

# COMPASS

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August 12, 2021



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# When the World Closes Down, Art Helps Us To Step Outside of Our Own Four Walls

As I write the introduction to this special issue of Compass Arts and Entertainment, there are worrisome signs that perhaps (after a summer of relative freedom) we will have to return to COVID-19 quarantine.

It was quarantine that first in-

spired this issue, which is dedicated to the many artists who populate this visually and intellectually inspiring corner of the world. Most did not arrive here with the shutdown of New York City caused by the coronavirus — although of course there were many talented newcomers who

arrived and made their homes (and studios) here during the pandemic. But the artists featured in this issue were all already here, pre-pandemic.

The articles in this issue explore how their work habits changed as they found themselves more isolated in quarantine — and what they did with, in some cases, the unexpected luxury of being able to devote less time to jobs and more time to art.

Taking us on this journey of exploration are two young women to whom this issue is dedicated. When summer interns Anabelle Baum of Sharon, Conn., and Sadie Leite of Salisbury, Conn., came to us this year, they were already very fully formed. Excellent writers and photographers, they were also mature and responsible and good communicators. They both are particularly interested in art.

And so we decided to let them loose to largely produce this special issue themselves. They chose the artists they would feature; and for the most part, they visited studios together, one taking photos and one asking questions and writing the text.

Also writing for us in this issue is Sari Goodfriend, who shares our admiration of West Cornwall, Conn., treasure Robert Andrew Parker.

In addition to a chat about art and workspaces, each featured artist was also asked to share three book titles that they would recommend. The titles are diverse, revealing and fascinating.

We hope that we will not all end up in quarantine again. But if we do, we will have this issue to guide us to new reading, and to inspire us to make art.

— Cynthia Hochswender

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PHOTOS BY SADIE LEITE

**Jeanette Montgomery Barron's artistic environment is not contained within the four walls of her studio — her whole property is an exhibition space, starting with the sculptures by Beverly Pepper that line the drive up to the house.**

**JEANETTE MONTGOMERY BARRON: SADIE LEITE**

## Mirror Images and Photos — A Metaphor For Self-Reflection?

In South Kent, Conn., a gravel driveway unfurls at an incline, revealing a modern, white building at its top. Photographer Jeanette Montgomery Barron's studio is on the second floor, lined with windows to reveal the property expanding over the hills.

The space was completed about three years ago. In addition to Montgomery Barron's studio, there is exhibition space for her husband, art dealer James Barron. The couple wanted a private exhibition space, available to visit only by appointment.

Collectors' visits are easier in

this format because they can "come and be the only ones here without other interruptions," a change from Barron's former gallery at the Kent Barns.

Currently, The Red Show fills the gallery's walls, with work by Sol LeWitt, Phillip Guston, Kikuo Saito and other artists.

Jeannette Montgomery Barron points to a structure across the hill. "James does exhibitions in the cabin down there. He uses our whole property as an exhibition space. It's great and funky." Then, she draws attention to the Beverly Pepper sculptures lining the driveway and

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Amber Violet, 40" x 60" oil on canvas

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*“These two blue mirrors here came out of COVID. It’s just been a period of self-reflection for many people, me included. So, for me, these blue mirrors are very much about that period.”*

resting just outside the back door.

Shifting back to describing her studio, Montgomery Barron identifies her favorite parts: “I can have the doors open; I feel like I’m outside but I’m really inside — even when the doors are shut, and it’s winter and snowing.” She asserts she would change nothing.

Recently, Montgomery Barron returned to her archives, using old work for future projects.

She is also continuing with the mirror series that she began in the early 1990s in black and white. The series evolved over time; the last print she has, of a photo she took in the early 2000s, was a large mirror with a “burnt Roman wall behind it.” After that, Montgomery Barron took a pause.

About seven years ago, she returned to mirrors, now capturing them only in color. Most are taken at her studio here; some are photographed in Rome, Italy, where she and her husband have lived off and on for many years.

The new mirror photographs are, to some degree, a study in the way that the pandemic intensified introspection and self-awareness.

“These two blue mirrors here came out of COVID,” she said, pointing to two images. “It’s just been a period of self-reflection for many people, me included. So, for me, these blue mirrors are very much about that period.”

She has also been photographing tablescapes.

“They’re basically photos I take when I’m walking around in Italy,

but sometimes here. They’re taken mostly with an iPhone. I just really love looking at tabletops. I walk around, usually, starting late in the morning.

“I love to work in series,” she added.

But she also does single-themed projects, such as a collaboration she did just before lockdown with author André Aciman. For “Roman Hours,” published in October 2020, Montgomery Barron took photos of the Italian capital on her iPhone and with a film camera; and Aciman wrote text about why he, too, adores the city where he grew up. Only 1,000 copies were made.

Propped up against the walls of her studio are prints that Montgomery Barron has made of portraits she took in New York City in the 1980s, of friends such as Keith Haring, Alex Katz, Kenny Scharf, many of whom went on to become “historical figures of the art world.”

She turns around one of her best-known portraits: An artist sits comfortably in his studio. It is Jean-Michel Basquiat.

#### **BOOKS THAT JEANETTE MONTGOMERY BARRON RECOMMENDS**

As requested, here are three of my favorite books! —JMB

- “The Warmth of Other Suns,” by Isabel Wilkerson
  - “The Year of Magical Thinking,” by Joan Didion
  - “Design as Art,” by Bruno Munari
- “There are so many more ...”



