In the past, art scholars would read artists’ diaries, letters, and newspaper reviews in libraries long before they would think of visiting artists’ homes and workplaces. But this essay and the ones accompanying it point out the ways in which these homes and studios are themselves art-historical treasures, a mother lode of historical evidence. As more communities preserve artists’ studios and open them to the public, and as entities like the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Luce Foundation help with grants and national visibility, we will all have more opportunities to learn from the work and living spaces of artists of the past. And we will learn things no piece of paper can teach us. Artists’ studios—from the highly decorated formal room to the plain white box—tell different stories from diaries or photographs. Like any genre of architecture, they can be classified into definable styles that change over time. Their locations relative to the artists’ living quarters change, as do their sizes, ceiling heights, fenestration, wall finishes, and decor. Some have windows that look out on views, while others are closed hermetic boxes providing physical and mental privacy. Some provide chairs, displays, and amenities for visitors; others are utilitarian workshops. By reading these work sites as material artifacts and comparing one against another, we gain insights into the history of artistic culture as well as the art and aesthetic allegiances of the artists who created and worked in these spaces.\(^1\)
Not only do we glean different things from studying them, but the process of learning is different. It is a visual and visceral experience, one where not only eyes and mind but also the body are engaged. Visitors can momentarily possess architectural spaces and, with a little projection, imagine and feel the delights and pressures of living and working in them day to day. Some artists’ homes—especially those with personal effects—can offer aesthetic and emotional pleasures of the same magnitude as paintings and sculptures.

I began to think about what can be learned from studios in 1987, when my husband and I lived in the upstairs living quarters of the Alice Pike Barney Studio House, a provincial American Gesamtkunstwerk dedicated to the Arts and to the Beautiful.2 Alice Barney (1860–1931)—a painter and patron, and the mother of Laura and Natalie Barney, the latter a celebrated lesbian writer—was an audacious presence in turn-of-the-century Washington, D.C. She was determined to bring the modern arts to her sleepy city. As a patron, she brought the dancer Ruth St. Denis, among others, to Washington, and built the Sylvan Theater, an outdoor performance space at the foot of the Washington Monument. As a professional painter, she studied with James McNeill Whistler and ran with the symbolists and other turn-of-the-century aesthetes. At the end of her career, she moved to California and turned to writing plays and supporting modern theater productions in Los Angeles.

In the early 1900s Barney turned her back on her typical Gilded Age mansion and her unhappy marriage and built herself a “studio house” on Sheridan Circle. She modeled it after the then-fashionable artists’ town houses in London’s Kensington and Chelsea neighborhoods. With a relatively plain exterior but all theater within, the house was also much like the larger home Isabella Stewart Gardner built about the same time in Boston. Both Barney and Gardner arranged to have their living quarters on the top two floors, dedicating the lower two stories to entertaining and the arts. The largest and most conspicuous room in Barney’s house was a studio designed to accommodate dozens of guests. With its dark wood paneling, stained-glass windows, and Mercer tile floors, the room housed Barney’s easel in one corner while leaving plenty of room for people to congregate. She used the studio, with its substantial balcony over a grand stone fireplace, not only as a workplace but as a performance area for modern music, dance, and drama.

Though I knew the fin-de-siècle aesthetic movement academically, living in the material spaces of Barney’s studio house allowed me corporally and psychologically to experience its heightened idealism and hothouse theatricality. Having visited countless Gilded Age homes—the Frick Museum in New York being one—I realized the degree to which period studio houses like Barney’s were countercultural artifacts, working against conventional mansion designs and against the ethos of conspicuous consumption. With its arts and crafts design and heavy nods to medieval and Renaissance paneling and furniture, the house also communicated to me the chores of furnishing and managing such a residence. Nothing was left to accident: the architecture, decorations, and furnishings
were stylistically united, down to the art nouveau dress of the hostess who welcomed guests into the rarefied and therapeutic world of art she had created.

A generation earlier, successful Hudson River School artists built mansions filled with eclectic artifacts purchased on their travels to the western frontier, Europe, South America, Asia, or the Middle East. The finest example that can be visited today is, of course, Olana, the Victorian Moorish home and studio designed by the great landscapist Frederic Church (1826–1900). Built from the 1870s into the 1890s, Olana is set high on a hillside overlooking the Hudson River (outside Hudson, New York). The ground floor is a series of contiguous public rooms. They are not closed boxes connected by hallways, as in more conventional grand homes of the time, but rather rooms that entice visitors from one exotic space into the next. Each offers tantalizing views back into rooms we have just come from and ahead into rooms we have not yet visited. Oversized doors that stand open urge us forward as do oriental runners that travel from one room to the next. Light, too, is carefully orchestrated to beckon guests through the rooms.
In a sense the house forms its own panorama, inviting us to think anew about the structure of Church’s large landscape paintings which, like his home, are organized as progressions of smaller vistas opening onto larger ones. The house also draws attention to Church’s habit of playing solids against empty spaces. The parade of vessels, vases, and service pieces that sit on tables and mantelpieces at Olana constitutes the same aesthetic of organizing visual experience through arrangements of small volumes and voids.

The house’s plethora of goods gathered on travels to the Orient, Egypt, and the Near East also tells us that Church’s relationship to nature was not at all passive. Where his spiritual mentors, the men and women of the preceding generation—Thomas Cole, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and David Henry Thoreau—had listened to the hills and written about water and light but rarely reworked them to achieve special effects, Church was much more aggressive in carving into the land and dramatically manipulating vistas and sunlight. His house, like his paintings, is filled with the romance of exotic places, but it also relays imperialist values and an aesthetic of conspicuous consumption, a post–Civil War rapaciousness.

When we get to the artist’s studio, the last room on the visit, the acquisitiveness is still there but understated. This is one of the less interesting rooms on the tour, a more open and functional space, needing the workings of the artist’s mind to furnish it. Clearly it was a space where Church showed visitors his current paintings after a tour of the sumptuous house had warmed their aesthetic tastebuds.

If Olana tells us new things about Church’s aesthetic of accumulation and his complex relationship to nature, the homes and studios of Charles Demuth and Georgia O’Keeffe teach us something of modernism’s revolutionary impact on artists’ spaces in the early twentieth century. Modernists rejected both the theatricality of studios that showcased world travel and the studios conceived as Temples to Beauty. The modernist studio became a much more private space, often off-limits to anyone besides the artist and close family members and friends. Plain and little decorated, the studio was dedicated to Work. That the early modernist studio was often within or very close to sleeping and dining spaces speaks not only to a new informality but also to the modern desire to integrate workplaces with living spaces. These studios testify to the high value modernists placed on the privacy and sanctity of the creative act, while creating a notable tension between the solitude of the studio and the sociability supported by the nearby living rooms.

The home and studio of Charles Demuth (1883–1935) in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, an eighteenth-century brick row house, is a dollhouse compared with Church’s sprawling Olana. With period furnishings, many of them Victorian, the family home (now the Demuth Museum) is on one of Lancaster’s oldest streets and right next door to what in his lifetime was the Demuth Tobacco Shop, run since 1770 by five generations of the family, including the artist’s father and uncle. The long row of well-preserved Georgian town houses reeks of history, and we understand immediately the environmental forces
that helped form Demuth's sensitivity and fondness for older American buildings, especially the vintage churches and houses he painted in Lancaster, Bermuda, and Provincetown. Windows in the family house look out on classic Demuth motifs: a church steeple to the right, industrial watertowers, and brick factories to the left. The small garden in the back, which was tended by Demuth's mother and has been re-created by volunteer gardeners, relays the easy access the artist had to the tulips, daisies, zinnias, and other fresh flowers he painted and the appreciation he gained at home for plants in blossom and indoor bouquets. Learning something of Lancaster's history as an agricultural hub and its farmers' markets helps explain the preponderance of fresh vegetables in the artist's still lifes. And in exploring Demuth's neighborhood, where billboards and factories intersect with and often overwhelm the town's original eighteenth-century fabric, visitors can better fathom the humor, irony, and poignancy of Demuth's paintings of industrial Lancaster.

