

Provincetown

art treasures hidden in plain sight: a guided tour

By Georgia M. Coxe

So here you are in Provincetown, looking for historic art. You're in luck — much of the town's more-than-400-piece art collection is displayed on walls of public buildings, and accessible to all.

You'll easily find our Town Hall, built in 1885, on Commercial Street. Go up the front steps and into the entry hall, and the first art you'll see is two murals by Ross Moffett (1888-1971) painted in the early 1900s. The one to the left shows fishermen on the sand dunes drying their nets. The other shows local women gathering beach plums in the dunes. (This activity is practiced to this day, in pursuit of the fruit for Cape Cod's famous beach plum jelly.)

Next, you may proceed right on

through the doors beneath the murals. This is the main corridor of the building, lined with large paintings. Important among them is a Charles Hawthorne masterpiece, "The Crew of the Philomena Manta." The powerfully painted fishermen in the painting have left their boat and are carrying a basket of fish off the pier.

Hawthorne (1872-1930), the first well-known artist to stay in Provincetown, is considered "father of the art school" here. In 1916 there were six art schools in town. Hawthorne used the strong local men and women as models, and many in our Portuguese community have grand- and great-grandparents in his paintings.

▶ Art Commission members Stephen Borkowski, Chair, and Peggy Pritchett hang Salvatore Del Deo's portrait of Francis "Flyer" Santos in the library.

All artwork is from the Collection of the Town of Provincetown. Courtesy of the Provincetown Art Commission.





Charles Hawthorne
"The Crew of the Philomena Manta"

In *Caucus Hall* at the end of the corridor hangs a huge portrayal of "Old Ironsides" by Frederick J. Waugh (1861-1940). Until recently, it was on display in the American Embassy in Lisbon, Portugal. Waugh pictured the grand old vessel under full sail.

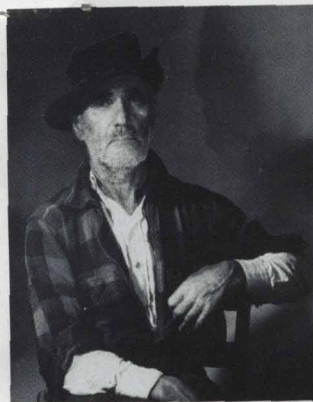
Before you leave, peer into the nearby Assessor's Office to see, among other paintings, a delightful portrait of a young lad in brown cap and overalls – "William," painted by R.H. Ives Gammell in 1915.

Behind the Town Hall building and up the hill stands the Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown



Giro Cozzi
Untitled (Provincetown dragger)

Museum. There you will find an exhibit titled "Net Working," reflecting Provincetown's Portuguese fishing community. The town art collection provided thirty-three of the works in this show. Among them is the colorful contemporary oil by *Ciro Cozzi* (1921-), of fishing boats beside the wharf, an untitled work featuring Provincetown dragger. Others here from the collection include a black-and-white photograph of a wonderfully weather-beaten seaman, *Captain John Gaspa*, by photographer *John Gregory* (1903-1992). This is a true portrait with no picturesque background or dressed-up clothing to distract from the sitter's face.



John Gregory
"Captain John Gaspa"

"Jimmy Boy at Flyer's Yard," by *Arthur Cohen* (1928-), shows a sunset behind the dragger "up on the rails" in the wooden cradle waiting for repairs to begin at Flyer's Boat Yard, still located in Provincetown's West End.



Arthur Cohen
"Jimmy Boy at Flyer's Yard"

If you head back down to 385 Commercial Street, you will come to the majestic white building of the new Provincetown Public Library. The library resembles a church because it was built as the Center Street Methodist Church. Next, it became the Chrysler Museum, then the town's Heritage Museum, and now our town library. Today its spacious walls hold many Provincetown Art Collection pieces.

In the main room of the library is an oil painting the Provincetown Art Commission has recently restored and re-framed. We have no date for



Pauline Palmer
"The Lumber Wharf"

this warm, old-time view of town. Painted by *Pauline Palmer* (1869-1938), it pictures a long-skirted female plein-air painter, perhaps *Palmer* herself, who has set up her



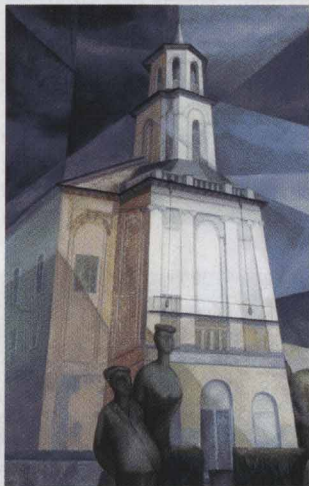
Schooner model in the library.

palette and canvas on “The Lumber Wharf” – which is, indeed, the name of the wharf and the name of the painting.

Above the library’s bank of computers, which invariably are being used by busily typing researchers and e-mailers, hangs a large work by Karl Knaths (1891-1971), “Woodland Deer,” adding a fresh outdoorsy note with its forest colors and contemporary look. A little farther on is the staircase to the basement floor. Although this is not open to the public, you can peer down the steps to see an amazing Oliver Chaffee (1881-1944) modernist work, “Crucifixion.” You will find sea-creature forms in

this work if you look for them.

On the second floor, you will find the half-scale model of the schooner “Rose Dorothea.” The cheerful Children’s Book Room surrounds its shiny black hull and tall white sails. There hangs the portrait of Francis “Flyer” Santos, principal builder of the model ship, painted by Salvatore Del Deo (1928-). Beyond the ship are two portholes in the wall. If you peek through, a depiction of the front of the library, somewhat cubist in style,



Mary Spencer Nay
“Homage to Heritage Museum &
Chaim Gross”



E. Ambrose Webster
“Summer Garden”

will appear. This is “Homage to Heritage Museum & Chaim Gross,” by Mary Spencer Nay (1913-1993), hanging in the director’s office. The Chaim Gross (1904-1991) sculpture, “Tourists,” can be seen in the front yard of the library, where it is often the subject of visitors’ photographs.

Toward the front of the building, past the bowsprit of the ship, is the Local History Room. On exhibit there are four paintings, the originals for a suite of posters called “The Four Seasons,” available for sale at the library desk. The artists are Volian Burr Rann (1897-1956), E. Ambrose Webster (1869-1935), Marjorie Windust Halper (1908-1996), and Ross Moffett (1888-1971).

A final art stop in the library might

be the third-floor balcony. The extreme far end, the Poet’s Corner, overlooks the immense Oliver Chaffee painting titled “Still Life,” as it hangs on the wall below, its seemingly smiling fish a curiously decorative composition.

Near the poetry shelves is a portrait of Harry Kemp, known as “the poet of the dunes” for most of his writing years. Edmund S. Oppenheim (1901-1992) did the portrait of Kemp in 1955. And through the nearby window, you can actually see a view of those distant dunes beyond Provincetown.

The Provincetown Art Commission is busy restoring and re-framing more of the town’s historic art collection. Next year there will be different works for you to discover and enjoy.

We’ll be looking for you. ■

Georgia M. Coxe is a poet and photographer, a grandmother, a 27-year resident of Provincetown, and a member of the Provincetown Art Commission.