**Jeanette Montgomery Barron and her husband, James, agreed that their private gallery, visits by appointment only, provided a better, distraction-free environment for individual curators to visit James’ shows, and preview Montgomery Barron’s photography.**

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PHOTOS BY SADIE LEITE

**KK Kozik particularly enjoys the large doors that she added when she renovated a carriage house into an art studio. Leaving them open allows in the sounds of birds, the touch of the moving, fresh air and natural light.**

**KK KOZIK: SADIE LEITE**

## In Search of Dreams, from a Converted Carriage House

When KK Kozik and her husband, Scott Stiffler, moved from Brooklyn, N.Y., to Sharon, Conn., 16 years ago, they bought an elegant house in the center of town, steps away from the historic town Green. The family had been traveling between Connecticut and New York for some time. Eventually, they found that it was easier to raise their young children from a permanent home in Sharon.

Once the main house was fixed up, the couple turned to the old carriage house on the property. The downstairs was cleaned up so that Stiffler could keep a classic car there; the

upstairs became Kozik's studio.

Once a dim loft space, the new studio is now a bright and open room, natural light flooding in through its large glass doors. Kozik said one of her favorite things about the studio is "the ability to work with the doors open, so you can hear the birds and feel the air moving around you."

Sometimes Kozik does work that's dreamy yet representational, starting with actual landscapes and, in the case of her bookscape series, beginning with actual piles of books.

She usually takes photos of her subjects and then studies them as she paints.



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For other paintings, she doesn't use a single photograph or even step outside her studio in search of one of the country landscapes that are all around her.

For those visuals, she said, "I just make it up — but, I don't make up the ideas. I take the ideas from someplace else."

As an example, Kozik talked about her fascination with the Northern Lights.

"Some people say that you paint what you want to see."

Kozik understood she wanted to paint the natural phenomenon — and she wanted to paint it as the backdrop to a house. She needed to find just the right house to serve as her inspiration.

One day, she was driving in Vermont and came upon "a house you might feel a bit sorry for — and that was it."

She took photos of the building, which appeared to be abandoned. And she used her research on the Northern Lights, and began work on a piece she titled "Call and Response," a reference to a type of gospel singing where the lead singer calls out a phrase and the group sings back in response.

The partnership in the painting refers to a Lava Lamp that Kozik painted in the house's window.

"The Northern Lights make you think there must be a God," she said. "Imagine if you were a primitive person and you saw them."

The kitschy glop of the Lava Lamp is the cheap commercial response to nature's glory.

"The Lava Lamp is a cheap, crummy response to this sublime thing."

The COVID-19 quarantine didn't profoundly affect Kozik's work. Moving to Connecticut had already taken her out of the more active world of art and artists in New York City.

"Artists may have been the least affected because they were already staying home and working alone," she

said.

What changed for her during COVID-19 was the constant presence of her husband and children in the house during the day.

"Personally, my whole family being home all the time was the most difficult; it's hard for me to concentrate with conflicting energies."

Because of it, she said, "I think I've been a little slow this year. But it's getting better."

### BOOKS THAT KK KOZIK RECOMMENDS

- "Landscape and Memory" by Simon Schama

"I wrote about this book in an article for The Journal of Cornwall Contemporary Art. It helped me understand how some artists are very inspired by the places they live. Schama said that a landscape doesn't name itself, it takes someone looking at it and thinking about it before it becomes a place otherwise."

- "It all Turns on Affection" by Wendell Berry

"This was another book I wrote about in that article. Berry focuses on what people feel about where they live. He believes that if people are in touch with their affection for a place, then they will take care of it. If you love the landscape, you do all that you can to take care of the life that's in it."

- "Set this House on Fire" by William Styron

"I think this is my favorite fiction book. Styron's use of language is amazing, but also his stories are just really good — they are unexpected and interesting. There is a young man, who is American, living on the coast of Italy right after World War II.

"It starts as a comic tragedy, but then he observes the characters around him. I like how he's observing. When I was growing up, I always watched everything that was going on around me with a great deal of skepticism."



**Artist KK Kozik paints what she wants to experience, such as her Northern Lights landscape series. She thoroughly researched the natural phenomenon, then found ways to combine the majesty of the lights with, for example, houses at dusk.**



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PHOTOS BY SADIE LEITE

After living in New York and other cities around the world, Lauren Was and Adam Eckstrom find that they can remain in touch with the world while raising chickens at a home in the artist community of Wassaic, N.Y.

**LAUREN WAS  
& ADAM EKSTROM: ANABELLE BAUM**

## Reaching out to the Rest of the World from a Small Studio

Lauren Was and Adam Eckstrom — who create large-scale collages and installations together under the name Ghost of a Dream — first came to the Tristate region to take part in the Wassaic Project, an art colony in Amenia, N.Y.

Though they've lived and worked in New York City, Beijing and Berlin, they chose to buy their home and settle down in Wassaic (a hamlet of Amenia), buying a small house and adjacent outbuilding in 2012.

Both buildings are now painted teal blue, one like a smaller version of the other. They are able to move back and forth between the two buildings, tending to their daughter and their

three chickens.

Renovating their home and studio, the artists say, was one of their favorite collaborations. The studio especially has been transformed by the couple, who converted it from a dirt-floor shack to a brightly lit modern workspace with energy-efficient lights, a guillotine cutter, piles upon piles of papers, and a large worktable.

"I love it," Eckstrom said. "I love that it's climate-controlled and that it's clean. I love that I can walk to it."

He and Was also love that they are steps away from the community and inspiration of the Wassaic Project, where there are events, a restaurant, art shows and artist residencies

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(like the one that brought the couple to this part of the world in the first place).

“We’re a part of this great artist community that’s right here and easy to access, so there are always a lot of people coming through the studio and visiting,” Was said.

The couple also are the “embedded critics” of the Wassaic Project, organizing visits to the studio spaces of the artists in residence there.

But there is always the danger that so much rural bliss will begin to limit an artist’s work and vision.

“We started to think, How can we keep working? How can we keep traveling, meeting people and collaborating?” Was said. “So Adam and I decided to reach out to an artist in every country in the whole world and ask them to record 7 minutes of the sun at the end of the day.”

The COVID-19 quarantine intensified the duo’s desire to do work that would connect them to other artists.