One of the immeasurable benefits, then, of experiencing Demuth's living and working quarters is to realize how site-specific the artist was in his paintings—that this watercolor is of the church next door, that the factories he painted are all within a small radius from his home. The house dramatizes the degree to which Demuth painted his own garden, figuratively and literally. We experience in a new way how committed he was to a modern art built on a well-honed sense of place.

But perhaps the small scale and orderliness of the rooms that Demuth inhabited make the greatest impression, there being such a close structuralist analogy between the formality and pristine nature of his lived-in spaces and that of his precisionist paintings. Demuth's tidiness as a painter and his fondness for tightly organized surfaces of fractured units constitute the same aesthetic that he and his mother applied to their tiny quarters, with everything dusted and in a well-chosen place. In his lifetime, critics often criticized Demuth's fastidiousness as a painter, the same way someone might complain of a woman's overcleaning of a house. It was a coded critique that called attention to Demuth's homosexuality; it also described the way Mrs. Demuth and Charles kept their home.
The New Mexican home and studio that Georgia O’Keeffe (1887–1986) designed for herself in the tiny village of Abiquiu is bigger and less furnished but it offers similar lessons about the importance of place to America’s first modernists. O’Keeffe, like Demuth, painted *sur le motif*, a practice few scholars had appreciated until her home was opened to visitors and they could look more closely at her environs. Visible from the windows of O’Keeffe’s studio and bedroom are some of the views she transformed into bold abstractions. A dozen more miles down the road rise the red and yellow cliffs of Ghost Ranch and the Pedernal Mountain that inspired other paintings.

It is also instructive to compare the spectacular natural setting of O’Keeffe’s hacienda to the site chosen by a nineteenth-century landscape artist like Frederic Church. Both artists handpicked their landscapes and designed comfortable homes in them. Like Church, O’Keeffe decorated with objects arranged in still lifes throughout her living and work spaces. But there the similarities end; O’Keeffe’s objects are all drawn from nature and have a unity of aesthetic, while Church’s are man-made, global, and eclectic. O’Keeffe showcased natural objects on her deep windowsills and in her courtyards: water-smoothed rocks, shells, and animal bones. And she did so sparingly, decorating as much through unfilled spaces as filled ones. The minimalist decorations of her home at Abiquiu, her views, and her organic gardens reorder the relationship of the artist to nature. With O’Keeffe we feel close to Emerson and Thoreau, in that her home exudes a desire to live in peaceful coexistence with the land around it. It is not the wealth of accumulation but her Zen-like absences that impress us. Indeed, we marvel at the discipline she brought to her environment, refusing as she did to fill her spaces with man-made goods. Her environments also seem pointedly anticonsumer, though this, too, is cultural artifice. Simplicity and naturalness were the religion in her household, just as acquisition and artificiality were in Church’s.

In comparing the floor plan of O’Keeffe’s home to Church’s, we see the concerns of a woman continually looking for ways to concentrate her energies and avoid the distractions of traditional gendered responsibilities. Just as she reduced her choices of clothing to a few shapes and colors—mostly black and white—O’Keeffe organized her one-story
house so that her studio was integral to but removed from those spaces where guests or
house workers might be. Church’s studio, we remember, was the final room on the first
floor, in close proximity to the many living spaces his servants maintained. O’Keeffe, in
contrast, placed her studio next to her personal bedroom and bath, and then pulled the
entire suite as far away as possible from the other bedrooms, the kitchen, and the living
and dining rooms. Using courtyards and patios as buffers, she created a room of her own
dedicated to her creative work and intimate personal life.

What follows are other art historians’ insights into artists’ spaces, commentaries that I
hope will raise people’s consciousness about the historical value and experiential pleasures
of visiting places artists created to work and play. These properties need advocacy from
art historians as well as from preservationists. To date, studios in America (Europeans are
better at this) have been preserved on an ad hoc basis, usually because of the family’s or
community’s action. Many have tiny budgets and a handful of loyal volunteers who keep
them open to the public. Too few have strong funding and professional administration.
The National Park Service has but three artists’ homes and studios under its aegis (the
Augustus Saint-Gaudens estate in Cornish, New Hampshire, the Frederick Law Olmsted
site in Brookline, Massachusetts, and J. Alden Weir’s farm in Wilton, Connecticut).
The National Trust operates Daniel Chester French’s house and sculpture studio in
Stockbridge, Massachusetts, as well as the Frank Lloyd Wright home and studio in Oak
Park, Illinois. Philip Johnson also bequeathed his famous Glass House in New Canaan,
Connecticut, to the Trust.

The good news is that over the last two decades, and particularly recently, art histori-
arians, museum curators, and gallery directors have become more active in preserving and
interpreting properties. To cite but a few examples: a Thomas Cole Foundation has been
formed to look after Cole’s home and studio in Catskill, New York; Frederic Remington’s
New York studio and Joseph Henry Sharp’s log cabin on the Crow Reservation have been
meticulously re-created at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming; Grant
Wood’s studio house has been restored by the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art in Iowa; the
Heckscher Museum of Art has acquired and is restoring the tiny cottage where Arthur
Dove and Helen Torr lived in Centerport, New York; and Chicago art advocates have
been trying to save the Tree Studios, a complex of work spaces created for artists after
the World’s Columbian Exposition. Eager to help solidify the trend, the National Trust
has obtained two substantial grants from the Henry Luce Foundation, one in 1999
and the other in 2002, to create an Associate Sites program that today has twenty-nine
members drawn from seventeen states. Historic Artists’ Homes and Studios, as the
program is called, brings together staff and trustees of its member sites for annual work-
shops and a sharing of concerns; it also offers its members small grants to improve their
facilities and community outreach. Visitors can pick up a brochure listing information on
all the participating sites at any of the member properties.5

Perhaps the most recent news of a studio rescue came in the New York Times a few
days after I had finished a draft of this essay, which I had ended with a plea to save major
studios still in private hands. My prime example was the seaside studio house of Winslow
Homer (1836–1910), in Prouts Neck, Maine, a large nineteenth-century seaside community
that retains many of its original shingle-style residences. Homer had built his
home out of a former carriage house and stable (as did Grant Wood), and it is here that
he painted his magnificent late seascapes. When I first saw the house a few years ago, it
was owned by members of the family who had put the structure on the National Register
of Historic Places but had not yet formulated long-term plans for its preservation. It was
open to pilgrims who knew whom to call to make an appointment or who disregarded
the “No Trespassing” signs and let themselves in. Over the years the property’s value
as real estate has soared—less because Homer lived there than for its magnificent seaside views. This had increased the burden for the family members who owned the property and who knew they were custodians of a national art-historical site.

This is a studio with aura. From it, Homer could walk directly outside, across his front lawn, to the edge of the sea. While the building as a whole underwent a few modifications in the 1930s and has lost most of its furnishings, the ground-floor studio is still the same physical space Homer used, now decorated with fading reproductions of the artist’s works. Alone in the space, it was easy to imagine the crusty artist at his easel, laboring to paint a seascape as driving and independent as his own human spirit while hearing the call of the surf at the foot of his property.

A door from the studio leads to a fair-sized upstairs apartment. Because it has been rented out, only a few lucky souls have been able to see it and go onto the two-sided balcony where Homer would look at his paintings in the sunlight, visit with friends, and watch the sea breaking against the silvery gray shale rocks only a hundred yards away. Along the edge of the sea runs a cliff walk with the same dramatic vistas and geological formations we know from Homer’s great paintings. Along the walk, visitors can see the real estate that Homer helped to develop and the houses nearby where members of his family lived.

