the camaraderie, community, and landscape along with isolation, allows artists time to focus on their projects. Artists from all over the U.S even Europe have stayed at the ACA. The artists include composers, writers, painters, musicians, and visual artists. The ACA has a different process for selecting artists to work at their facility. First, the staff director chooses master artists who apply to stay in residence. After the master artists are chosen, the master artist selects artists who desire to study under them based on their resume and portfolio. The ACA process is unlike most art colonies where an individual artist may apply and pay for their stay at the art colony. ACA artists are specifically chosen based on their skill level and primary goals that are complimentary with the master artist's. Poet, Chase Twichell master resident artist, stayed at the ACA in the February 18- March 9, 2008 Artist Residency Program and was blown away by the atmosphere at the ACA. "This place has brought together such an unlikely cast of characters. We all come from very different backgrounds, yet we are all here for the same reason, to create. Sharing the creative process with musicians, composers, and brilliant young poets is the most electric atmosphere, combined with the gorgeous outdoor surroundings of the woods, its hard not to be inspired."¹⁶⁴ The ACA is an example of a modern art colony; artists come here to study under a master artist for three weeks while immersing themselves in a creative

¹⁶³ Ann Brady, executive director, *Atlantic Center for the Arts. Annual Review 2006-2007*, March, 2008.

¹⁶⁴ Chase Twichell, (Poet, ACA Master Artist in Residence), Interview by author, March 9, 2008.

atmosphere. They come to begin or finish art projects and at the end of the three weeks, they participate in a public exhibition to display or perform their work.

Conclusion

Location, aesthetic features, and economic resources are important but what about maintaining an art community? Can a person reasonably live there? Do city codes allow for such an activity? If not, is the city willing to change them? Is there an investor who has vision to see it through and put up the resources to make it happen? After the project is completed, how will the new residents promote it and sustain interest in times of economic stress? These are issues faced by virtually all modern art communities. For instance, Sanford is a small agricultural town near the St. John's River on Lake Monroe, built on rich delta soils and once known as the "Celery Capital of the World." The city government has made changes to revitalize the town, rezoning its entire historic downtown district to include mixed-use real estate to attract artists and retailers.¹⁶⁵ In 2007, developer John Giuliani put up \$3 million to preserve historical elements and convert some buildings into artist lofts, complete with retail space on the ground floor.¹⁶⁶ Like Sarasota's Towles Court, Sanford's once quiet streets are now bustling with a renewed sense of vitality reminiscent of its cobblestone street days. In an interview with Sanford resident Bill Belleville, author of *Losing It All to Sprawl: How Progress Ate My Cracker Landscape*, Belleville claims, "Sanford is supportive of the arts but it does not

¹⁶⁵ Bill Belleville, *Losing It All to Sprawl, How Progress Ate My Cracker Landscape* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2006), 87-88.

¹⁶⁶ Diane Sears, "Art Attack," *Florida Trend*, August 1, 2007.

have the image or reputation as an ‘art friendly’ community yet, which may be to its benefit. Artists, as you know, are often pioneers who move into less desirable places like SoHo in NYC being the best example I know because they are far cheaper. Then the chic factor kicks in when a certain critical mass of artists, art buyers, browsers, and tourists is reached, and such a district gains prestige.”¹⁶⁷ Sanford is an example of a community of citizens who realized the value of restoring its historical downtown and attempted to attract creative people. However, the area has not caught on as a trendy art enclave and perhaps for the better because it is able to sustain an affordable living for its citizens.

There are numerous Florida towns and cities where art has revived a once forgotten identity but also created a new identity and sustained itself through the inevitable changes brought about by growth, modernization, and economic cycles. Places that survive growth, like St. Augustine, have protected their historical past by preserving their architecture, art, and infrastructure. Orlando never had an art community but now that the developers have created one, the city has much more to offer than just rides and entertainment at Walt Disney World. Another example, on the East coast of Florida, is Melbourne’s Eau Gallie district. Eau Gallie is an artist friendly enclave where their City Council unanimously (6-0) passed rezoning ordinances to allow commercial business in the historically residential neighborhood.¹⁶⁸ “Build it and they will come, it is what the people want in their community,” says council member Ralph Sanders.¹⁶⁹

Wealthy benefactors, John and Mable Ringling, and other art patrons, helped to create an art community in Sarasota by laying the foundation for art to become a

¹⁶⁷ Bill Belleville, email interview by author, July 2, 2008.