“COVID is what made us decide to make this the most inclusive and collaborative work we could possibly make in a time when we were really kept apart,” Eckstrom said.

The project consumes the studio, with computer printouts of photos of sunsets lining the walls, all of them held up with blue painters tape.

The studio space is jam packed, with these images collected from artists around the world and with past and present work by Ghost of a Dream — the artists have created quilt-style collages with ephemera such as discarded lottery tickets and used casino playing cards.

They don’t find that sharing the small space is confining, however — in fact, both expressed how rewarding it is to work and live alongside another artist.

“We’ve gained so much working together because we’ve been able to bounce ideas off of each other and make ideas better because we talk

them through,” said Was.

With a smile and a laugh, she added, “And we steal each other’s words!”

### BOOKS THAT GHOST OF A DREAM RECOMMENDS

- “Art/Work: Everything You Need to Know (and Do) As You Pursue Your Art Career,” by Heather Darcy Bhandari and Jonathon Melber

“This book was so important to us as we were starting off our careers as artists. It was everything we should have learned through our multiple art degrees, simplified and put into one place.”

- “The Hearing Trumpet,” by Leonora Carrington

“The escapist in me loves the strange surrealist world that Leonora Carrington creates,” Was said. “It is a story about a 92-year-old woman who, when given the gift of a hearing trumpet, realizes her family plans to ship her off to an old age home.

“Upon arrival she realizes it’s not a ‘normal place;’ the houses are in the shapes of birthday cakes, a big boot, an igloo, a castle tower and an Egyptian sarcophagus. There is murder, occult happenings and a portal to the underworld.

“This book is bonkers and amazing”

- “Ada Twist, Scientist” and “Rosie Revere, Engineer,” by Andrea Beaty, illustrated by David Roberts

“These are great books that we



The newest project of art duo Ghost of a Dream is a collection of images of sunsets by artists from around the world.

have read over and over to our 5-year-old daughter, Holiday. They are empowering stories about girls discovering and pushing through challenges to follow their dreams, and it’s written in rhyme. These books are beautifully illustrated with intense detail that keeps us wanting to read them again and again.”



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PHOTOS BY SADIE LEITE

Artist John-Paul Philippe works in his simple Sharon, Conn., studio, inspired by the nature that surrounds him. One recent piece, behind him in this photo, captures the way that caterpillars chew leaves.

## JOHN-PAUL PHILIPPE: ANABELLE BAUM

# Finding Inspiration in the Quiet, the Birds and Even the Moths

Although his name sounds French, John-Paul Philippe is actually a native of Oklahoma, someone who understands a rugged rural life. Perhaps that's why he's so at ease in a splendid but rustic cabin in Sharon, Conn., where he lives and works when he is not in New York City.

The cabin is small, clean and quirky. His artwork includes paintings, murals and what he describes as large-scale interior design elements for stores such as Barney's New York. He also makes lighting, furniture and ... bird perches.

The birds are a recurring theme at the artist's Sharon home, which he said was a bird sanctuary before he

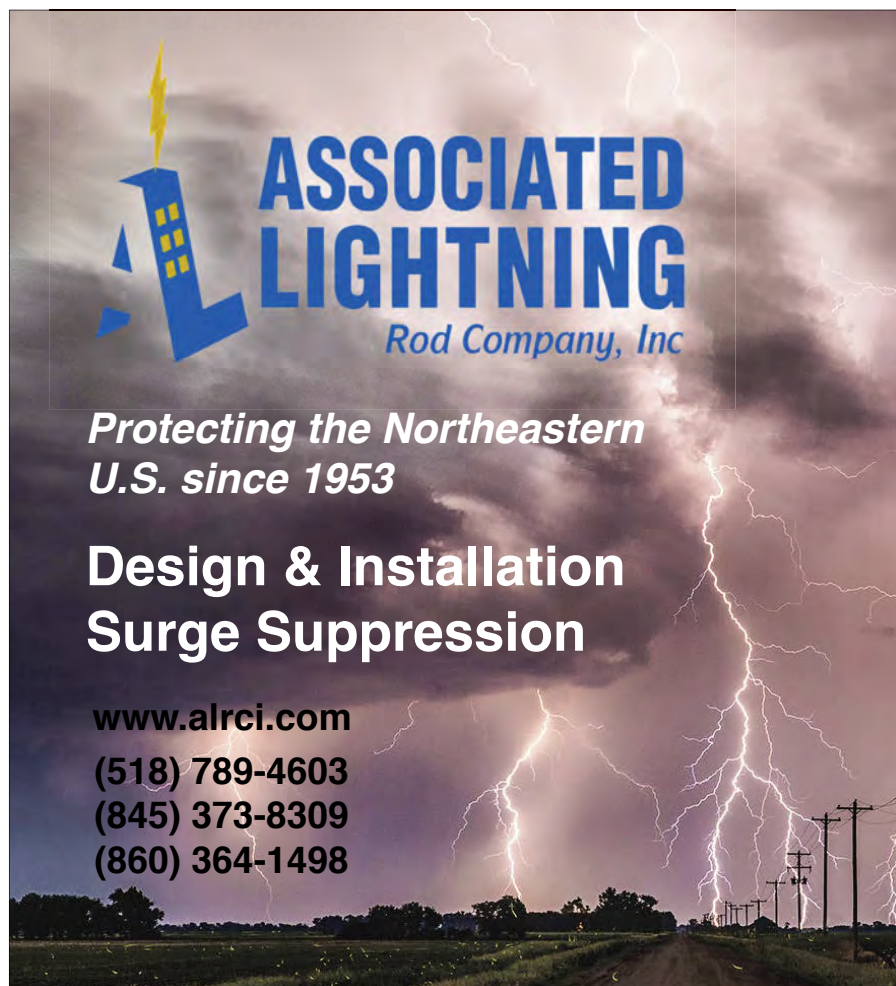
purchased it in 2006 (he moved to Connecticut full-time five years ago).

