

**PLACE AND FAMILIARITY:  
CONVERSATIONS (ACTUAL AND IMAGINED)  
WITH FIVE AMERICAN PAINTERS**  
by  
**Jill Finsen**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Painting at  
The New York Studio School  
Of Drawing, Painting & Sculpture**

**May 2018**

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Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Painting.**

**Accepted on behalf of the Faculty of the New York Studio School  
by the Thesis Committee:**

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## In Appreciation

Thank you to the three artists with whom I spoke and all five whose work has left a mark on me: Milton Avery; Harold Garde; Marsden Hartley; William Irvine; and Paul Resika.

To the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting & Sculpture (NYSS) current and former faculty and writing advisor, I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to work directly with you in preparing for this thesis at this extraordinary institution: Graham Nickson; Elisa Jensen; Karen Wilkin; Aimée Brown-Price; Ron Milewicz; Chantal Lee; and Paul D'Agostino.

The community at NYSS is exceptional. I am enormously grateful, in particular, to my studio-mates and now good friends Audrey Cohn-Ganz and Mark Milroy for their support and encouragement throughout these last two years.

It is my good fortune to befriend my Maine rowing partner, Deborah Evans, who provided me with the rich details of Marsden Hartley's stay with her in-laws in West Brooksville, Maine.

To my favorite sister Susie Finsen and dear friend George Kimmerling, your ongoing generous support has made the intense two-year journey much more tolerable and even fun. I am indebted to you both. And finally, thank you to my parents, Gita and Irving Finsen who gave me license to do just what I wanted.

## CONTENTS

Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Plates/Illustrations .....	v
Abstract.....	vii
Chapter 1: On the Coast—Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Cold Tea and Single Malt Scotch Forsaken—William Irvine .....	3
Chapter 3: I Don't Know from Boats; I Don't Swim and I Don't Sail— Paul Resika .....	8
Chapter 4: No Pretty Cups—Harold Garde .....	13
Chapter 5: Taking License—Marsden Hartley.....	17
Chapter 6: Painting on My Own Terms—Milton Avery.....	22
Chapter 7: Paint What You Love and Make It Your Own—Conclusion .....	26
Bibliography .....	28

## List of Plates/Illustrations

1. William Irvine, *Heading Out*, 2012. Oil on board. 26 x 36 inches. Collection Pat and Carol Jackson.
2. William Irvine, *Evening Sail*, 2007. Oil on board. 26 x 36 inches. Collection Lee Smith and Hal Crowther.
3. William Irvine, *Calling in the Cats*, 2013. Oil on board. 16 x 20 inches. Collection of the artist.
4. Paul Resika, *Headland II (Moon, High Head)*, 2001, Oil on canvas. 64 x 51 inches.
5. Paul Resika, *Moon and Boat (Pendulum)*, 2003–2007, Oil on canvas. 81 x 65 inches.
6. Paul Resika, *Black and White Vessels*, 2008, Oil on canvas. 76 x 76 inches.
7. Harold Garde, *Two Pitchers*, 2002. Oil on canvas. 30 x 22 inches.
8. Harold Garde, *Yellow Chair*, 1983. Acrylic on canvas. 56 x 30 inches.
9. Marsden Hartley, *Flaming American (Swim Champ)*, 1939–1940. 40  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 30  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Baltimore Museum of Art.
10. Marsden Hartley, *Birds of the Bagaduce*, 1939. Oil on board. 28 x 22 inches. The Butler Institute of Art, Youngstown, Ohio.
11. Marsden Hartley, *Flowers from Claire Spencer's Garden*, 1939–1940. Oil on composition board. 28  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 22  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.
12. Milton Avery, *Bathers by the Sea*, 1960. Oil on canvas. 50 x 72 inches. Private Collection.

