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## Historic Art Venues: Complementing the Space

- Marion Wolberg Weiss

While the North Fork has its own geographic traits, there are other aspects that distinguish it from the East End, especially historic structures, some of which have been converted into art galleries.

Take, for example, Greenport's deCordova Studio, owned by Hector deCordova. Here's an artist who's been on the South Fork

for a long time but pulled up stakes a few years ago with his wife, Joyce, to move into a Victorian house on the North Fork. Built in 1905, the residence has its original spruce floors and molding, a metal stamp ceiling and lots of columns. It was a perfect place to hold the deCordova's collection of architectural objects. It was also a perfect venue for an art gallery.

And that's exactly what it is today, with the upstairs floor providing living quarters. There's a sense of complete comfort and warmth, and there are no hard edges to be found. The owners have used this setting to good advantage, showing art that complements the space. Thus, most of the paintings in the current exhibit have muted colors, many employing earth tones. There are no geometric abstractions, most styles being impressionistic or expressionistic.

Cases in point. Barbara McClatchie's images blend into one another, their compositions recalling primal landscapes and states of mind. Archetypical images are also created by Georgia Charuhas, a Mexican resident who features heroic women in shades of oranges and browns. Swiss born Verena Michel's still life also captures the mood of muted orange.

Jamesport Manor Inn is another historic structure with an art gallery, but it occupies a country setting. Initially built in the late 1800s, the Inn overlooks a peaceful field, and since it's off the main road, there's a quiet ambience as well. The shows are varied, highlighting both North and South Fork artists. For example, last month's exhibition featured small expressionistic works by John Randolph, moody and mysterious. Also on display were Sibylle-Maria Pfaffenbichler's big and bold scenes of Harlem social life, circa the 1920s.



deCordova Gallery in Greenport

The current show offers other diversity. Olive Reich's still lifes are homegrown, fitting into the country atmosphere of the Inn itself. In "Pitcher and Pear," flowers and a pear sit on a checkered cloth, the items familiar and reminiscent of the past. Her colors and composition also convey a lushness that is welcoming and relevant.

Doug Reina's work presents a different picture, his paintings depicting local scenes, like Montauk, with wider views. His style is more realistic than Reich's as well, but there's still a sense of the past in "Racing with Time," showing old cars in a flea market setting.

With this exhibit, the past is not always directly represented, but who says the art has to connect with the venue's history?

Finally, Shelter Island's Mosquito Hawk Gallery is another quaint structure (a church) filled with history and art. The church was built in 1890 and has served as an artist's studio, meeting place for the Masons, a children's museum and, most recently, a furniture store. This is the second season for owner Alexis Martino, and the gallery bears her distinct stamp of individuality.

Mosquito Hawk (another name for dragonfly) is a venue that's surprising and innovative because the art does not complement the décor. Yet therein lies its strength.

Consider the exhibit that just closed: digital mixed media by 13-year-old Isabelle Weber that she drew, scanned and painted. The figures are, frankly speaking, somewhat grotesque, but fascinating. Viewers simply cannot avert their gazes.

Marshall Weber's rubbings represent history which is more in keeping with the church's setting: work from gravestones, as well as images recalling the "murderous" Wild Wild West. Obviously, interest in the bizarre is something shared by the Webers.

Work by Allyson Mellberg - etchings with organic inks developed by the artist herself - is intriguing, too. The technique seems to somehow fit the venue's ambience, and although the subject matter recalls figures from the film, *Freaks*, it is fascinating, nonetheless.

*The exhibit at deCordova Studio, "Here's To Your Health," will be on view until late June. The exhibit at The Jamesport Manor Inn will be available until August 5. Work is available for view at Mosquito Hawk Gallery upon request. The next show opens May 23.*