The property very much reflects the interests of its owner, with its handcrafted parakeet aviary, a large teepee, a chicken coop guarded by a tin can scarecrow.

Most intriguing, however, is the artist's studio. The workspace is a screened-in porch that extends directly off of the main house. Natural light floods the small enclosure during the day. Darkness dims it during the night.

But to Philippe, the lighting is his most considerable quibble.

"The light coming in is green, and I don't want it to be. But eventually, I'm going to blot the color out in my



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studio. It's just too dominant.”

Light is not his only nature-induced issue. Recycled cans, rolls of burlap and other materials stockpiled from the past that Philippe utilizes in his art — along with his unfinished pieces — are vulnerable to the elements. So, depending on the forecast, Philippe must rearrange his studio on a regular basis.

Nevertheless, there is still much of his workspace the artist takes pleasure in.

“I enjoy its plainness and simplicity. I have a longtime infatuation with Japan, so I’m sure that aesthetic has filtered into my surroundings.”

Unexpectedly, the COVID-19 quarantine allowed Philippe more time to enjoy the simplicity of his studio, in solitude.

“It intensified the work. I loved that it was quiet and that there weren’t jets, you know, that the sky wasn’t tracked. That at one point there was no traffic; the race track wasn’t buzzing down there.

“It seems like a dichotomy, but I am a ‘social hermit.’ I enjoy being in my own company.”

Looking up at the sky on a July day, the artist observed a swarm of gypsy moths, whose caterpillars destroyed acres of trees in the region this year (Sharon was one of the towns that was hardest hit).

“Right now, I’m raising cecropia moths,” Philippe said. “They’re not harmful like the gypsy moths. I’ve been inspired by how they chew the leaves and how they’ll eat a leaf and



**John-Paul Philippe’s home/studio in Sharon, Conn., settles unobtrusively into its natural environment. Reporter Anabelle Baum, at right in photo, asked questions for this interview on the informal lawn.**

leave the veins. It has affected the shapes I’m interested in right now. It’s often something like that, in nature usually. Like bark on a tree.”

**BOOKS THAT JOHN-PAUL PHILIPPE RECOMMENDS**

“Here are my 3 favorite books.”:

- “Walden” by Henry David Thoreau
- “In Praise of Shadows” by Jun’ichiro Tanizaki
- “Green Mansions” by William Henry Hudson



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PHOTOS BY ANABELLE BAUM

**Joshua Frankel, an animator who is collaborating on an opera about Robert Moses, has created a silkscreen model of the displacement caused by the building of New York City highways, housing projects and infrastructure.**

**JOSHUA FRANKEL & EVE BIDDLE: SADIE LEITE**

# A Husband and Wife Work Together But Apart at Maxon Mills

**M**axon Mills in Wassaic, N.Y., was a simple grain elevator in the 1940s, hard up against the train tracks because it was at the center of a livestock auction complex in this rural part of Dutchess County.

It is now at the center of the Wassaic Project, a bustling artist community. Co-director and artist Eve Biddle has her studio within the building's white walls.

Biddle and the other founding co-directors — Jeff Barnett-Winsby, Bowie Zunino and Elan Bogarin — started the Wassaic Project in 2008. Biddle clarifies the group's initial intentions: "We wanted to make a space that really integrated artists with the community that was already here."

Biddle said she loves her personal space in the mill because "it's great to be able to integrate my art and my work and my life. There's no separation of the different things that I do in my life."

Drawings by her 18-year-old sister, who recently stayed with her for four months, hang on one wall. Her children's art is framed, on her desk, next to images of birds that were a collaboration between Biddle and her husband, contributing Wassaic Project artist Joshua Frankel.

On a separate wall is her latest project, the New Relics series (which was on display at the new Geary gallery in Millerton, N.Y.; other pieces will be shown at the Williams College Museum of Art in 2022). All the relics are handmade, mostly crafted from clay.

They are like things, she said, that you might find on a walk in the woods "and you might not know whether they were real or fantasti-

cal or manmade or made by nature or left behind by some animal or actually a bone or if it was healthy or diseased."

Downstairs in the same building is Frankel's studio — which at the time of this interview was largely bare. An animator, a painter and a composer (among other artistic titles), his newest work had been transported to Sharon, Conn., covering the walls of the Standard Space gallery. His solo exhibition "Emergent System" was on display from July 2 to Aug. 15.

To talk about his space and his inspirations, Frankel spoke while walking from the Maxon Mills to the nearby Luther Barn, where the livestock auctions were held and where the animals were kept in small pens that are now studio spaces.

The Luther Barn now has a community garden surrounding it. Inside, the old auctioneering stage is now a presentation platform for Wassaic Project resident artists.

Perhaps most important on Frankel's tour is the print shop inside the green building's wooden walls. Frankel does a lot of his work here, as does Biddle.

Much of Frankel's work involves collaboration with other artists. For instance, at the heart of "Emergent System" is an 11-minute animated film. For it, he created 1,001 drawings on 60 sheets of paper, working "in conversation" with other artists.

Choreographer Faye Driscoll staged the interaction of the bodies featured in the film; Missy Mazzoli composed the music (on six grand pianos) to which the film is synchronized.

Music and ideas are at the heart of another of Frankel's collaborative

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projects: an opera called “A Marvelous Order” about New York City planners Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs.

“Robert Moses built most of New York’s highways, the housing projects, the public swimming areas — but many of his projects caused a lot of displacement.

“Jane Jacobs was an urban theorist and activist, and her rise coincides with Moses’ fall,” Frankel said. The two visionaries had conflicting visions. Where Moses cared about infrastructure, Jacobs cared about people. “She wants to make the sidewalk bigger, he wants to make the street bigger.”