13. Mark Rothko, *Three Women*, c.1935. Oil on canvas. 23 x 19 inches. Collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation.
14. Milton Avery, *Portrait of Marsden Hartley*, 1943. Oil on canvas. 12½ x 12 inches. The Phillips Collection.
15. Milton Avery, *Sails in Sunset Sea*, 1960. Oil on canvas. 72 x 52 inches.
16. Jill Finsen, *Studio View 7*, 2017, Oil on canvas, 18 x 18 inches.
17. Jill Finsen, *Studio View 16*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 inches.
18. Jill Finsen, *Yellow Chair*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 36 x 36 inches.
19. Jill Finsen, *White Sail*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 36 x 36 inches..
20. Jill Finsen, *Locale One*, 2015. Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches.
21. Jill Finsen, *Rimmed Sun*, 2013. Oil on linen, 30 x 30 inches.
22. Jill Finsen, *Virginia*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 20 x16 inches.
23. Jill Finsen, *Yellow Sail*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 20 x 20 inches.
24. Jill Finsen, *Self Portrait*, 2014. Oil on board, 30 x 30 inches.

## **Abstract**

How do painters choose their subjects, and what influences them to do so? For me, place and a sense of familiarity are paramount; they are central themes that apply to more than just landscape. Interior and exterior views, domestic scenes and people hold my interest as a painter because I am connected emotionally to them. Recognizing this prompted me to explore what motivates other painters to select their subjects. I began to reflect on the lives of painters whose work resonates with me, and this led me back to New England, where I was raised. My thesis comprises interviews I have had with some of those painters and interviews I wished I could have had to explore what motivates and has motivated these artists.

## Chapter 1: On the Coast—Introduction

Prior to becoming a painter 18 years ago, I photographed for many years. Given a Brownie camera when I was a child in the 1950s, I pursued my love of photography using a range of cameras, from 35mm to 8x10 inch—photographing, processing and printing black-and-white film. I mostly photographed in my free time while I had a demanding full-time career in nonprofit policy and legislative work at AARP.

In 1990, I was invited to photograph members of AARP’s Board of Directors and National Policy Council. I was deliberate in how I depicted these older accomplished people. Sometimes a photographic session would take two days, as subject and photographer sought a sense of familiarity and relaxation. I didn’t want to “take” or “shoot” the picture. I wanted an image to reflect and celebrate the subject and have the process be a joint project between my subject and me.

My painting process mirrors my approach to photography. There is always a warming-up process, and if I do not attain a sense of familiarity with my subject, my time at the easel is not successful. I spend a significant amount of time considering both the subject and the painting, exploring my affinity for the subject and attempting to capture that in the work—whether the subject is in front of me or in memory. In the last year, the view from my easel in the Benton South Studio, for example, has drawn me in and become a much beloved subject.

Growing up in New England, I spent considerable time on the coasts of Maine and Massachusetts, and my affinity for paintings created from those landscapes has sustained itself over the years. Thus, I have been drawn to painters associated with that region, including Milton Avery, Marsden Hartley, Paul Resika, William Irvine, and Henry Garde, each of whom I visited with for this thesis.

I chose to discuss painters mostly who worked in landscapes that I, too, love—specifically Maine’s Blue Hill Peninsula and Massachusetts’ North Shore and Outer Cape Cod. The painters are in their late 80’s and mid 90’s and all still working. In addition to those discussed here, I would add Edward Dickinson, Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb. I also want to pay homage to a distinct group of painters. Although not associated with the New England coast, they have made an important mark on me: Georges Braque; Henri Matisse; Nicolas de Staël; Richard Diebenkorn; David Park; Alfred Maurer; and Elmer Bischoff.

In the three actual interviews, the questions and answers below are based on my notes, rather than a recording. Sometimes the conversations are enhanced by additional materials—including interviews with and writings about the painters. In the two fictive interviews, I ‘sit down’ with Milton Avery and Marsden Hartley. Both have strongly influenced my work, and I have focused on a specific area or time in their career, having the conversation I might have had if given the opportunity to do so.

