



KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly

THE CAPE COD SCHOOL OF ART

I've always felt that one of the best kept secrets of Provincetown has been the continuous smooth running of The Cape Cod School of Art. This year, as Provincetown celebrates its centenary as an art colony, due attention has come to the school through impressive news coverage—The New York Times, American Artist Magazine and TV coverage beyond the obvious Cape Cod media coverage. But within the low keyed success story of a school so well run and so constant there lies a gem of opportunity and art exposure waiting for all who have not yet had the experience. I am extolling the Friday morning demonstrations. Each Friday morning at 9am a live model or a still life is painted by way of an active study, a demonstration of the tenets of The Cape Cod School of Art.

This demonstration which takes place at the junction of Brewster and Pearl Streets is conducted by the present director of the school Lois Griffel. Since 1899 these demonstration have been attended by students of the school and visiting artists. Though informal, out of doors and very welcoming, great respect is shown and hopes are high to gain a bit more insight into this well practiced, simple and enduring method of "seeing." Charles Hawthorne brought the theory of American impressionism from France, painting *en plein aire* on the wharves, dunes and gardens of Provincetown rather than in the sheltered studios.

From 1899 to 1934 the patient and imposing Hawthorne guided many talented and grateful artists from "looking at" to "seeing" color. With a 2" palette knife he would have his students create a portrait study—clumsy at first—called "mud heads" because of the obvious lack of facial features. Students would realize that they were seeing color rather than the human form before them. And after they could "see" color they could much more easily paint a portrait with all the great color effects, rendering a believable and beautifully human interpretation, unstilted, unfettered, easy to view.

Henry Hensche took up the post as director in 1935 and developed his "science of seeing." Hensche introduced blocks as a way of seeing light. When I was at the school last Friday I saw blocks of various colors and many paintings rendering the observation of climate and time of day. When I studied with Hensche the blocks were white and we were constantly encouraged to see all the flinting colors in the white caused by the sun and shadings of the white caused by an overcast day.

Hensche ran the school for 55 years. During this time he had many monitors who help out in the class, they got things going or closed things out for the director. They were ever behind the scenes and stepped forward whenever called upon. Henry observed his students carefully and critically, always looking for "soldiers"—all men—to carry on his work and Hawthorne's work. Sami Barber and a man called "Clay" from the South were the chosen students when I studied there. Sami, with his eye for color developed through the unrelent-



ing tutelage of Henry Hensche, went off on his own or better with wife Jane and has become quite successful.

In the late 70's, early 80's Henry noticed he had some students who adapted quickly to his method. Upon questioning, he was told, "Oh, Lois taught us all winter." And so Henry Hen-



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I'm not here to tell you how to paint,
rather I'm here to show you, help you, how to see.
-Lois Griffel*

sche started looking at Lois Griffel's work and a great change took place at The Cape Cod School of Art. Henry, always sharp with criticism and sparse with compliments, reluctantly said to Lois, "Well, I guess you know what you are doing." That was as good as it could get, as soft as it would be from Henry. Lois, contained her thrilled response at this spartan praise and continued working. She still beams and laughs, "As near to a compliment as you are going to get from Henry." Lois Griffel became the first and only woman monitor and the first "soldier."

There are many out there painting and practicing the theories of color and light and painting out of doors. Many who keep close to the ideas of the Cape Cod School of Art, but Lois Griffel is at the forefront. She is the soldier carrying on the work. In 100 years there have been only three directors, Hawthorne, Hensche and now Griffel. What remarkable continuity!

Visiting Lois' demonstration class brought nostalgia, knowledge and a comparison to mind. We were more like "starving artists" then, but today there is more money everywhere. I could hear Henry's voice and see his stubborn white hair above that puppet-like jaw that never ended giving information and criticism. Lean, well-boned and a man on a mission. He cleared paths when he spoke. Lois is carrying on the message and her personality, talent and self-confidence fill all the gaps for visiting artists. She too, keeps it simple adding her own style to her teaching. She creates beauty and leads others to it. "I'm not here to show you what I can do. I'm not here to tell you how to paint, rather I'm here to show you, help you, how to see. You don't have to finish every painting. Leave it alone, don't finish it. I'm not going to 'talk' this painting, I'm going to do it intuitively. It's a grey day. Here is a painting of the same still life on a sunny day."

Quiet and observant, 20 to 25 consenting adults are slipping slowly into this observance of color conditioned by local clients. Some take notes, some are open-mouthed, some half smile, some half frown and none is anywhere but in this small glade to learn.

"Train your eyes. Train your vision, simply....The brushes will loosen up the application...There's an immediate 'scum-

bling'. Keep going, push the color. Push the effect of the color. ...What was it Henry used to say: Try the richest, craziest, most bombastic, etc. color and it will still be timid." On she paints.

"White is not a color, it is a pigment. Dark and light connotes value, not temperature. There are specifics but no rules. Warm, cool, light, dark...that tree...this tree I'm painting has been burnt umber,

magenta, crimson red. Same tree, different light." The study emerges on the board. Same study as the bright sunny one on the table, but so different in

tone. A grey day.

"You'll learn what *not* to do, if you don't know *how* to do something. You can correct it. Draw, learn. Learn from any good teacher. Composition, color, value, temperature, saturation and problems of color. Keep looking..." On goes the busy brush talent draining off its bristles. "I'm not trying to make light of it." Is that a pun, Lois? "Don't ask color as I work; that's irrelevant. Don't ask which or why or about it—watch. ...Plan, scan, squint, step back."

The demonstration was changing with the light and the students were taking the opportunity to ask Lois about her own work. Students asked about her painting, the "Moorlands."

"Four feet by six."

"Tools?"

"Palette knife and brush."

"Days to complete?"

"5 days on location and two weeks on the Gloucester easel."

"Where is it now?"

"In a Cohasset gallery."

"Just shapes, simple shapes at the beginning" On she teaches, and on she stokes. "In the beginning just do a flower 'shape' no petals, just masses and shapes. You don't have to work it too hard, keep it 24" x 30" manageable. You can literally change it. You're not locked in, start with shapes. Your drawing will be more accurate. ...Portrait artists use shaping. If you drew a linear nose you would have to put so much paint around it to keep it, you'd be locked in, leave room to change."

And so this wisdom goes on, a 100 year accumulation from three proponents, right here in our own town and available to us. Students come from all over the US and abroad for what is ours on a simple visit. Here the learning process and its three leaders receive homage through this weekly demonstration. Students rise, mill, study the demo board and appear visibly moved by the experience. To bring them out of the clouds, one student shows her a newly learned method of packing wet paint. Practical unto cerebral, the learning goes on. A fortunate troupe of people choosing for themselves under the guidance of others.