For Frankel, “it’s a story about who controls the shape of the spaces in which we live and how decisions about what to build and what to destroy get made, by whom and why.”

Frankel’s favorite part of working in Wassaic is “being part of the community of artists here. Animation can be quite solitary, so being able to pick my head up and go jump in the creek with friends in the hamlet is something I really treasure.”

During COVID-19, Biddle and Frankel also shared their workspaces with their children.

“They’re pretty great sculptors and drawers,” Biddle said warmly; creating with them was “really fun.”

#### **BOOKS THAT JOSH FRANKEL RECOMMENDS**

- “The Death and Life of Great American Cities” by Jane Jacobs
- “Jacobs’ revelatory writings about what makes a neighborhood vibrant, fun and the kind of place where we want to live — and the ideas at the heart of our opera, ‘A Marvelous Order.’ She writes about Greenwich Village (where I spent much of my childhood), but the ideas apply just as well to small towns like Wassaic.”
- “Urban Legends: The South Bronx in Representation and Ruin” by Peter L’Official
- “A new book considering how



**Eve Biddle, artist, sculptor and painter, is working on a new series, called New Relics, featuring painted clay sculptures that mimic the appearance of stray items found in the woods.**



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- “The Radiance of the King” by Camara Laye

“I just finished this novel, recommended to me by Eve’s 18-year-old sister, Penina, about a European man traveling in West Africa, written in 1954, by the brilliant Guinean writer and thinker. It is hilarious, devastating and spectacularly beautiful.”

#### **BOOKS THAT EVE BIDDLE RECOMMENDS**

- “Just Us” by Claudia Rankine
- “Bloodchild” by Octavia Butler
- “Alternative Histories: New York Art Spaces, 1960 to 2010” edited by Lauren Rosati and Mary Anne Stanszewski

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PHOTOS BY ANABELLE BAUM

Etienne Delessert is best known for his picture books, but he also creates expressive portraits on posters and canvasses, which line the floors, shelves, and tables of his studio.

ETIENNE DELESSERT: SADIE LEITE

## Reaching out to the World From an Attic Studio in Lakeville

Artist Etienne Delessert grew up in Switzerland but has lived and worked in Lakeville, Conn., since 1985.

He first came to the area in 1968, visiting friends in the Northwest Corner on vacations. He appreciated how easy the trip was by train to this part of the world from his home in New York City.

“Lakeville was close enough to New York that in the morning we could take the car and have two, three appointments in the city and then

come back at night.”

He and his wife, artist Rita Marshall, were also attracted by the beauty of the area, and the excellent schools. Their son attended Salisbury Central School and The Hotchkiss School.

Delessert’s work has international reach. He has done portraits, landscapes and many political cartoons and illustrations. In 2017, he created the foundation “Les Maitres de l’Imaginaire” in Switzerland, “to explain and promote the art of graphic



Stacks of books, each several feet tall, are spread throughout Delessert’s studio with his picture books, including “Humpty Dumpty,” “A Was an Apple Pie,” and many others mixed in.

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*"It's wonderful to be in a place where basically nobody knows you. I have shows all over the world, but people know my wife and I here for walking the dog. We are the first ones to do it, in any kind of weather."*

drawing"

The foundation has put on many shows of graphic art in France, Italy and, most recently, Beijing, China, at the Tsinghua University Art Museum. The show "Image of the West" closed after six months, on May 5, 2021.

"From this porch in Lakeville you can do a lot," Delessert said. "You can be living in a tiny place where you walk calmly without being disturbed, and you choose your friends, and you vote for public housing."

Delessert's workspace is on the very top floor of a Victorian-style house in the center of the village. Artwork and other important artifacts hang on the walls that frame the path up the stairs.

"It's a big mess, but it's my studio," the artist said of his workroom. Delessert's art is everywhere, leaning on walls, perched on an easel, rolled up in tubes. There are posters, books, a lineup of stuffed animals and several small sculptures.

There's one desk with a computer and another with art materials, parallel to large glass doors that invite in the sunlight. Delessert will sometimes clear the floor so he can work in a different position. Sometimes he works outside.

One might wonder how an artist with such international reach can work in such a small space in a little, rural town.

Curiously, the isolation and privacy are what the artist loves.

"It's wonderful to be in a place where basically nobody knows you. I have shows all over the world, but people know my wife and I here for walking the dog. We are the first ones

to do it, in any kind of weather."

Perhaps it is the peace and quiet of his surroundings that allow Delessert to work quickly and under great stress when he has assignments to do illustrations for breaking news stories.

"I've become known for doing impossible tasks," he said.

The influx of residents to this area due to the pandemic has demonstrated, Delessert said, that others had realized the magic of this part of the world. "We never saw so many dogs. We're not the only ones anymore."

### BOOKS THAT ETIENNE DELESSERT RECOMMENDS

"By recommending three books, I suppose it is somehow expected that my choices will say something about who I am,

"So, I choose three of my own books, which have traveled from France to Iran to China."

- "Night Circus," published by Creative Editions

"The story starts one evening on Route 44, as I saw a little circus with many odd characters passing slowly before me, and going ...?"

- "It," published by Creative Editions

"I never tell any of my dreams in my books. But waking up one morning I saw a strange creature, floating like a brown furry dot in a pale yellow sky. I followed it. Friend or foe?"

- "Fuzzy, Furry Hat," published by Creative Editions

"I really believe that the Noah's Ark journey was a perfectly laic story — and that a black bear saved the world."



Swiss-born artist Etienne Delessert spends his days translating his passions, nightmares and political views into books, paintings, and media of all kinds, in a studio in the attic of his Lakeville, Conn., home.