**Chapter 2: Cold Tea and Single Malt Scotch Forsaken—William Irvine**  
**Conversation in Brooklin, Maine, January 3, 2018**

I visited Bill Irvine at his home in Brooklin, Maine, during a very cold winter spell. I have been drawn to Bill's paintings for some time and had attended his artist talks in recent years at Courthouse Gallery in Ellsworth, Maine, and at Brooklin's Friends Memorial Library.

I arrived around 3:30 p.m., and I knew the afternoon light would fade quickly. Though I understood that Bill is not a *plein air* painter, I wanted to learn more about how painters are influenced by studio views—how they process the environment they experience. I arrived with a mutual friend, David Porter, one of Fairfield Porter's nephews.

**Jill Finsen:** I am hoping that before we sit down to discuss your work that we could have a look at your studio. I would like to see what you are looking at when you make your paintings while there is still light.

**William Irvine:** *(After some hesitation, and in a lovely Scottish brogue),* I don't relish taking anyone to my studio. In fact, my wife Margery is not allowed in the studio without my invitation. It is the place to which I escape. I say a prayer and then hope for a miracle when I get there! *(laughing)*

*There was a pause and I stayed quiet for a bit. The temperature was about five degrees Fahrenheit outside, and we would have to cross the snow-packed lawn to get to Bill's studio. He looked at me as I explained that I was trying to decipher what he was seeing from his studio. He finally reached for*

*his jacket, and we embarked on the chilly walk. I was honored based on what he had told many others and me about the sacrosanct status of the studio. We soon arrived at a small and very understated workspace.*

**WI:** I have not been working for the last week because it has just been too cold. The studio takes quite a while to warm up.

**JF:** I really appreciate your making the exception for 'visitors' to the studio. I envisioned that you would have a more expansive view to your beloved Tinker Island and the Blue Hill Bay, as you do from the house.

**WI:** I made a deliberate decision in building the studio to have more wall space. I put in some skylights, but I don't really need the view. By the time I come into the studio, I am all fired up and know what I am going to paint. I come in with a cup of tea and hours later it is cold, as I have forgotten to drink it. I get to look at Tinker Island from my house all the time. And the distinctive Maine clouds stay in my brain. At this point, I don't need to be painting from observation.



Fig 1. William Irvine, *Heading Out*, 2012. Oil on board. 26 x 36 inches. Collection Pat and Carol Jackson.

**JF:** Do you have a defined approach when you are starting a new painting?

**WI:** Well, you know I am in my late 80's. By now I have become more intuitive and am better at handling paint. I am not so concerned with laying out paint from which to pick and choose. Besides which (*with a laugh*), I probably cannot find the colors to lay out. But I certainly understand how to correct the imbalance of the composition more quickly.

*We returned to the house, where Bill offered me a glass of Laphroig Quarter Cask. Regrettably I declined, in favor of tea so I could be fully attentive during our visit.*

**WI:** I have painted all my life and knew that I wanted to be a painter from a very young age. I moved to London to study and paint. I met my first wife, an American, in London. It is still quite something to think we responded to a newspaper ad for a house in Maine with 100 acres for \$4,000 in 1968. We arrived to a dilapidated house on desolate land with snow on the ground in April. We soon moved to the coast where the sounds of gulls, surf and boats were familiar to me, as I grew up on the coast of Scotland. And I have been on the coast ever since.

**JF:** Your landscapes and seascapes are presented in a unique and charming manner—not a literal representation of how the land or seascape is viewed. But the viewer gets it.

**WI:** Drawn to the landscape not so much in a realistic manner but as an emotional offering, I am concerned that my viewers do not fall off the edge. Walking the fine line between realism and abstraction, I want my paintings to

be intellectually stimulating and something that viewers can relate to. I want to broaden the field.



Fig 2. William Irvine, *Evening Sail*. 2007. Oil on board. 26 x 36 inches. Collection Lee Smith and Hal Crowther.

