

# INSPIRATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

## DOVER'S ART CENTER BUILDS VIBRANT ARTS COMMUNITY

### COMMUNITY

A WINDOW TO THE  
UNIVERSE  
MAY 3 THROUGH 31

THE ART CENTER |  
NEW HAMPSHIRE ART  
ASSOCIATION MEMBERS  
EXHIBITION  
JUNE 1 THROUGH 30

1 WASHINGTON STREET,  
SUITE 1177  
DOVER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Marsha Wilcox, *Milky  
Way with Constellations*,  
2018, 12" x 18"; on view in  
"Windows into the Universe"  
exhibition in May.

Located at a deep bend of the Cochecho River in the beating heart of burgeoning Dover, New Hampshire, is where you'll find the historic Washington Street Mills complex. Over the past few years, something special has happened within this former textile mill, as the Seacoast Region city it calls home – the oldest permanent settlement in New Hampshire – has transformed into one of the fastest-growing communities in the state.

This circa-1880s mill complex has sprung to new life through the efforts of a vigorous and varied blend of

talented entrepreneurs. At the core of it all is a thriving artists' colony anchored by a multifunctional creation, exhibition and performance space named The Art Center which is well-served by the boundless and infectious energy of its passionate owner, Rebecca Proctor.

In the damp gray of early-April, as the New England spring struggled to find its foothold, Artscope Magazine's Eric J. Taubert visited with Rebecca Proctor to learn more about all of the colorful goings-on already blossoming in 2022 at The Art Center.



BOTTOM LEFT: Sarah  
Cassini, *Curiosities:*  
*Mother's Key*, 2020, oil on  
canvas, on view in June.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Sean  
McHugh, *The Kraken*, oil,  
on view in June.



**Hello, Rebecca. Thanks for taking some time to speak with me today. I'd like to begin by asking how the art center got started at the Washington Street Mills?**

**RP:** I'm a custom framer with a background in marketing and communications and I've catered my business toward the artists in the seacoast and surrounding areas for many years. Over time, I became more engaged in the art community, the New Hampshire Arts Commission, and other art endeavors in the area. Just over four years ago, I had an opportunity to relocate and move into this 6,000-square foot facility, which enabled me to make space for a number of artists working in a variety of media.

**You've accomplished quite a bit with the art center in such a short duration of time. How was your concept evolved since 2018?**

**RP:** In the beginning, the Art Center had a number of artists with their own studios, a stage and gallery space and exhibits were primarily local art. During the pandemic, I began to branch out into an online format which attracted artists from all over the country. Then we began to get international attention. Now we have a wonderful mix of in-person and online art shows which regularly attract local, regional and international artists submitting work. We've built a vibrant community where artists can find affordable spaces to work, along with exhibit space – an intimate place where visitors can see people creating and attend exhibits all in one place.

Artists initially come here to find an environment that provides inspiration and encouragement to make the best art they can. What they ultimately end up finding is so much more – fulfilling relationships and encouragement in many aspects of their lives.



**Your artist-in-residence program at the Art Center gets a lot of buzz. Can you tell me a little more about how it's structured?**

**RP:** We began our Artist-in-Residence program a couple of years ago which was sponsored by Market Square Jewelers, a local business here in Dover. When it started, three artists were sponsored and each had four months to create a body of work. At the end of the year, their work was presented in a group exhibit.

This past year, the Artist-in-Residence program sponsored seven artists. As additional sponsors continue to get involved in this program, we are encouraging more and more artists to come to The Art Center and create work using our resources.

It's very important to me that the artists here get along with each other and be supportive of each other. That, above all, is what makes this community what it is.

**And you also have a pretty impressive print-making studio...**

**RP:** Yes, our print-making studio has become a linchpin of The Art Center's in-person classes. A lot of artists that have applied to be residents are printmakers and they

TOP: The 2nd Annual Page Turner event in 2019 hosted authors from throughout New England.

BOTTOM LEFT: Robert Weinstein, *The Dancer 2*, oil on canvas, on view in June.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Kyle Nelson, *Red Eye*, acrylic, paint and pen on canvas, on view in June.





are making beautiful work! We have a Sturges press from the early 20th century, and a state-of-the-art Takach etching press. With these presses, artists are able to explore a variety of print-making techniques from Intaglio and monoprint to etching, linocut and more. We are also creating a print gallery where works are framed and made available for sale.

**When I showed a few of my photographs at the "Faces" exhibition during your "Celebration of the Arts" event last fall, I had ample opportunity to witness the depth with which you create multi-faceted happenings at the Art Center. Music, art, cultural awareness, community partnerships, theater, poetry and more all come together – true community events. What are the most important lessons you've learned about getting people in the community (and regionally) to show up for art events?**

**RP:** I've learned to use all avenues of publication that are available to me, as well as to have top quality press releases. It's important for the public to see and hear something that engages them – something that makes our events seem exciting and worth seeing. It's also important to cross-promote events with other venues; and to take advantage of other outlets, such as the New Hampshire Art Association.

**Can you tell me a little more about The Art Center's partnership with the New Hampshire Art Association?**

**RP:** This relationship occurred when I went to the New Hampshire Art Association to visit some artists who were exhibiting, and met the director, Amanda Kidd Schall. She was interested in what we were doing at The Art Center, and I was interested in the work of the New Hampshire Art Association. This has been an incredibly beneficial relationship for both of us. We have each been able provide access to artists and bodies of work that each organization didn't have access to before this relationship came about.

**Let's talk about Dover. It feels like a city in the midst of change...**

**RP:** Dover has definitely been changing. Certainly, Dover is becoming an arts destination; but there is also something of a fear that with rising housing prices, many artists will be pushed out of the city into lower-cost surrounding communities. It would definitely be helpful if Dover remained mindful that many artists rely on affordable housing in order to remain in an area.

**Do you feel The Art Center has contributed to some of the recent changes in Dover?**

**RP:** Since The Art Center has been in operation, we have been acknowledged state-wide and internationally,

with artists world-wide taking note of what has been happening here. It has been becoming more commonplace to have visitors from Boston, New York, Canada, Europe and South America. Artists have been submitting art from pretty much everywhere. Through The Art Center, Dover has become noticed as a genuine art destination. And I'm very honored to report that I will be receiving the 2022 Community Arts Champion Award from the Greater Dover Chamber of Commerce. This is the first time they have ever given an Art Award.

**Regarding your Late-Spring programming, what do you have planned exhibition-wise for The Art Center?**

**RP:** In May, we have an astronomy related exhibit entitled 'Windows into the Universe.' There are a number of exciting offerings from some fine artists; and John Gianforte who is the observatory director at the University of New Hampshire is coordinating the exhibit with The Art Center and will be offering a presentation at the reception.

In June, we will be having a joint exhibit showing the work of members of both the New Hampshire Art Association and The Art Center. This is an exciting opportunity for the community to see the work of the finest artists in New Hampshire, the Seacoast, and beyond.

I'm hopeful that Artscope Magazine readers will be encouraged to visit The Art Center, attend our events, take-in our exhibitions, and see what we are all about.



ABOVE: Printmaking instructor Diane St. Jean.

BELOW: The opening reception for Art Center Dover's "Faces" exhibition in September 2021.