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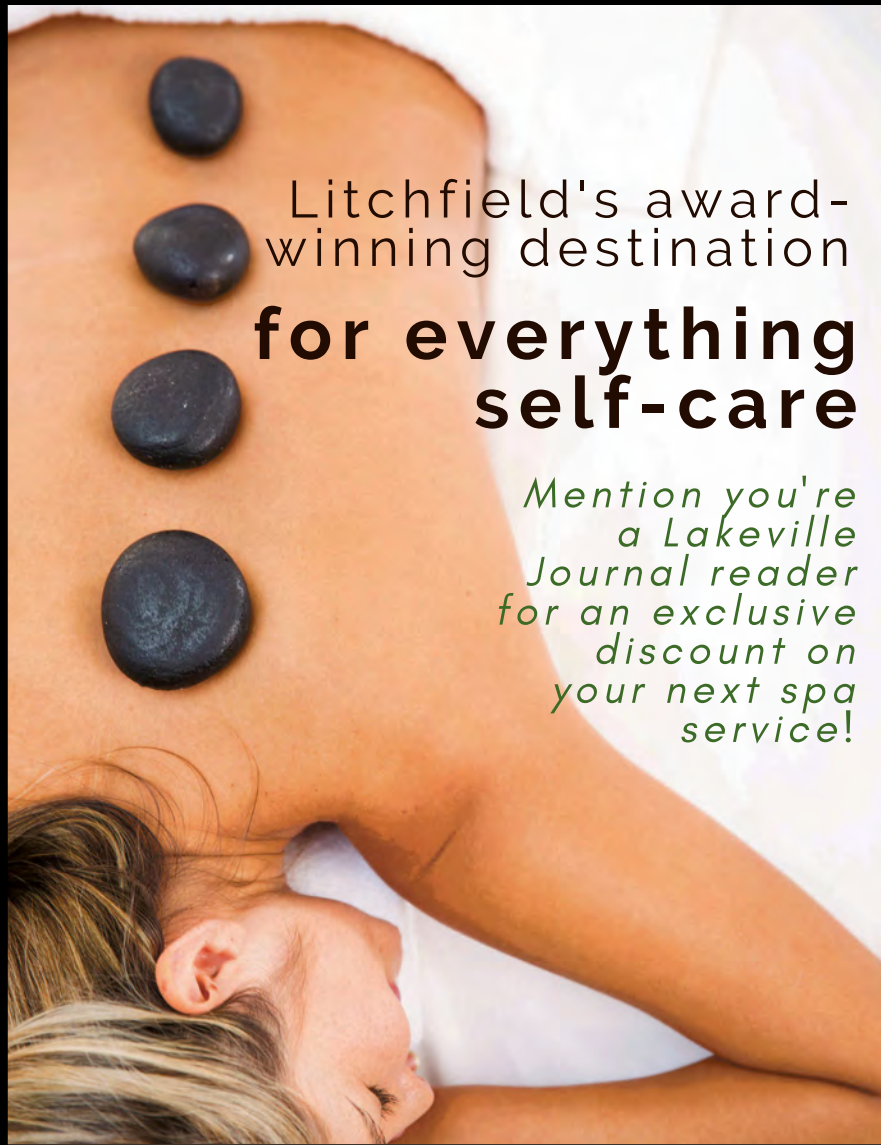
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PHOTOS BY SARI GOODFRIEND

**Robert Andrew Parker, the beloved artist (and jazz musician) who lives and works in West Cornwall, Conn., surrounds himself with memories and images that inspire him.**

**ROBERT PARKER: SARI GOODFRIEND**

## Planes, Ships, Music, Images that Transport Him Around the World

**I**'m in my studio every day. I don't know where else to go," Robert Andrew Parker (known to his friends as Bob) joked recently one morning.

This charming and talented 94-year-old West Cornwall, Conn., resident is a national treasure — but more endearingly, a local one.

He's known both as an artist (he has had a prolific fine art and illustration career) and a musician. He plays the drums and had several jazz bands, which for decades played at area venues including The White Hart in Salisbury and Washington, Conn.'s Mayflower Inn.

His radio show *Swing that Music with Bob Parker* still airs on Robin Hood Radio (WHDD, based in Sharon, Conn.), Monday through Friday from 1 to 2 p.m.

In his studio, the radio is always tuned to WHDD; Parker rhythmically taps a paint brush or pencil along to the music.

Although Parker might feel that his world is limited to the inside of his studio these days, his presence is felt widely in the Northwest Corner. It isn't just his radio show; Parker's art work is out and about all over the region. He's prolific and generously shares his work with many area li-



*Parker's studio reveals his global perspective, and love of living things (animals, insects, people) as well as his many interests and experiences. Sculptures of model airplanes that he designed, built and painted hang from the ceiling.*

libraries and other nonprofits for their annual art sales. In June and July this year, he was featured at the Cornwall Library; from now through the month of September he has several illustrations in the Book Marks show at the D.M. Hunt Library in Falls Village; and of course he was one of the many well-known names whose work was shown in early August at the Rose Algrant Art Show in Cornwall.

When asked if his artwork has a message, Parker's sense of humor again kicks in and he replies, "Well, I hope the message is, 'Buy me, buy this picture!'"

Kidding aside, his long and successful career reveals a deep intellectual curiosity that led him to make several interesting artist books. His best known might be surrealist illustrations based on Kafka's "Metamorphosis" and the character of Gregor Samsa.

The most challenging might be a collection ironically titled "German Humor," a chronicle of the atrocities of the Holocaust.

The most accessible might be the 100 or so children's books on topics ranging from the lives of Albert Einstein and Art Tatum to the origins of Hanukkah to Native American tales.

In addition to his commercial illustrations, Parker's artwork is in the collections of New York's Museum of Modern Art and Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Art Institute of



**Robert Parker's studio is thick with his own work and the work of other artists.**

Chicago, among others.

Parker's studio is a simple free-standing New England country-style structure, which is actually a converted garage.

"The previous owner had a studio upstairs, but I turned it around, put my studio downstairs and parked my car in the yard," Parker said.