**JF:** Your paintings of shacks with people squeezed into doorways and windows. Where does that come from?

**WI:** We spent time in fishing villages when we first moved here. I remember the fishing shacks that are iconically simple. With a door and window and shape I can rework into the houses, I call them my 'comfort' paintings. I usually put one or two figures in the doorway or window as though the viewer is passing by and visiting the private lives of people who live there. I adapt the buildings as expression. The simple structure attracted me.



Fig 3. William Irvine, *Calling in the Cats*, 2013. Oil on board, 16 x 20 inches. Collection of the artist.

By the way, Jill, I looked at your website before you came to visit. I see we are clearly influenced by some of the same painters including Henri Matisse, Marsden Hartley and Milton Avery.

**JF:** Bill, it is an honor to hear that you identified our shared influences and that you looked at my work. Thanks so much for your time and, especially, taking me to your studio.

### **Chapter 3: I Don't Know from Boats; I Don't Swim and I Don't Sail—**

**Paul Resika**

**Conversation in New York City, New York, February 16, 2018**

Paul Resika's repeated motifs—small boats, the iconic Provincetown, Massachusetts, harbor and fishing piers—and his use of color and shape have drawn me in for two decades. I know his work from exhibitions and I heard him speak in small intimate New York City galleries. Aimeé Brown-Price generously offered to formerly introduce me to Paul. An art historian, Aimeé had never been to Paul's Upper West Side New York City studio and asked if she could join us.

Paul's studio is on the fifth floor, and at 89 years old, he had hoofed it up the stairs when the elevator stopped working the day we met him. I spent a delightful two hours—when Aimeé left for an appointment, I offered to leave as well. But Paul was interested in continuing to talk when she excused herself. I was hearing about painters whose work I had long admired during the afternoon from first-hand accounts.

**Jill Finsen:** Paul, how and when did you get interested in art?

**Paul Resika:** I grew up in Washington Heights [in New York City], and my mother recognized my interest in making art. I was 13 years old when she sent me all the way downtown on Saturdays and Sundays to study with the artist Sol Wilson. I was the only young kid in the class. Sol would set up landscapes that would include rocks, horizons and lighthouses in the studio. He would talk about making the horizon lighter or warmer. Sometimes he

would work alongside us. The class was small, and we all had his attention. Wilson discusses his commitment to instruction and painting.

A highly respected and sought after teacher at the Y.M.H.A., the School of Art Studies, American Artists School and the Art Students League in New York, Wilson instructed his students: 'You cannot escape your own feelings, or your lack of feeling about life in your painting.' The artist, he believed, must put his whole self into his work. Wilson himself was deeply influenced by his teacher at the Ferrer School, George Bellows. In referring to Bellows, Wilson might be describing his own style of teaching. He says that Bellows was very important to his work because 'of his directness in painting methods and because he was a real human being. Never pedantic—never the professor. He was one of us and frequently became one of his own class, by actually drawing along with his students.'<sup>1</sup>

**JF:** I know Sol Wilson's work from Provincetown. So your idea of boats and water stem from those days?

**PR:** The truth is I don't know from boats. I don't sail. I don't swim. I just like the motif and somehow I mastered the concept of it when I was pretty young before I went to the Cape.

**JF:** Where else did you get your formal education?

**PR:** I never really had a formal education. But I had the opportunity to study with some remarkable artists and teachers, including Hans Hofmann. I spent two years with him—really learning about color.

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<sup>1</sup> Sol Wilson, Julie Heller Gallery. Accessed 31 March 2018, <https://www.juliehellergallery.com/sol-wilson>



Fig 4. Paul Resika,  
*Chromatic Vessels*, 2000.  
Oil on canvas. 20 x 24  
inches.

**JF:** Ah yes, color is one of your primary languages as well.

I know Provincetown pretty well having spent a good amount of time there since my college years. Your Provincetown is like no one else's, be it Sol Wilson or Hans Hofmann's.