¹⁶⁸ Rick Neale, “Artists’ Colony Gets Initial Approval,” *Florida Today*, November 17, 2007.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

permanent part of the town. The area flourished until the sprawl of shopping malls and gated suburban communities drained the vitality of downtown, and yet a fresh focus on art once again helped revive downtown Sarasota.¹⁷⁰ In the last couple of years that same revitalized Towles Court has gone through its cyclical downturn. According to Chris Falk, Director of the Katherine Butler Gallery in Towles Court, “the area is going through a transition. Many of the previous tenants did not agree on several issues such as how to allocate funds, how to promote, individuals not doing their part to support the court and losing faith in the big picture but mostly it was people’s egos getting in the way.”¹⁷¹ Today the commercial space appears vacant with very little foot traffic but the gallery owners are optimistic. Recently, an artist couple Andrew Bowers and Davi Kuhn, inherited a little cottage in the Court after the death of Davi’s father. They both moved to Sarasota from Indiana and attended Ringling College of Art and Design. They opened a gallery space in the cottage and waited for foot traffic. After unsuccessful attempts to create traditional gallery space and a frame shop, they decided to get creative and make plans for a coffee shop in the front of the building, a dog boutique in back and to display artwork for artists of all levels. The non- traditional approach to their gallery space has provided a place for Ringling graduates to show their work and get their name out there without years of experience. "In general, the art world can get kind of snobbish and full of itself," says 29 year-old Scott Moore, a Ringling graduate. "When you go to most galleries, they put everyone on the same plane.' If you are not a professional artist, then you are not welcome here. I like the down-to-earth quality of the space," he says. "People

¹⁷⁰ <http://www.towlescourt.com/history.htm>.

¹⁷¹ Chris Falk (Director of Katherine Butler Gallery) interview by author, July 8, 2008.

can show their stuff -- and if it isn't up to the standards of subject matter or concepts, so what?"¹⁷²

Artists invent new ways to survive and revitalize spaces and areas that they work in. These creative types of individuals continue to come together for support and fresh ideas as did artists living in the artist colonies of two centuries ago. As a result, cities that attract creative people often benefit from the cultural diversity and genuine interconnectedness that makes a community thrive.¹⁷³ St Petersburg, Florida, is a great example of an arts community that has grown in the last twenty-five years. Once known as "God's waiting room," where senior citizens spent their remaining years, it is now a thriving arts community supported by passionate artists, citizens, and local organizations. St. Petersburg is home to the Salvador Dali Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, among other planned museums and a gallery at the Arts Center, dedicated to the glass works of artist Dale Chihuly. According to artist Rebecca Skelton, "Artists come to St. Pete because it is affordable to rent a space and live here. When you come from New York, these prices are low compared to those in the northeast."¹⁷⁴ However, recent local budget cuts have translated into much less support for the arts. Sarah Ellen Smith poignantly put it this way, "Artists suffer the consequences of an economic downturn, we are like the canary in the coalmine, we are the first to go."¹⁷⁵

Once the upper echelon of society moves into these areas, they produce another dynamic where historical authenticity is often displaced for the sake of revitalization or

¹⁷²Joel Rozen, "Towles Court Gallery Makes Room for Young Artists," *Sarasota Herald Tribune*, July 6, 2008.

¹⁷³ Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 324.

¹⁷⁴ Rebecca Skelton, (Painter, sculptor, art instructor); Interview April 12, 2008.

¹⁷⁵ Sarah Ellen Smith (Artist and sailor); Interview April 10, 2008.

so-called progress. Cities take the wrecking ball to old buildings to make way for new development, but the wealthy and creative people who move into these diverse areas cannot assume that their existence assures the “revitalization” of an area.¹⁷⁶ In fact, many times great wealth and transition make these areas unaffordable for nearly everyone including artists surviving on a limited income. This certainly appears to be the case in Towles Court, where it is nearly impossible to afford even a small apartment let alone a studio space.

Art colonies and modern art communities share styles and ways of connecting people to their environment and society. The question remains: How do we maintain and include art as a vital part of the community? Villages in Europe, small rural towns in the United States, and modern art communities in Florida, are connected to the cyclical creative process, which results in the periodic renaissance of each consequent place. Art is a precious asset and when understood and directed carefully in our communities, results in positive effects that connect people and creative ideas upholding healthy, livable, and diverse communities. Nurturing art in our communities and utilizing creative groups of people to flourish in a sustainable manner is fundamental. Society today can learn from the first art colonists and their utopian ideals of honoring the natural environment and true craftsmanship of artisans. The creative pioneers who resist the adverse consequences of technology by utilizing existing resources to create in and live in, will survive by enhancing our lives and not giving into the quick –fix society that risks losing the value of creativity and our ingenuity.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 325.

If progressive individuals remain in these art communities, the likelihood of its survival is better as artists invent ways to raise the resources to maintain their creative lifestyle. Fundraisers, exhibitions, monthly walks or galas, and grant writing are necessary for arts organizations, galleries, individual artists, and businesses to raise capital. Although artists' supporters have varied throughout the centuries during periods of renaissance and decline, whether it is wealthy socialites, supportive patrons, local government, or great ingenuity, artists will continue to thrive if they have a strong and supportive community.

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