On September 30, 2004, the Portland Museum of Art announced a two-year capital campaign to raise $8 million for the “acquisition, preservation, and endowment” of the property, which is currently owned by a great-grand-nephew of Homer. This is joyous news. When the campaign is complete, the property will be open for small group visitation, allowing increased access to this charmed site. This is an intervention we all should applaud, hoping it will goad other professional institutions to help preserve artists’ studios not just as part of our national heritage but for the art-historical stories they can tell.
For the past ten years, I have been drumming for the preservation and visitation of artists’ homes and studios. Some of my remarks here are drawn from two earlier lectures: “The Art Historian in the Studio,” the keynote address for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Middle Atlantic Symposium in the History of Art in 1995; and “The Artist’s Work Place: An Endangered Species?” a keynote address at the 1997 National Preservation Conference run by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The latter was published in **Historic Preservation Forum** 12, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 33–41.

The Barney Studio House, designed in 1902 by Waddy Wood, is now owned by the Embassy of Latvia. When I lived in it, it was owned by the Smithsonian, and visiting scholars could rent an apartment that had been carved out of the bed- and sitting rooms. For more on Barney, see Jean L. Kling, *Alice Pike Barney: Her Life and Art* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); and my “Art Matronage in Post-Victorian America” in **Fenway Court** 27 (1997): 9–24.

In the mid-1960s Church scholar David Huntington spearheaded the drive to save this building, not an easy task at a time when anything Victorian looked decidedly déclassé and the Hudson River School artists were not yet back in fashion. Today Olana is one of the glories of the genre, capably administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. It is the one artist’s home and studio that has attracted substantial scholarship. For a bibliography of writings about Olana, see Gerald L. Cart, *Olana Landscapes: The World of Frederic E. Church* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989). See also Karen Zukowski, “Creating Art and Artists: Late Nineteenth-Century American Artists’ Studios” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1999).

On East King Street in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the Demuth properties are administered by a nonprofit foundation that was formed in the early 1980s to preserve the house and eventually the tobacco shop next door. The foundation provides a map of the local sites Demuth painted. It also publishes a newsletter, *The Demuth Dialogue*.

For a description of the program and links to members’ sites, visit www.nationaltrust.org/associate_sites.


The Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site and Chesterwood

The legacies of Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848–1907) and Daniel Chester French (1850–1931), America’s foremost sculptors at the turn of the twentieth century, are preserved and promoted today amid the natural beauty of their New England summer retreats. Many of the two men’s professional activities centered on New York, but as French saw it, Chesterwood, his seasonal home at Stockbridge, Massachusetts, was heaven and New York was, “well, New York.” Saint-Gaudens also enjoyed inspiration and remarkable creative productivity in the bucolic setting of his Cornish, New Hampshire, home and studio. Following the sculptors’ deaths, their families worked tirelessly to safeguard the properties, the surrounding landscapes and vistas, studio materials, and, of course, the art. These efforts resulted in two remarkable historic sites that tie past to present, delighting the public and serving the scholarly and artistic communities.

Saint-Gaudens first summered in Cornish, with its dramatic views of Mount Ascutney, in 1885. He bought the property in 1891, naming it Aspet after his father’s birthplace in the French Pyrenees. Over several decades he transformed it, renovating a circa-1800...
federal-style brick inn into his home, building studios to accommodate himself and his atelier of assistants, and adding a swimming pool and even a nine-hole golf course. Saint-Gaudens was a full-time resident from 1900 until his death there in 1907, and over time Cornish became a thriving art colony, attracting a throng of talented artists, writers, and actors. While his house and several buildings remain much as Saint-Gaudens envisioned them, disastrous fires in 1904 and 1944 destroyed two original studio buildings, many plaster models and works in progress, sketchbooks, correspondence, and business records. The scholar visiting the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site today cannot experience the sculptor’s working world just as he did, yet much remains to offer a window onto his life and career.  

In 1919 Saint-Gaudens’s widow, Augusta, and son, Homer, realized their dream of turning the home and studios into a museum to exhibit his work, encourage artists, and foster a general appreciation of sculpture. The site was overseen by the Augustus Saint-Gaudens Memorial, with Daniel Chester French, Paul Manship, Charles A. Platt, and John Singer Sargent among early trustees. Since 1965 it has been administered by the National Park Service—one of only three artists’ properties under the agency’s aegis. The private Memorial board continues to serve as a partner in maintaining the site and collections as well as funding special projects. An ongoing program of acquiring surrounding woodlands has been successful, and the well-buffered property today consists of 148 acres, with six buildings open to the public.

The collection of art, which continues to grow, numbers some 10,000 objects, about 8,000 of which are works by Saint-Gaudens. Its core consists of plaster casts, including those exhibited in a 1908–10 Saint-Gaudens memorial show as well as studies and models that escaped damage in the 1904 fire. The work of Cornish Colony artists and
Saint-Gaudens family members, including the sculptor's brother, Louis, sister-in-law, Annetta, and nephew Paul, is also collected.

Saint-Gaudens's sculptures—from his early cameos to his late coins as well as an array of portrait busts, bas-reliefs, and monuments—are displayed in and around two buildings: the Little Studio, constructed in 1904 after designs by George F. Babb, and the New Gallery and Atrium, remodeled into exhibition galleries in 1948 on the centennial of the artist's birth. Reproduction copies after several of his best-known memorials—the David Glasgow Farragut Monument (1877–80) for New York; the Adams Memorial (1886–91) in Washington, D.C.; and the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial (1884–97) for Boston—are installed in discrete landscaped settings amid formal perennial gardens designed by the sculptor. The remainder of the collection, especially the many preliminary plaster models, is housed in an on-site storage facility.

When the National Park Service assumed management of the property in 1965, Saint-Gaudens's papers were transferred to nearby Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth is the primary repository for material on the sculptor, his family, and other Cornish Colony artists, yet useful scholarly resources remain on site. These include unique manuscripts relating in particular to works of art in the collection and the property itself. A treasure trove at Cornish is the extensive collection of photographs. The Dewitt Clinton Ward Photograph Collection consists of about 750 prints by Saint-Gaudens's photographer of choice. In addition, there are the Louis and Annetta St. Gaudens Collection of Glass Plate Negatives (615 pieces); a study collection of some 10,000 prints, slides, and transparencies; and numerous images of the property. Many of Saint-Gaudens's books are shelved among his sculptures in the Little Studio and in Aspet; those of his son, Homer—longtime director of the Carnegie Institute of Art—though in storage, are readily available.

The first floor of the house, which is open to visitors, contains original family furnishings, tapestries, and decorative objects, much of which the Saint-Gaudenses acquired abroad during the 1870s. In the dining room is the Golden Bowl, the gilt-brass vessel presented to Saint-Gaudens on the occasion of an open-air performance—A Masque of "Ours": The Gods and the Golden Bowl—which members of the art colony held on the property in June 1905 to celebrate the sculptor's twenty years in Cornish. The temporary, templike stage produced for the pageant was later reproduced in marble and serves as the Saint-Gaudens family tomb, a short walk from the house and studios.

In 1895, after spending the summers of 1892 and 1894 rubbing elbows with Saint-Gaudens and his crowd in Cornish, Daniel Chester French discovered the southern Berkshires, drawn there by the area's relative solitude as well as its proximity to Boston and New York. The following summer, he purchased an old farm with a sweeping view of Monument Mountain and named it Chesterwood in recognition of his family's ties to Chester, New Hampshire. For nearly every year from 1897 until his death in
1931, French lived on the outskirts of Stockbridge from mid-May to mid-November. He labored on some of his best-known sculptures there, including the *Melvin Memorial* (1906–8) for a Concord, Massachusetts, cemetery and the massive seated *Lincoln* (1911–22) for the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., done in collaboration with architect Henry Bacon.