**PR:** I have been painting from nature for 40 years. I was fortunate that Hofmann taught us where things go.

*At the end of our time together, Paul looked at a few images of mine. He talked about how many clouds I needed. Should I move them around? When I told him that one of my images is based on a Provincetown neighborhood called Beach Point, he was disturbed because it seemed a bit hilly. Thinking this over, I am reminded by what he said in 2001, responding to a question posed from David Shapiro: "I once asked [Resika] whether a painting was of*

a Provincetown I did not know. He responded it was a Provincetown I would or could never know. It was a fiction: fictive music.”<sup>2</sup>



Fig 5. Paul Resika, *Moon and Boat (Pendulum)*, 2003–2007. Oil on canvas. 81 x 65 inches.

Because we did not have enough time to talk about all of the issues, I ‘continued our conversation’ about form through Bruce Weber’s publication.

Form became his ‘preoccupation...you have to follow your form and hope it leads to good things’. In the late 1990s, Resika began increasingly to pare his subjects down to the essentials of sky, water,

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce Weber, *See It Loud: Seven Post-war American Painters*, (National Academy Museum, New York), 2013, 36.

land, house, tree and figure, so that by the end of the following decade, he was pushing forms toward complete dissolution.

In a series of paintings of boats dating from the late 1990s Resika at last broke away almost completely from the naturalistic imagery. Boat and building-like forms morph into hot and radiantly colored geometric shapes, including rectangles, triangles, squares, and circles, which are flushed against a background field of monochromatic color. David Carbone interprets the vessels as symbolic of “soul boats,” and the dashing painted background quivers and glows with an almost corporeal presence.<sup>3</sup>



Fig 6. Paul Resika, *Black and White Vessels*, 2008, Oil on canvas. 76 x 76 inches.

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Weber, *See It Loud: Seven Post-war American Painters*, (National Academy Museum, New York, 2013, 37.

**Chapter 4: No Pretty Cups—Harold Garde**  
**Conversation via Telephone from His Home in**  
**New Smyrna Beach, Florida, March 25, 2018**

I met Harold Garde during the summer of 2017. He lives in Belfast, Maine, during the summer, and he was very generous during a studio visit and invited friends and me to return to continue the relationship with him. He is a robust almost-95-year-old, raised in New York City. He taught art to support his family and continues to paint regularly. I chose to focus on his still life paintings for our conversation.

**Jill Finsen:** Harold, I want to explore your still lifes in black and white and your chair series in particular. The paintings are really distinctive, and I wonder if you are making the paintings from observation?

**Harold Garde:** I rarely set up the subject in recent years. Although in the early years, certainly I was looking at subjects as part of my education. I had the opportunity to go to school with the GI bill after the war [i.e., World War II]. I went to University of Wyoming for my undergraduate work and because there was so much interest in pursuing education after the war, schools were not set up with permanent faculty. Some of my teachers came out of Black Mountain College. Back to your question, Jill. My concern is not to follow a formula. The objects come out of the painting and usually emerge later.

**JF:** So what are you thinking about while you are at the easel?

**HG:** Sometimes I am thinking about what is not in the picture. I am trying to simplify in a sensory overloaded world. I am not trying to make the cup “pretty.” I am thinking how the cup or the vase is going to serve me and the

viewer. My challenge is to make the elements work. I do not want it to be or look preconceived.



Fig 7. Harold Garde, *Two Pitchers*, 2002. Acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 inches.

**JF:** Your still life paintings in black and white look like they are simply constructed and are convincing.

**HG:** I think they might have something to do with how I viewed images growing up. Newspaper images and reproductions were always in black and white. Thank goodness I got to see art in museums in New York. But I do think it has something to do with how images were conveyed in those early years for me. I really looked at construction because the color was not always available. And I remember one of my professors at Columbia talked about “*nature morte*”—my proclivity for languages was not very good. But what I do remember that he said, “There is nothing dead about your still life work”.