There was some kismet involved in the transfer of the space. Parker is fascinated with vessels and transportation, and he learned from the prior property owner that members of the Society of Illustrators can travel with the U.S. Air Force and Navy.

"I love to travel and so I went everywhere with them — wherever there was trouble: Panama, South Africa, Rwanda," Parker said.

Parker's studio reveals his global perspective, and love of living things (animals, insects, people) as well as his many interests and experiences. Sculptures of model airplanes that he designed, built and painted hang from the ceiling.

"There used to be even more planes, but I sold and gave away a bunch of them.

"See that one there with the Italian colors? That's the one that Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia flew in the first World War.

"I'll tell you a funny story about him. There was huge support of Nazi Germany all over the country and in New York too; so LaGuardia said [they] could march on Seventh Avenue through the garment district. My friend who was a newspaperman then said that afternoon that actual sewing machines were hitting their heads."

Photos and drawings of Parker's musical heroes, family and friends are pinned to the walls. Flat files cradle much of his archive, bursting with prints, sketches and watercolors.

There are also the stray whimsical collectibles scattered about, some of mysterious origins. In nearly a century of life, he's lost track of how or when some of them appeared.

### **BOOKS THAT ROBERT PARKER RECOMMENDS**

"I like so many writers."

- Christopher Isherwood

"We named our first son, Chris, for him. Everything he wrote I liked. My parents used to tease me [about it], but I'm a great Anglophile. We exchanged letters for a while. I sold them though; not for the money, but so they wouldn't get lost. He and I never met."

- Graham Greene: everything

- Kafka: "Everything about him is interesting to me. I don't want to sound pretentious but I let dreams give me ideas in the morning. I like the spread of his sources. The story of his family is so touching — none of them survived the Holocaust. None of them. But he was gone by then." Kafka died of tuberculosis in 1924 at age 40.

- Evelyn Waugh: "I like him very much. Very cynical English writer. Wrote a lot of things that became movies."

**PETER STEINER: SADIE LEITE**

# Trying To Understand How We Make the Choices We Make, in an Attic Studio

Painter-writer-cartoonist Peter Steiner says that painting was difficult during COVID — but writing was easier. Is he serious or kidding? Sometimes it's hard to tell with him. He is soft-spoken and dry, but always witty, all of which combine to have made him a successful cartoonist for *The New Yorker* magazine (and for *The Lakeville Journal*, where his work appears weekly).

COVID-19 was a challenge for him as an artist, he said, because he couldn't hold art shows in the attic space at his home in Sharon, Conn. But then again, he didn't have any shows planned. Writing, on the other hand, "is a solitary enterprise anyway, so all that stayed the same."

His social life was affected the most. "What few social skills I had,

seemed to disappear."

On the top floor of the home where he has lived for 18 years, Steiner writes in the smaller room that materializes first through the doorway at the top of the stairs. Through a wider opening, the second and larger room is where he paints and creates cartoons. Steiner's favorite parts of the studio are "the spaciousness and the comfort of it, and the light."

He designed the house with the help of an architect. "Being an artist, I can visualize what a house can look like; so I made sketches and the architect made it better."

Steiner inserts a soft joke, claiming the only aspect of his space that he would change would be to install air conditioning. Truthfully, he would never; instead, he suggests "better



PHOTOS BY ANABELLE BAUM

**The multi-hyphenate artist Peter Steiner has separate studios for writing and painting.**

windows of higher quality."

Reflecting more on COVID, Steiner said that it stopped him from painting, that the last time he'd put brush to canvas was three or four months ago. He attributes it to the shared melancholy of COVID-19. "It impacted me in that I found it depressing. That doesn't help if you're trying to work. I think that was part of why I couldn't get going painting. It's just a sad, sad thing."

The paintings that he did create were mostly "a reaction to the virus and what happened." He also did a number of self-portraits, before switching to writing full time.

Steiner is at work on the third book in a series about Germany under Hitler's reign. They are police procedurals that explore decisions that humans make, their choices to do good or evil.

Steiner said he wishes to understand the process of falling into preventable problems. He gives the example of Donald Trump's presidency, explaining it was a part of why he chose to write about Hitler: "It could've gone the same way."

He surmises that, "It all has to do

with our faulty thinking."

## BOOKS THAT PETER STEINER RECOMMENDS

- "Thinking, Fast and Slow" by Daniel Kahnemann

"Thinking, Fast and Slow' is about how fallible our thinking is, how our intuition is unreliable and dangerous, and reason is not something we are very good at."

- "The Way We Live Now" by Anthony Trollope

"The Way We Live Now" is the one book I would want on a desert island. Either that, or George Eliot's 'Middlemarch.' The richness of Trollope's storytelling is a marvel and a joy to me."

- "And Eliot's understanding of the foundations of human behavior and the way she can take it apart into its smallest components and let us understand our various misunderstandings amazes me and brings me joy as well."

"As you can see, all three books have to do with what a mess we are. Human misunderstanding (and misbehavior) seems to have become one of my preoccupations these days."



**During COVID-19, Steiner did self-portraits but then switched to writing.**



PHOTO BY ANABELLE BAUM

Portrait and figurative artist Christopher Pouler makes paintings that showcase the human condition, in his charming shed and working studio, which sits atop a hill on his 3.5-acre property.

**CHRISTOPHER POULER: SADIE LEITE**

## An Artist Finds his Place in the World Through his Portraits

One of many patches of forest in Lakeville, Conn., featuring a steep hill, is painter Christopher Pouler's "Little Walden Pond without the pond."

Three years ago, Pouler and his wife bought the property, which measures 3.5 acres.

Their initial plan was to build a house there, but it was too expensive. Pouler had always wished for a studio outside his home, so he switched gears to fulfill those dreams. A friend, who is a builder, recommended that Pouler buy a custom-made shed, instead of building a small cabin from scratch.