Since 1969, Chesterwood has been a property of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The richness of the collection and preservation of the estate are largely due to the vision of French's daughter, Margaret French Cresson, herself a sculptor, who donated Chesterwood to the National Trust. Following her father's death, she took the contents of his New York studio to Chesterwood and determinedly collected examples of his work, including a number of large plaster casts that museums had relegated to storage. In 1947 she authored *Journey into Fame: The Life of Daniel Chester French* and in 1955 opened Chesterwood to the public. Today the 122-acre site is a time capsule virtually unchanged from French's days, with several old buildings adapted to serve new functions.

During French's first summers at Chesterwood, priority was given to the studio that would gain him much-needed additional work and storage space. The structure, with its distinctive hip roof and ample north-light windows, was designed by Bacon and completed in 1898. A full-size railroad track enabled French to wheel his sculptures-in-progress from the interior of the studio outdoors so he could study natural lighting effects on their surfaces. Adjoining the main studio with its lofty ceiling are a casting room for preparing molds and plaster models and a well-appointed reception room to entertain clients and friends. Now French's studio is presented as a creative, functional space, with his study casts, sculpture tools, and supplies on view; this emphasis on the sculptor's day-to-day artistic practices rather than just on the display of his works offers insight into a well-preserved artistic environment.

The Italianate residence, on axis with the studio, was completed in 1900–1901, again under Bacon's guidance. French chose many details of its interior design, including the wallpaper, textiles, and even a full-scale replica of the parlor in his grandparents' house in Chester. Part of his personal library of some 4,000 volumes is in the house. Artworks by such friends as sculptors Herbert Adams and Evelyn Longman and painters Abbott H. Thayer and Robert Vonnoh also are installed there and in the studio. The residence's first-floor formal spaces are open to the public, while the rest of the house is given over to administrative offices and storage. The circa-1820 barn that was French's first studio, converted into a public gallery space in 1962, now includes the museum shop, visitor resource center, and collections storage. Since 2001 its main space has been devoted to the self-guided installation “Daniel Chester French: Sculpting an American Vision,” which uses four of the artist's works as case studies to explore the aesthetic, creative, and social components of monument making.
French's oeuvre was considerable, some 400 projects. Of these, Chesterwood houses representations of 154 of his titled sculptures, many of which are plasters. The total sculpture collection, including pieces by other artists, numbers about 890 and continues to grow: among recent acquisitions is a rare plaster reduction of The Minute Man, French's first monumental commission (1871–75) for Concord. French's works in the studio include the final plaster model for the seated Lincoln (1916) and the sensuous full-size marble nude Andromeda (1929–31). Other highlights on view are the sole surviving full-size plaster replica of French's iconic bronze Milmore Memorial (1889–93) for a Boston cemetery and a 1966 bronze cast after Abraham Lincoln (1909–12) for Lincoln, Nebraska, which is French's only public sculpture installed outdoors at Chesterwood. In addition to paintings and sculptures by French, objects in storage include works on paper, wallpaper and architectural fragments, and sculptures by Margaret French Cresson.

Like Saint-Gaudens at Cornish, French at Chesterwood worked not only his clay but also the land. He delighted in managing details of the property's overall appearance and devoted much time to its meticulous design and maintenance. On one side of the studio are formal gardens with hedges, flower beds, and tastefully placed garden sculpture and decoration. Paths to the edges of the lawn lead to rambling woodland trails beyond.

French was an enviably organized record keeper and correspondent over a career that spanned more than six decades. Between 1961 and 1970 Cresson gave a vast cache of his papers to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. The Daniel Chester French Family Papers are a wellspring of immeasurable value, containing personal and business correspondence, commission files, and financial records. Chesterwood houses an archive of some 100,000 items that actually exceeds the Library of Congress holdings in linear feet. There are journals, sketchbooks, scrapbooks, and architectural drawings, as well as material that relates specifically to Chesterwood. The archive's particular strength is the photographs, especially many of working models and clay sketches; French often visually documented the progression of a commissioned work from sketch to final result. Many study photographs of historic sculpture collected by the sculptor are included, as are albums of family life at Chesterwood and travel pictures. Additionally, through the National Trust's oral history program, taped interviews with friends and assistants who were close to French and Chesterwood provide rich personal recollections.7
It is perhaps symbolic that both Saint-Gaudens and French died at their beloved summer retreats. Initially destinations for annual urban exodus, Aspet and Chesterwood evolved into vibrant artist locales. Today these sites both support active public and contemporary art programs and function as “living memorials,” just as the founders of the Saint-Gaudens Memorial intended. As such, the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site and Chesterwood effectively locate sculptors and sculpture within America’s cultural heritage and provide ample fodder for scholars employing diverse approaches to make significant contributions to American sculpture studies.

Notes

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1 For the quote, see “Daniel French, U.S. Sculpture Dean, 80 Today,” New York Herald Tribune, April 20, 1930, sec. 5, 6. Other nineteenth-century sculptors’ studios open to the public are the Edward V. Valentine Sculpture Studio in Richmond, Virginia, and the Elisabet Ney Museum in Austin, Texas.


3 Scholars may request the brochure "An Outline of the Collections."


7 Chesterwood, while not a locus of French scholarship, has been a scholarly resource. Art historian Michael Richman systematically catalogued many of Chesterwood’s holdings beginning in 1971. He has worked for many years on a planned multivolume publication of the French Family Papers.
The Eanger Irving and Virginia Couse Home and Garden

The house purchased in 1909 by painter Eanger Irving Couse (1866–1936) and his wife Virginia (1860–1929) is a telling example of the Anglo settlement of New Mexico in the early years of the twentieth century. Its history, like that of a number of other extant artist homes and studios in Taos, involves the transfer of Hispanic land to Anglo owners arriving from the East and the gradual evolution of architecture and landscape.¹

Couse would later become a member of the Taos Society of Artists (founded in 1915), which helped to make the state an art mecca and tourist destination. Others in the group were Oscar Berninghaus, Ernest Blumenschein, W. Herbert Dunton, Bert Geer Phillips, and Joseph Sharp.² Most of these artists came to town between 1898 and 1917, initially renting summer properties before putting down deeper roots. Following that pattern, Couse arrived in the summer of 1902 and spent the next four summers there in Hispanic-owned rental properties. With his wife and son Kibbey, he purchased the family’s first house in 1906, only to trade it three years later for the permanent family residence located on Kit Carson Street, a block from historic Taos Plaza. At that time no railway lines reached the isolated town of approximately 1,500 residents, and roads were nothing more than burro or wagon trails. Households were heated with wood or coal, and lighted by candles and kerosene lamps. Like a number of other artist families with children, the Couses routinely wintered in New York City, where Couse conducted the business of his art and Kibbey attended school, until 1928 when they moved to New Mexico year-round.

The earliest section of the Couse home had been built in 1839 by Pedro Luna and probably consisted of one or two rooms of earth, timber, and adobe, a flexible building material made from soil and straw that does not need inner structural supports and, as a result, lends itself to freehand architecture and easy expansion. By the time Couse acquired the house, which had been owned by five others before him, the structure was

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*Image: Eanger Irving Couse in the sala of his home in Taos, New Mexico, 1909. Couse Family Archives*
L-shaped, included seven rooms, and measured nearly 2,300 square feet. At his death at age seventy in 1936, the main house had increased almost threefold. Today the Couse home and studio retain their Hispanic heritage in the adobe walls, the dominance of brown earth tones, rounded corners, beamed ceilings that originally supported heavy mud roofs, and the cool, slightly musty atmosphere of a preserved historic building made of this material. In contrast to many nineteenth-century residences in the East, the home is not the product of a preordained architectural design; rather, it moves from one idea of needed new space to another, sometimes easily, sometimes surprisingly. Of equal significance to the house is the flower garden begun by Virginia Couse—a new phenomenon in Taos that reflected eastern gardening trends.3

Rooms added onto the house over the years by Hispanic and Pueblo Indian labor continued to rely on older adobe-building traditions. But echoes of newer southwestern architectural styles popular in the second half of the nineteenth century began to be incorporated, including Spanish colonial and territorial styles. After Couse purchased the home, California mission and Pueblo revival styles also appeared in additions.