**JF:** And your chair series, mostly in color, is very unusual. The chairs are very convincing. But many of them only have two legs.

**HG:** I didn't mean to render the chairs. I wanted the form. The other two legs were not integral to the image. It is not that I forgot them. I just did not need them.



Fig 8. Harold Garde, *Yellow Chair*, 1983. Acrylic on canvas. 56 x 40 inches.

*Harold's comments were augmented by curator Jeanne M. Dowis' comments that the chairs were in fact portraits rather than objects. Dowis suggests that it is really up to the viewer to determine if each chair has personality and "an accurate representation of a more complex character, or simply a seat".<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Jeanne M. Dowis, "Lexicon", In Todd Kiefer (Ed). *Harold Garde. Painting 50 Years.* (Deland, Florida: Museum of Florida Art, 2008), 52.

**HG:** You know, I have been painting for myself for many years. Although I wished I had had more commercial success, I am relieved as I look back that I never had to paint for a dealer. I am having a show at the museum in Bangor, Maine, in 2019. The curator came to Belfast to look at my work and he chose to put in the gritty stuff—as he said, ‘worthy of real attention’.

**JF:** Harold, I look forward to visiting again with you next summer and am grateful for your taking the time to chat.

## Chapter 5: Taking License—Marsden Hartley

### Fictive Conversation

**Jill Finsen:** Mr. Hartley, I appreciate your taking the time to talk about your paintings. I have admired them for a very long time. Other artists, including Bill Irvine, whom I recently interviewed for this thesis, see that you have influenced me, and I am pleased to claim it. The work you made while staying at Claire and John Evans' farm in West Brooksville, Maine, in 1939 is what I would like to discuss with you. Their daughter in-law, my good friend Deborah Evans, lives there now.

**Marsden Hartley:** Jill, please call me Marsden. I see we have friends and a special place in common. My memories of the three months spent at the Evans' Bagaduce Farm are lovely. John was the only child of my friend Mabel Dodge and Karl Evans, her first of four husbands. I knew Mabel through Alfred, that is, Steiglitz. Lots of good memories of that time.

**JF:** Yes, Deborah has told me of the connections. I am intrigued by a few paintings in particular that you made while at the farm. "Flaming American (Swim Champ)" is a powerful image of a young man we have come to understand was William (Bill) Moonan, the Evans' nephew. Deborah told me that Spencer, her late husband, was just three years old at the time when you stayed with them.

**MH:** Oh yes, I remember there was a youngster in residence. You know, it was never my goal to render, to 'represent' what I saw. I like to paint what I like. The young man was splendid and agreed to sit for me. He was a competitive swimmer for Yale at the time. I think I might have sent him back to the gymnasium in my mind to bulk up in the painting! In fact, when I

exhibited *Flaming American (Swim Champ)* at Hudson D. Walker Gallery [in New York] the next year, I associated it and another painting with wall panels created for gyms.<sup>5</sup>