It was an epic challenge to deliver the shed to the "Thoreau-esc" plot. It took two hours for a hydraulic-powered truck to "inchworm" the shed up the steep hill.

After its installation, Pouler furnished the inside. There is no electricity, so he uses a super-charged lithium-ion battery to fuel the lights in the studio, and a woodfired stove to keep warm in winter.

Reflecting on his favorite parts of the studio, Pouler reflected, "I love where I am. It's in the woods. It's super secluded."

*Continued on page 20*

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## ... Pouler

Continued from page 19

But it has its downsides. “It would be nice not to freeze for the first half an hour in the winter,” waiting for his stove to warm up the small room. Still, Pouler feels wiring the shed with electricity is not needed: he’s content with the battery and stove.

Pouler is also a designer, creating sets for broadcast news and television. With COVID-19, that work stopped — which allowed Pouler to focus on painting.

“The good thing is that, since COVID-19, I’ve been in the studio practically every day.”

A portrait and figurative artist, Pouler is interested in “the human condition and how it differs depending on where you find yourself.”

When Pouler became a father 20 years ago, he realized that his children would have privileges that are not available to so many children —

refugee children, for example, who are faced with challenging environments all over the world.

“It’s random how you end up in a place — your life could so easily have been completely different.”

He painted pieces that showed his own children and refugee children, to reflect those thoughts.

With these portraits, he hopes to show that, no matter who they are, “this person or that person is a beautiful girl or young man or old guy.”

One of his portraits in progress is a young woman refugee from Iraq, whom Pouler described as a success story: “She’s in a safe place now.”

Pouler has a show coming up at the Berkshire School in Sheffield, Mass., in November; it will include her finished portrait, floating above two panels painted with yellow flowers.

*“It’s random how you end up in a place — your life could so easily have been completely different.”*

Pouler chooses the word “installation” for his coming show — appropriate, because he hopes to “meld” his designing and painting skills. He also wishes to engage the students fully in the show, by having them write to child refugees in detention centers.

### BOOKS THAT CHRIS POULER RECOMMENDS

- “The Time Traveler’s Wife,” by Audrey Niffenegger

“This is an intelligent, quirky and beautifully written novel. It’s a story of a couple who learn to cope with the arbitrary nature of the husband’s

time-traveling ability.”

- Tao Te Ching by Laotzu

“This book, written in the 4th century B.C., has been by my side since my freshman year of college. It contains what I believe to be some of the simplest yet most profound philosophy that I have ever read.”

- “Anselm Kiefer: A Monograph,” by Dominique Baqué

“This is a well-written and spectacularly illustrated monograph of one of the greatest living artists. While his art is completely different than mine, I am nonetheless inspired by it and his creative fearlessness.”

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## FISHING BOOKS: PATRICK L. SULLIVAN

# When it Rains, There Are Fishing Books

Like many fanatic fly-fishers, I have lots of books on the subject. I buy them. People give them to me. Some are wonderful. Some are outdated. Some are ridiculous.

I took a look at the primary fish book shelf, shoving fly rod tubes out of the way to do so. And here is what I found after an exhaustive and highly scientific search that took three minutes:

1) **“Instinctive Fly Fishing”** by Taylor Streit. Streit is a guide in Taos, N.M., and I once fished with someone who fished with him a lot. So he’s practically a close friend. Anyhoo, any fly-rodder at any skill level can learn something (or be reminded of something) useful from this book.

2) **“Presentation”** by Gary Borger. This coffee table-size book is inexplicably out of print. If you find one, grab it, even unto half your kingdom (or a hundred bucks, whichever comes first). Loaded with tactical tips that seem obvious once you read about it.

3) **“The Optimist”** by David Coggins. This is brand new and got good reviews from the usual media suspects, who notoriously enjoy the most appalling bilge.

So I was prepared to hate it, and was denied the pleasure.

Coggins goes around and fishes in places I will probably never get to, and describes it in a humble, amusing manner. I dislike fishing with anybody, but I’d fish with this guy.

4) **“Casting a Spell”** by George

Black. This account of the bamboo rod and the author’s attempts to collect a few for himself is very interesting and just the thing for those gray, cold days in mid-February when the sun comes out around 11 a.m., throws in the towel at 2 p.m., and you’ve got permanent glaucoma from looking out your plastic-covered windows.

5) **“Trout Madness”** by Robert Traver. Every car I’ve ever owned has been called “The Fish Car.” This book is why.

If P.G. Wodehouse wrote about fly-fishing it would come out like this.

6) **“Dances with Trout”** is our representative selection from John Gierach. It doesn’t matter which one you get. They’re all terrific. I rip him off regularly for my “Tangled Lines” columns for The Lakeville Journal. (If you’re gonna steal, might as well steal from the top shelf.)

7) **“Trout Streams of Southern New England”** by Tom Fuller. Part of the excellent Backcountry Guide series. Only problem is that some of the info in this 1999 book is out of

date in 2021.

8) **“Flyfisher’s Guide to Connecticut”** by Ron Merly. This is one of another excellent series of guide books, and was published in 2012, which is better than 1999.

9) **“Simple Flies”** by Morgan Lyle. I don’t tie flies but I know people who do. This collection of recipes for 52 easily tied patterns is laid out in such a way that I can take photos of the relevant pages, send them to a guy, and say, “Like that. Four dozen, please.” I especially recommend the Deer Hair Sedge in sizes 12 and 16.

10) **“Fly Fishing for Smallmouth Bass”** by Harry Murray. Murray’s Fly Shop in Edinburg, Va., is one of those legendary places everybody should go to once, and Murray himself is the undisputed king of the bronzeback. He also gets kudos for pointing out the obvious: that trout and smallmouth eat a lot of the same stuff, so you don’t need to change your entire approach, nor do you need to buy a lot of new gear. Although if you want to, he’s got it in stock.



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