The transition in the Couse home from a style based solely on Hispanic tradition to a home derived in part from Anglo-inspired architecture is perhaps most striking in the insertion of paned sash windows and doors into the thick adobe walls and the later design of a sunlit artist's studio. A historical need for security, which had restricted the use of windows, gave way to a changed perception of the relationship between indoor and outdoor space, imported from the East in the late nineteenth century. The land was seen as less a host to danger and more a recuperative and picturesque complement to a home, particularly for Anglo newcomers. In response to territorial style architecture, itself influenced by eastern building styles, James Quinn, the first Anglo owner, remodeled the future Couse home and added an east wing between 1851 and 1857. One of the windows he introduced, as well as the tongue-and-groove fir flooring installed by Couse to replace the original dirt floors in the 1839 sala, can be seen in a 1909 photograph of the artist seated in this room. The Indian pottery displayed on the adobe fireplace, the Rio Grande rug in front of it, the coyote skin rugs, and the Hispanic-style benches built by Couse were largely appreciated for their aesthetic quality rather than traditional uses.

Couse added a studio to the house the year he purchased it. He designed the studio so that it was much higher on one end, the sloped profile of the roof breaking the traditional horizontal of the flat roof that typified not only Hispanic but Pueblo Indian architecture as well. He had local carpenters and adobe layers place a large multipaned window in the high end and, in doing so, announced a new kind of resident in Taos, a European- and American-trained artist who needed a neutral northern light to strike the canvas on his easel. Sharp, Couse's immediate neighbor, made an even more radical break with Hispanic culture. He bought a Catholic family chapel that had been built around 1835 by Juan de Luna (the chapel is now part of the Couse property) and installed a studio window in its north-facing wall. Then he turned the chapel into a painting studio and storage area. In doing so, he secularized the former religious space used both by Hispanic penitentes, members of a lay religious group, and by the Catholic diocese in Santa Fe.

When Couse met Virginia Walker in Paris in 1887, she was also an art student. She gave up her art, presumably because of eye problems, although her husband urged her to continue painting. She directed her creative energy and sense of color and design instead to her flower garden, begun soon after the family acquired the house. In establishing the garden she charted a new path in Taos by requiring a nontraditional use of water. Water in the high, arid desert came from individual water wells, such as one dug decades before in a patio on the opposite side of the house from Virginia's garden, and from acequias (water ditches) used primarily for irrigation. The Couses took advantage of an acequia.
not to irrigate fields and orchards, but to water the plants and flowers of a summer and fall garden.

Framed by the L-shaped house, the garden overlooked a large pasture and, beyond it, the sparsely inhabited south Taos Valley. That same summer, the first flowers were planted along the borders of the portal (porch) and wires for vines were attached to the portal columns. Eventually, the variety of flowers was remarkable. Virginia’s garden was an influential innovation in the Taos area, newsworthy enough for mention in local newspapers. A later writer commented that in her generosity with plants and seedlings she “became a sort of parent to many of the other attractive gardens now thriving in the Taos area and contributing to its beauty.”

The concept of a garden was not simply a decorative change but a different perception of land, now used for beauty and personal pleasure. While well-to-do Hispanics in the region favored the open courtyard, made cool by trees, plants, and a well, flower gardens had become increasingly popular in the East in the late nineteenth century, including cottage-style gardens and terraces like those Virginia laid out. Her garden was part of a larger pattern of change established by Anglos in Taos, whose men played tennis and baseball, and wore ties and suits, while the women held birthday parties with silverware and lavender decorations, and wore white blouses and clothing bought in the East.

Both the home and garden are early indications of the transformation Taos would soon undergo, from an early Indian trading post, rendezvous site for fur traders and trappers, and a Hispanic-built village to an art colony, art market, and tourist destination deeply colored by a highly visible Anglo culture.

Notes

1 My deepest appreciation is extended to Virginia Couse Leavitt and her husband, Ernest E. Leavitt, for the research this article is based on, particularly the comprehensive history of the house compiled by Ernie. Also see Virginia Couse Leavitt, E. I. Couse: Image Maker for America (Albuquerque, N.M.: Albuquerque Museum of Art, 1991).

2 The artists who formed the Taos Society of Arts were drawn to Taos for its beauty and the Taos Pueblo Indians. With few opportunities to sell their paintings in New Mexico, they formed the society in order to circulate exhibitions of their work across the country from 1915 to 1927. Like the Couse home, the Ernest Blumenschein home and studio is open to the public and retains its original character. The Phillips, Sharp, and Walter Ufer houses are now retail spaces with varying degrees of alteration. The E. M. Hennings, Berninghaus, and Dunton houses are modified residences.

3 About 1980 when they gained access to the house, Virginia Couse and Ernest Leavitt found a multitude of materials left behind by her grandfather. The house, designated a National Historic Trust Associate Site in 2002, is now overseen by the Couse Foundation. Its extensive archives include more than 1,000 photographs that Couse took of his models and Taos sites as well as correspondence, newspaper clippings, an account book listing the amounts he paid his models, and other ephemera.

When Suzy Frelinghuysen (1911–1988) and George L. K. Morris (1905–1975), soon to become prominent members of the American Abstract Artists group, built their summer home in western Massachusetts a few years after their marriage in 1935, its idiosyncrasy in the Berkshire landscape was immediately felt. The first International Style house to be erected in New England, the building’s stark white planes, differentiated by glass bricks and occasional floor-to-ceiling windows, stood out from the nearby rambling “cottages” or grand neo-Georgian mansions and saltbox-style wooden farmhouses. An appendage or add-on to a studio that Morris had built in 1930 on the pattern of Le Corbusier’s design for Amédée Ozenfant’s studio in Paris, the terse, spartan complex of structures is architecturally anomalous, in both local and national contexts.

Apart from its distinctive design, the Frelinghuysen Morris House & Studio is a remarkable archival site. Although the couple divided their time between New York, the Berkshires, and Paris, the material trappings of both their elegant lifestyle and intellectual pursuits are now located entirely in Lenox. To begin with, Morris was a serious collector of art who acquired work by Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Fernand Léger, Juan Gris, Georges Braque, Jean Arp, Jean Hélion, Alexander Calder, and Joan Miró, among others, as he embarked on his career as a painter in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In these largely cubist and post-cubist prototypes, Morris found much to mine for his own work, effecting especially in the mid-1930s a transatlantic importation of modernist visual tropes. The house and studio in Lenox retain most of the works from this collection, including Gris’s *Still Life with Guitar* (1917) and Picasso’s *Dinard* (1928). These artworks, now installed primarily in Morris’s studio, provide a rare, firsthand comparison with the formal attributes of the murals that Morris and Frelinghuysen painted throughout the house, as well as their own easel paintings remaining from the estate. The enterprise of American abstract art often involved reformulating European stylistic precedents; the tracking of derivations is made abundantly easy here with the close proximity and occasional juxtapositions of works that served as some of Morris’s and Frelinghuysen’s aesthetic sources. While the bulk of Morris’s correspondence has been donated to the Smithsonian Institution’s Archives of American Art, the house and studio possess materials that anyone involved in in-depth research on either figure or the period in general would want to consult. For example, the facility has retained many of Morris’s notebooks from the 1940s, which contain writings related to his ongoing inquiry into the nature of form and his interest in attaining some semblance of abstract purity in his work. In addition, more than one hundred sketchbooks by Morris, many with full-page watercolors, as well as the personal letters between Frelinghuysen and Morris have been preserved at the site.