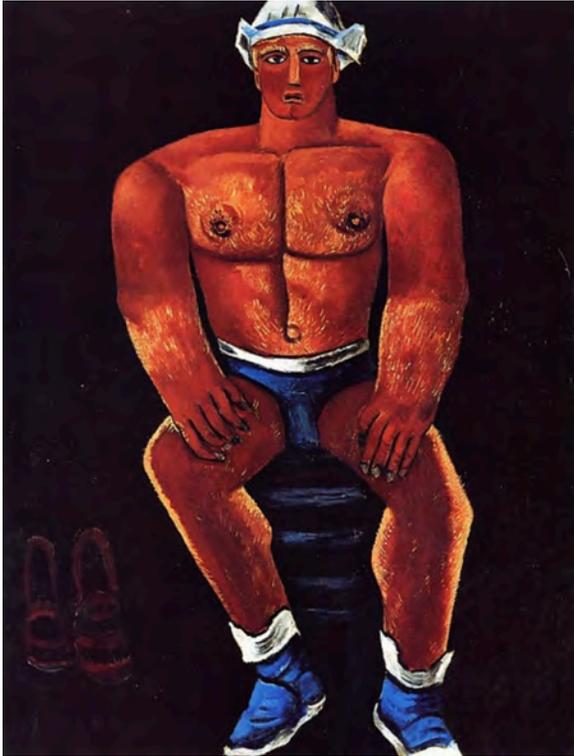


Fig. 9. Marsden Hartley, *Flaming American (Swim Champ)*. 1939–1940. Oil on canvas. 40 3/8 x 30 3/4 inches. Baltimore Museum of Art.

**JF:** And your color. It does not seem that it has anything to do with local color in this painting.

**MH:** That's certain. Color is always a large consideration for me. If there is something delicious in local color that will translate to the two-dimensional canvas, I will take it. As you know, Jill, we artists take license, and it seems it is a major theme in our work. In addition to all the angst and challenges of making art, there is no reason to paint if we cannot have fun.

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<sup>5</sup> Randolph Griffey, "An Ambivalent Prodigal: Marsden Hartley as 'The Painter From Maine'" in *Marsden Hartley's Maine*, (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2017), 127.

**JF:** Let's talk about *Birds of the Bagaduce*. During the summer, I spend a lot of time on the Bagaduce River rowing with Spencer's wife. While not in any way a literal representation, your painting brings me right back there. The funky Maine clouds, the birds, the wind in the sails.

**MH:** It was a great subject for me. The landscape was the starting point and I just got to take it from there. Based on my time sailing on the river with John, I know it must be challenging to row because of the currents and the wind.

**JF:** Yes, currents and wind are always present. Your seagulls certainly testify to the latter. And you may be interested to know that Spencer was a sailor, as is his son. It looks like your painting might have been perceived from the hillside leading down to the river.

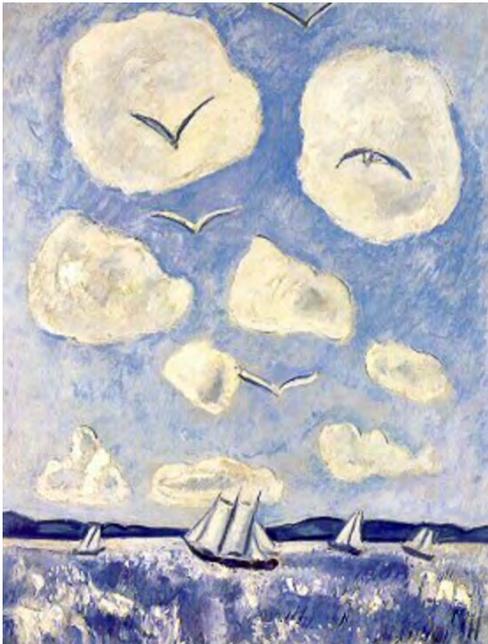


Fig. 10. Marsden Hartley, *Birds of the Bagaduce*, 1939. Oil on board. 28 x 22 inches. The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio.

**MH:** Yes, I remember liking that view especially. It gave me some exercise to walk through the fields on the farm as well. And Claire also had a magnificent

garden. There so many delightful memories on the farm that made their way to my canvases. This painting with the vase came about because of the glories of the garden.



Fig. 11. Marsden Hartley, *Flowers From Claire Spencer's Garden*, 1939–1940. Oil on composition board. 28¼ x 22½ inches. Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.

**JF:** I recognize the vase in your picture—it is still at the farmhouse many years later. Thanks so much for your time and our little visit back to Bagaduce Farm. I might just have to bring my easel and paints there this summer and indulge myself after a row.

