

KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly

Our Canada geese have bred in the Beech Forest again, and the goslings are close to adult plumage. They are being fed by admirers: bread, crackers, cereal, and anything surviving the picnic. The squirrels, sparrows, jays, and crows have joined in the hand-out and the on-going feast.

The crows are the most aggressive and cleverest of all. They are even quicker than the jays though they are in the same family. Their size, their appetite, and their raucous call make them competitively first. The geese are so well and constantly fed that saturation is possible. The crows observe that point and charge in with abandon to clean the pond area of all thrown bits and pieces.

Crows are intelligent, and it has been suggested that they are bored with ordinary bird life and so are mischievous and get into human-like trouble. They are thieves. They steal the eggs from other birds' nests. They will steal anything shiny you should leave about.

Their nests have curious collections of jewelry, coins, zipper parts, screws to bikes, and flip-top can tabs. They torment other birds just for something to do. They are large, aggressive, ominous in their color and downward swooping flight. Most of all they eat. They never seem full and the chicks and fledglings are fed continuously, so crows must be quick and clever and everywhere on the food chain. They eat berries, seeds, insects, small mammals, snakes, other reptiles, fish, and all kinds of human food. Their omnivorous diet necessitates the regurgitation of fur, bones, seeds, and carapaces through the mouth in dry pellet form as birds of prey do.

In India, they are an efficient means of garbage collection. Crows in the cities are black peculiarities in the countryside. I have had the experience of leaving a part of a sandwich on a terrace wall and having a crow snatch it as quickly as a vision. Crows are world-wide, ravens preferring the arctic zones, our American crow preferring north temperate comfort at all times. If crows are abundant, food is abundant.

In the British Isles the rookeries or groups of nests, are expansive, and when overly populated, are split up by the farmers. You can always hear the crow in the background in the rural scenes of Masterpiece Theatre. In Sicily, their famed wine, *Corvo*, is named for the crow. In America it is a whiskey, *Old Crow*.

Also, in America, the scarecrow moves to an art form. I have seen scarecrows of many styles and composites in other countries, but in America the corn fields encamp some of the best dressed and most detailed costuming possible for an open-air doll. Farmers mimic their own clothing or their spouses' clothing to produce a comic effect. It fools the birds only sometimes. They are usually too busy eating the new shoots of corn. That is the only truly harmful work of crows. Aluminum foil strips have been added to help deter the destructive action of the crows.

Here in Provincetown, we have no need of scarecrows, and one of our most obvious viewing spots is the flats instead of corn fields. The American crow and the smaller fish crow can both be observed at low tide among the gulls and shorebirds, noisier than all and checking the beach for any edible scrap.

The one other quality of crow intelligence is its ability to mimic. Not all crows have that talent, and it is not known why it is restricted to individual birds. But with the talent equal to an African gray or double-yellow-headed Panamanian, these crows can mimic a baby's cry, a dog's bark, the call of someone's name, an engine noise, or any chronic household noise such as a squeaky hinge or banging screen door. Crows are often kept as pets.

It's a good species to start bird watching with because of its abundance and public showing: easy to spot, easy to watch, and never dull. You will enjoy crows the more you know about them.

Mary Spencer Nay is celebrating her fiftieth year, her golden anniversary of living and painting in Provincetown. Though Mary is a person who celebrates life daily, these days have a special approach. A series of paintings using gold leaf will be exhibited at St. Mary of the Harbor Outermost Gallery from July 10 for three successive weekends.

Mary Spencer Nay first visited Provincetown in 1937 as a chauffeur for her two art professors, Fayette Barnum and Maude Ainslie. Fayette Barnum studied with Hawthorne. Maude Ainslie was a founder of the Provincetown Art Association and Museum and of the Provincetown Players. All came from Louisville, Kentucky, where they taught at the Art Center Association. The latter was founded by Barnum, and Ainslie was the first president. Mary Spencer Nay was given a ten-year scholarship to this center and later went on to a forty-year teaching career at the University of Louisville. Barnum and Ainslie built, in 1915, the house which Mary Spencer Nay lives in now. It was left to six heirs, and Mary bought the other five out in 1972.

This teacher-student bond was close and continually nurturing. Mary named one of her daughters Fayette as a living tribute. Fayette and husband, Cecil, have built their own home on the adjoining land where they raise their two darling children, Berquitta and David. Mary's other daughter is Malu, a blending of Mary and her husband's name, Louis.

Mary loved Provincetown instantly, as most people involved in beauty and creation do. She visited every



Mary Spencer Nay

summer and returned Labor Day to teach at the University of Louisville. In 1951, she married. In 1959, Mary was appointed assistant professor. In 1942, she taught their first offerings in art education. From 1944 to 1949, she was director of the Art Center Association and in 1959, was appointed assistant professor of art at the university. In 1971, Mary was appointed distinguished professor of art education and in 1975 was named the Marcias Hite Professor. Mary Spencer Nay is not a stale academician. She has painted and created throughout her career and continues today with the visionary vigor of the gifted. Mary has been in Provincetown yearround since 1979 and shows her work at every opportunity possible.

As I sat in Mary's peaceful home for a private showing, I was continually reminded of elevated thinking, technical skill, and variety of subject matter and approach. Such an active mind; such a developed talent. When I remarked on this Mary said, "I never can repeat myself." One beautiful painting of sweet honesty or the money plant folded. This was designed for an apartment with limited space. Why not use the angle of two adjoining walls?

As I viewed *Mirror Mask on the Moon* with the earth reflected on it and barnacles for moon rocks, I realized my mind must constantly travel to enjoy these works. The sea, the earth, the moon, space, the human head; there is a lot of information in one painting. The series of masks, *After Kyoto*, with the Japanese paper reflected *Magical Mirror Mask* with scissors and a self portrait seem alike but are not. The titles have humor, lamb bones named *Lamb's Bona Fide By-Products* and *Egg Salted Egg*.

Personal history as well as ancient myths hang side-by-side with equal importance. *When Time Stood Still*, a vision minus gravity, is as striking as sunrise at Stonehenge or the land designs of Nazca, south of Lima, Peru. *Aftermath*, inspired by a poem of her mother's, about a cartoon of broken Christmas ornaments, has all the poetry of the ancient themes: delicate, personal, yet universally striking.

The gold leaf themes that group the paintings, some with mirrors added, Stonehenge with wax melted into the gold leaf by means of an infrared light. Are you beginning to understand Mary's comment about never repeating herself?

You realize that Mary likes parts of things, destroyed things, ruins, leftover bones, rotting logs. Her observation at the age of ten still permeates her paintings. "Isn't it strange how beautiful ugly things are?" And she does find the beauty in them. The egg shape is also lovingly represented in Mary's work. This is the influence of her dear friend Boris Margo, now 85 years old, who held seminars in Provincetown in the 1950's. Duller colors were also advocated by Boris Margo.

The peace and comfort of Mary Spencer Nay's home are indicative of the constant work to the approach of excellence in thought, in graphics, and in demonstration. These paintings give you pleasure, but, more so, these paintings make you think. They make you earn your pleasure and therefore, heighten it. Provincetown is fortunate that such an accomplished and dedicated artist has chosen to live and work and continue her family among us. You will enjoy this show at St. Mary of the Harbor Outermost Gallery on July weekends.