When I was at work on the exhibition *The Park Avenue Cubists* for the Grey Art Gallery at New York University (a show that drew on the work of A. E. Gallatin and Charles G. Shaw in addition to Morris and Frelinghuysen), I was delighted to come across a full run of the now rare journal *Plastique* at the Lenox house and studio. Co-edited by Jean Arp, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Cesar Domela, Gallatin, Morris, and Shaw, *Plastique*, which thrived from 1937 to 1939, was one of the first international modernist publications to address the various contemporary elaborations of cubism and its offshoots both on the continent and in New York. As such, it alluded to the vitality of a small but burgeoning circle of artists in New York (including Morris and Frelinghuysen) whose aesthetic mandate was to transplant the avant-garde to America in a decade that privileged regionalist and social realist painting.
In addition to serving on the editorial board of the short-lived *Plastique*, Morris simultaneously became the first art critic (and anonymous financial backer) of the *Partisan Review* when it was restructured and dissociated from the John Reed Club in 1937. The Frelinghuysen Morris House & Studio retain bound issues of the volumes of the periodical for the five years that Morris served as an editor along with William Philips, Philip Rahv, Fred Dupree, and Dwight Macdonald. Moreover, the site also holds original drafts of many of his articles for the publication. The eloquence and conviction with which he argued in *Partisan Review* for the structural clarity of the work of the American Abstract Artists group (which was founded in 1936) and its extension and renewal of modernist European pictorial languages can be read and traced here in the authentic context of a contemporaneous Bauhaus-style building. Morris’s library of books, on shelves throughout the studio and house, provides another primary source; the scholar can find there some of the aesthetic theories—such as Clive Bell’s notion of “significant form”—that informed part of his thinking.

Like Morris, who was distinguished as both a writer and an artist, Frelinghuysen led dual occupations, as a painter and diva for the New York City Opera. The couple’s extensive collection of records of operas and symphonic and chamber music can still be found in the living...
room, where Morris’s beloved piano also remains, amplifying the breadth of their artistic interests and the correspondences they felt between visual and musical composition. The formalist coherence that defined most of their paintings was likened by Frelinghuysen to the way in which she positioned herself onstage, moving with spare, deliberate gestures.

The archives of the Frelinghuysen Morris House & Studio contain footage Morris shot of Frelinghuysen and some of their friends in Lenox over the years, which reveals the flip side of their commitments to the rigors of formalist art—playful, flirtatious vignettes, a glimpse inside their charmed and fashionable lives. As it turns out, Morris also took a stab at producing a few short independent films about 1940 that animate details of his paintings and offer more scripted narratives of Suzy, himself, and two friends immersed in a mock painted set. Like their home and studio in Lenox, these films represent a type of Gesamtkunstwerk, a modernist fusion of the arts.

The N. C. Wyeth Studio

The studio built in 1911 to the specifications of painter and illustrator N. C. Wyeth (1882–1945) is packed with source material that can support a range of art-historical approaches: aesthetic, historical, psychological, and technical. The multifaceted Wyeth was also the patriarch for a clan of artist offspring. His studio could be gainfully consulted by anyone researching his life and career or those of members of his family, including sons-in-law Peter Hurd and John McCoy; children Andrew and Carolyn Wyeth and Henriette Wyeth Hurd; and grandson Jamie Wyeth.

The earnings from a 1911 Scribner’s commission to illustrate Treasure Island enabled N. C. Wyeth to purchase eighteen acres in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. He quickly began planning a studio and sent plans, drawings, and ideas for a house to William Draper Brinckle, an architect in Wilmington, Delaware. The original portion of the studio has a cavernous room and a north-facing 220-pane Palladian window. A second studio, excavated into the hillside to create the height needed to accommodate large murals, was added in 1923; designed by the artist, it featured special directed ceiling lighting and also provided storage space. Wyeth had been able to paint only in natural daylight until 1923, when the entire property was electrified. (Andrew Wyeth, b. 1917, prefers his father’s pre-1923 work, and his own Chadds Ford painting studio is still not electrified.) In 1931 “Carolyn’s Studio” was added for Wyeth’s artist daughter, an architectural acknowledgment of her attachment to her father and his profession, although other family members have also used that studio. Carolyn Wyeth (1909–1994) studied with her father until he provided the additional studio for her—with its own separate entrance providing an interfamily boundary.

On October 19, 1945, N. C. Wyeth and his grandson Newell died tragically in an accident at a nearby railroad crossing, and the main studios changed hands. Carolyn and her mother continued to live on the property, making no major architectural changes. Carolyn painted and taught community art classes in the studio. She was also the major art tutor for her nephew James Browning Wyeth (b. 1946), schooling him first in charcoal drawing from the cone and cube, as her father had once taught her. After her mother’s death in 1973, Carolyn resided on the property alone for more than twenty years.1 As specified by her will, the contents of the house and studio not claimed by Andrew and
Jamie became the possession of the Brandywine Conservancy in 1996. The studio is, therefore, filled with many of the original props used in illustrations and still-life paintings, plaster busts and masks, easels, brushes, palettes, stands for models, Quaker stools, a lantern-slide projector, numerous frames, taxidermy specimens, source books, and a number of original works of art by N. C. Wyeth and his children. It opened for public tours in 1996, and the first floor of the house was added to the tour in 2000.

Recent scholarship on Wyeth has benefited from the exacting research carried out by Christine Podmaniczky, associate curator of the N. C. Wyeth Collections at the Brandywine River Museum in Chadds Ford, to preserve and accurately reconstruct period details. Photographs taken of studio spaces while the artist was painting or soon after his death helped her to return the rooms to a highly accurate presentation. She also consulted a sketch made by Andrew Wyeth of his father at work and interviewed Andrew, his son Jamie, and Andrew’s sister Ann Wyeth McCoy. Curtains the artist used for lighting adjustments were reconstructed based on remaining scraps, the mural stairs were re-created, blank Weber Renaissance panels (the gessoed supports he used for his later works) were fabricated to be stacked against walls, and period accuracy was enforced for a telephone and replacement cigar boxes Wyeth had used to store paint tubes.

Podmaniczky has involved expert conservators and technical consultants in each task related to the preservation and display of a wide range of materials in the studio, including an early birch bark canoe, a paint-laden artist’s smock, and many fragile historic books.
with the artist’s pigment splotches indicating pages that were open during painting. The painted walls, specified by the artist to be a “pearl gray,” were cleaned to retain the “patina” Wyeth loved, including characteristic discolorations from a coal-burning furnace and a working fireplace. Preventive conservation measures are also in place, especially during the months from November to March when the studio is closed, to retard light fading, facilitate pest management procedures, and remove objects entirely that could be especially affected by humidity changes.

Wyeth’s visual source material is immediately apparent as the researcher comes up the curved drive through the orchard surrounding the studio. The trees have interesting shapes and character that are reminiscent of the backdrops in his powerful illustrations for Robin Hood or The Boy’s King Arthur. Family photographs show son Andrew dressed as Robin Hood and playing with friends in the orchard. Guns, swords, saddles, ship models, a costume chest, and the canoe mentioned earlier are visible in the studio. The plaster masks on the wall include Abraham Lincoln and Ludwig van Beethoven, both illustrated by Wyeth. The “dusty bottle”—a large carboy featured in a famous still life of 1924—is on a table; the viewer can see the reflections of the greenery outside refracted through the Palladian windowpanes onto the bottle as in Wyeth’s still life. A large 1933 mural of William Penn is displayed in the mural studio, along with the moveable staircase that allowed the artist to reach the top.

Biographers have described N. C. Wyeth as “two men fighting in a sack,” torn between illustration and fine art and between his family and his profession. The studio contains evidence of his dualisms for researchers to mine. He was also a farmer, who provided food from the garden for his family and an appreciation of nature (dozens of apple baskets bear witness to the “working” status of the orchard). He was a dedicated historian as well who collected an extensive library and plaster busts of great men that often informed his illustrations. The N. C. Wyeth Studio has greatly aided my own research into the techniques and psychological history of N. C., Andrew, and Jamie Wyeth; it awaits the visits of new generations of scholars investigating the Wyeth family or the history of American illustration.
Stacy Morgan

Clementine Hunter and Melrose Plantation

Clementine Hunter (1886–1988), now one of the better-known figures in the field of folk and self-taught art, spent most of her artistically productive years on and around Melrose Plantation, just south of Natchitoches, Louisiana. At first glance the plantation certainly does not meet the art historian’s expectations for a conventional artist’s studio. There are few personal papers belonging to the artist. Owing to a life that was long on manual labor and short on formal education, Hunter was only marginally literate. There is little in the way of drafts or sketches that might suggest Hunter’s working process as a painter. The remarkably prolific Hunter painted directly over most of her sketches and sold her works nearly as quickly as she completed them. There is not even a formal studio space per se, since Hunter painted most of her works either in her house or outside on the plantation.
grounds. All of that said, the site remains a valuable archive of material regarding an artistic career that extended from the late 1930s until Hunter’s death at age 101 in 1988.

“You got tuh go there tuh know there,” explains Janie Crawford to Pheoby Watson near the conclusion of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This oft-quoted passage is certainly fitting for consideration of an artist whose work is as consistently grounded in local experience as Hunter’s, for she and Melrose share a remarkable history. The plantation dates to the 1780s, when a black woman named Marie Therese Coincoin received her emancipation and title to the property by way of a relationship with a white French planter named Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer. Together with her sons, Marie Therese oversaw the construction of most of its principal buildings, including African House, one of the earliest examples of African-influenced architecture in the United States. Hunter, among the region’s many descendants from this Metoyer family line, was born into considerably humbler circumstances in 1886. From the time her family moved to Melrose around the turn of the century until the late 1920s, she worked in the plantation’s cotton fields and pecan groves; later she assumed full-time domestic work as its primary cook, maid, and laundress. During these years, Melrose was owned by a white widower named Cammie Henry, whose initiative turned the plantation into an exceptional hub of Southern arts and letters that played host to such figures as Lyle Saxon, John Steinbeck, Roark Bradford, and Julia Peterkin during the 1930s and 1940s. Although self-taught, Hunter thus hardly emerged from an artistic vacuum. In particular, the residency of painter Alberta Kinsey apparently provided the initial spark for Hunter’s desire to try her hand at painting when she was already in her fifties.

Clementine Hunter’s paintings abound with scenes of everyday religious life (baptisms, funerals, weddings), work (hoeing and harvesting cotton, gathering nuts, laundering clothes), and leisure (drinking, dancing, fishing) that seem at once locally specific and expressive of broader patterns in Southern Afro-American life. And one need not be around Melrose Plantation or the proximate communities long to recognize that most of these subjects are far from quaint relics of days gone by—the content of Hunter’s paintings is,
in a real sense, living history. Many of the folklife customs she depicted remain facets of community life in central Louisiana’s Cane River country, and even the details of Hunter’s paintings that mark her work as of an earlier era—such as a horse-drawn buggy or the heating of water over an open fire for washing clothes—remain within the memory of contemporary residents of the region. In this regard, the local populace affords a valuable resource for the scholar who is willing to collect oral histories. Particularly for the non-Louisianan, some level of immersion in such local testimonies may prove essential to teasing out the relationship between Catholicism and Protestantism in the lives of women like Hunter, who was baptized and buried as a Catholic but felt a greater pull toward the Baptist Church throughout her adult years. (Hunter included both churches in her artwork.) Likewise with Louisiana’s complex patterns of racial and ethnic self-identification: to cite but one example, Hunter’s own mixed heritage led her to paint herself as “Indian” on occasion.

Equally important, Melrose Plantation offers visitors a diverse sampling of Hunter’s wide-ranging artwork, including painted bottles, washboards, and lampshades in addition to more conventional paintings from various stages in the artist’s long career and one of her remarkable (and quite rare) story quilts. The greatest treasures among Hunter’s work at the plantation are the African House murals. Painted in 1956 at the prompting of long-term Melrose writer-in-residence François Mignon, these murals constitute one of Hunter’s most fully realized projects, both stylistically and conceptually, and include all of the motifs of religious life, work, and leisure noted above. While Hunter revisited these themes in numerous subsequent paintings, there is a special value to being able to take in these works collectively and firsthand. Experiencing the murals in situ offers a comprehensive overview of life on Melrose Plantation, as adeptly paired panels lead the eye from the hoeing of fields to the harvesting of cotton, from scenes of demanding labor to the release of spirited Saturday night revelry at a local juke joint, and from the symbolic rebirth of an outdoor baptism ceremony to the pageantry of a church funeral procession to the graveyard. Interestingly, too, the murals blend archetypal scenes with autobiographical elements, such as a tableau of Hunter’s own wedding and two images of the artist at work painting on the grounds of Melrose Plantation. Hunter’s trademark sly brand of humor is quite evident as well: for instance, a hated overseer is rendered in diminutive, childlike stature atop a horse, while elsewhere a workday scene shows men who fish or sit idly on the front stoop of a house as women busily sweep the yard and wash and iron clothes.

A research venture to the plantation also can help to amend some of the specious paradigms that still pervade the field of folk and self-taught art. For example, a good deal of the extant writing about Hunter has posited her as a naïf, somehow removed from the alleged taint of outside influence and even unaware of her merits as a “real” artist. This argument is presented despite substantial documentation of the lively literary and artistic scene that existed at Melrose under Cammie Henry’s direction at the time when Hunter began her artistic endeavors. To be sure, there is little to suggest that Hunter engaged in extensive discussions of craft with the various writers and artists who visited Melrose during her lifetime, but it would seem equally suspect to assume that she was unaffected by their presence. One of the African House murals shows a white painter at work on the Melrose grounds mirrored by a self-portrait of Hunter engaged in identical activity. A more forthright assertion of Hunter’s standing as an artist would be hard to imagine, notwithstanding a handful of self-effacing comments that various art dealers and scholars gathered from her over the years. Nor are the constructions of Hunter as a naïve painter (or even a “primitive” painter in some accounts) merely a matter of semantics. In a story that is all too familiar in the world of self-taught art, Hunter sold the vast majority
of her works for a fraction of their current value, and the framing of her identity as a humble folk artist leveraged such market relationships. Despite a considerable body of publications around the art of Clementine Hunter, these questions regarding her self-consciousness as an artist and the nature of her patronage relationships have yet to be fully explored. With a number of homes in nearby Natchitoches and the surrounding area featuring the artist’s paintings and with Hunter herself still a vivid memory for many local residents, a scholar interested in pursuing these lines of inquiry would do well to pair any review of the extant literature and artwork with a visit to Melrose Plantation and its neighboring communities.

The author would like to thank Sue Weaver of the Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches for helping to arrange a visit to Melrose Plantation; Sherman and Gail Vogel and Kitchery LaCour for providing valuable information about Clementine Hunter and the Melrose site; and Yamini Atmavilas for general assistance with this project.

Ellen G. Landau

The Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center

One of the most controversial aspects of the Museum of Modern Art’s 1998 blockbuster Jackson Pollock retrospective was a full-scale reproduction in the museum’s Manhattan galleries of the barn studio in East Hampton, New York, where the artist created his groundbreaking allover poured paintings. The public, for the most part, seemed to love it, but many critics and art historians cried foul. The drips and spatters discovered in 1987 still extant on the barn’s original wooden floorboards (buried under tar paper and
square masonite tiles that Pollock had himself overlaid on top) were not reproduced by MoMA’s curators, thus delimiting its realistic effect. Pollock’s heroically oversized gestural canvases, such as *Autumn Rhythm* and *Blue Poles*, painted in the barn studio at 830 Fireplace Road in the Springs, a section of the Town of East Hampton, during the late 1940s and early 1950s, were hanging in earlier galleries, not stacked up against or tacked up on the walls as they can be seen in Hans Namuth’s famous photographs of Pollock at work. Judging from the worshipful way they walked around it, visitors to the show nonetheless evaluated the studio re-creation as an accurate emulation of sacred space.

Indeed, those who make the trek to the far eastern end of Long Island to experience Pollock’s actual studio for themselves often exhibit the attitude of pilgrims traveling from afar to observe a holy relic. The mandatory removal of one’s shoes before entering the barn reinforces the solemnity of encountering a venue where true creativity took place. That two important artists of the abstract expressionist movement—Pollock (1912–1956) and, after his unfortunate early death, his wife, Lee Krasner (1908–1984)—used this studio only increases its awe-inducing quality, adding emotional appeal to a wider and more diverse audience. Women artists and art historians, both established and aspiring, as well as feminists of all stripes are equally attracted to the structure’s post-Pollock history.

Whereas Pollock painted in the barn at the Springs for less than ten years, from 1947 until his fatal car accident in 1956, Krasner used the same space from the late 1950s until her death. Namuth’s visual documentation of her second-class status in its environs during Pollock’s life was supplanted, as anyone can see in the barn’s permanent exhibit, by a triumphant photo session in 1962 in which Krasner, her brushes and paint supplies, her own collages and canvases now commanded pride of place. Label text clarifies that Krasner, unlike her husband, did not paint on the floor, so the multicolored wall splashes provide added indexical evidence of her distinctive working process.

Designated a National Historic Landmark in 1994, the studio and the modest Victorian farmhouse built in 1879 in which Pollock and Krasner lived together for eleven years (and she lived or summered in for almost three decades more) constitute an invaluable resource not only for artists, curators, and scholars but for anyone interested in the history and development of twentieth-century American abstract art. The roster of potential tourists (many from abroad) has increased dramatically since Hollywood actor Ed Harris, a great admirer of Pollock, used the actual exteriors and re-created a barn as well as the original house interiors (predating later structural changes and redecorations) on a sound stage in the Bedford Armory in Brooklyn in 1999. To get into character for his starring role in the film *Pollock*, Harris—like the numerous scholars-in-residence
(including myself) who have stayed there—spent many days and nights in the house, listening to Pollock’s record collection (mostly jazz) on the original sound system, eating meals off dishes used by Krasner and Pollock, and likely leafing through their books. The spines of some books, such as the Smithsonian Institution’s *Publications of the Bureau of Ethnology, 1881–1901,* that Pollock bought secondhand in the 1930s, are still flexed so that pages open readily to his favorite illustrations. Like the drips and spatters on the studio floor, these volumes provide exciting direct evidence of the trajectory of Pollock’s thinking process.

In March 2001 actress Marcia Gay Harden won an Academy Award for her portrayal of Lee Krasner in the film Harris starred in and directed. Harris was nominated as well, and his painting scenes, based on extensive study of the more than five hundred stills and two films that Namuth made of Pollock making art, seem to channel his subject’s intensity with eerie accuracy. The Academy Award ceremony, which reached millions of homes all over the planet, featured film clips of the two stars imitating the house and studio’s original inhabitants and pictured the place where Pollock and Krasner’s mythic relationship had actually played out. With the possible exception of Frida Kahlo’s Blue House in Coyoacán, a suburb of Mexico City, it would be difficult to cite another modern artist’s dwelling that has received so much visibility.

What does ongoing accessibility to the site and collections of the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center mean to scholars who specifically wish to study abstract expressionism or who take a professional interest in pre- and immediate post-World-War-II-era cultural history? The site is far more than an outlet for pop-culture veneration. (As at rock legend Jim Morrison’s grave at Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, visitors regularly leave token gifts—cigarette butts, paintbrushes, flowers, and personal notes—for Pollock, and sometimes Krasner, on the volcanic stones left in a natural state that mark their graves in nearby Green River Cemetery.) Firsthand experience of Pollock and Krasner’s home and studio allows extraordinary insight into the visceral role geography can play in stimulating creativity. For example, when I walked the short distance from house to studio in the early morning, hearing the staccato sounds and observing the natural motions in their weed-choked meadow, I finally understood why Krasner’s suggested title *Sounds in the Grass* characterizes to perfection the charged intensity of so many of the canvases Pollock painted early on in his new environment.

Comprehending how important it was for Pollock to internalize the surroundings of his one-and-a-quarter-acre Fireplace Road property, with its view of Gardiner’s Bay and Accabonac Creek, is as critical to getting at the root of his accomplishments as examining his books and the pigment traces on the studio floor, or becoming acquainted with the cans of Duco, his stiff brushes, and the sticks and turkey basters he used to spread his paint. Among its numerous pertinent study collections, the Pollock-Krasner House owns the complete interviews and notes of Jeffrey Potter, author of *To a Violent Grave: An Oral History of Jackson Pollock* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1985), as well as the files used in preparing both Pollock’s and Krasner’s catalogues raisonnés. Reading through the illuminating anecdotes in Potter’s archives underscores one’s direct experience of the artists’ milieu. “You can hear the life in grass, hear it growing. Next thing there’s a dry spell—it doesn’t take much in Bonac sandy soil—and the life is gone. Put your ear to it then and all you hear is the wind”: this allusive statement recalled to Potter by Julien Levy indicates that the notoriously nonverbal Pollock could, when describing something he truly cared about, wax poetic. His transitional 1947 compositions *Reflection of the Big Dipper,* *Galaxy,* and *Comet,* works with astronomical titles supplied by Jungian translator Ralph Manheim, Pollock’s friend and neighbor in the Springs, “come alive,” so to speak, after exposure to the stunning summer’s night view of the Milky Way from the artists’ back porch.
Much has been written about the move by Pollock and Krasner from the city to the country and how it affected their artistic partnership and their art. My first visit to 830 Fireplace Road, while a graduate student in 1979, was as Krasner’s guest. Many of their colleagues whom I interviewed that summer, and even those I talked to in the late 1980s and early 1990s while writing *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Abrams, 1989) and preparing to publish Krasner’s comprehensive catalogue of works (New York: Abrams, 1995), are now also gone. But luckily for scholars, the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center has since become a primary site and ongoing repository for artifacts, exhibitions, lectures, and archival material that demonstrate the extent to which the east end of Long Island has attracted and continues to stimulate distinguished visual innovation.4

Notes

1 A representative sampling of these were on view at MoMA just outside the reproduction “studio” entrance. A large selection of Namuth’s photos of Pollock working in the barn is reproduced in Barbara Rose, ed., *Pollock Painting* (New York: Agrinde Publications, 1979).

2 Also in the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center research collections are 2,000 art reference volumes, Pollock and Krasner’s LP recordings, more than 150 of Hans Namuth’s photographs of the couple and their artworks, an extensive audiotape collection of lectures and interviews on abstract expressionist topics, and Pollock and Krasner’s papers on microfilm (copies of materials donated to the Archives of American Art). Pollock’s catalogue raisonné, edited by Francis V. O’Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, was published in 1978 by Yale University Press, with a supplement by O’Connor issued in 1995.