## Chapter 6: Painting on My Own Terms—Milton Avery

### Fictive Conversation

**Jill Finsen:** Mr. Avery, I very much appreciate your willingness to chat with me, especially knowing that it is not your habit to talk about your work. I understand that you would rather have people look at the work. I was represented by Julie Heller Gallery in Provincetown and she has a number of your drawings. I was honored to have one of my paintings hang next to one of your drawings in the gallery.

**Milton Avery:** Jill, I say why talk when you can paint?<sup>6</sup> My wife Sally Michel has been my 'mouth piece' over the years. But we have some things in common, so let's have a quick chat, and please do call me Milton.

**JF:** Thanks, Milton. I recently had the opportunity to see the exhibition *Early Works on Paper and Late Paintings*, and am so appreciative to see this work. The paintings are large in scale and minimal. Some are almost abstracted yet the viewer can usually decipher that it might be influenced by a landscape.

**MA:** You know, Jill, I spent many years observing my environs. Like you, Sally and I gravitated to the coast as often and for as long as we could. I made many sketches, and there were times that I also noted colors that I saw.<sup>7</sup> And as I got older, I was interested in the sense of the image rather than the details of the landscape.

**JF:** And they are arresting. Your figures in the landscape are often painted in an exaggerated and minimal manner. Can you talk about that?

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<sup>6</sup> David Ebony, "Milton Avery: The Quality of the Day", *Milton Avery: Early Works on Paper and Late Paintings*, (Yares Art, New York, February 24 – April 30, 2018), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 8.



Fig 12. Milton Avery, *Bathers by the Sea*, 1960. Oil in canvas, 50 x 72 inches. Private Collection.

**MA:** Well, as I did with landscapes and chickens and horses, I drew and painted from models over my career. Both Sally and my daughter, March, were available to me as well. But I was not interested in rendering the figure. I wanted to paint it on my terms and how I saw it and how it made me feel. Sally and I used to go to galleries and I told her: "I don't know. Either I'm crazy or everyone else is. Because my idea of what painting is is so different than what I see all around me".<sup>8</sup> So my work is a bit unorthodox, and I was kind of tired of hearing that I was derivative of Matisse, whom I admired but did not 'copy'. I am glad that Clement Greenberg had a change of heart in his review of my work. You know how critics can change the landscape for us artists. As he said:

Fifteen years ago, reviewing one of his shows at Paul Rosenberg's in *The Nation*, while I admired his landscapes, I gave most of my space to the derivativeness of the figure pieces, that made up the bulk of the show, and if I failed to discern how much there was in these that was not Matisse, it was not only because of my own imperceptiveness, but

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<sup>8</sup> Dorothy Seckler, Oral history interview with Sally Michel Avery, 1967 November 3, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Accessed 2 April 2018. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-sally-michel-avery-11687>

also because the artist himself had contrived not to call enough attention to it.... Avery's is the opposite of what is supposed to be a typical American attitude in that he approaches nature as a subject rather than as an object. One does not manipulate a subject, one meets it.<sup>9</sup>

There was a lot more written but you get the point, and that is enough for now.

**JF:** Being an admirer of both of you and Matisse, I can understand your sensitivity to the comments. And glad that Mr. Greenberg reconsidered your work so publicly. I also note that you were close to Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb. Although both of your friends chose to paint more abstractly as their work evolved, there are some wonderful examples of how you might have influenced them in some early works. Rothko's *Three Women* is one example.



Fig 13. Mark Rothko, *Three Women*, c 1935. Oil on canvas, 23 x 19 inches. Collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation.

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<sup>9</sup> James Panero, *Milton Avery: Then & Now*, *The New Criterion*, Volume 22, No. 9, May 2004.

I understand that you were friends with Marsden Hartley and made two portraits of him. One is in the Phillips Collection along with Duncan Phillips "Winter Riders", the first painting of yours to enter a museum collection.<sup>10</sup> Duncan Phillips was a wonderful supporter of many young artists at the time.

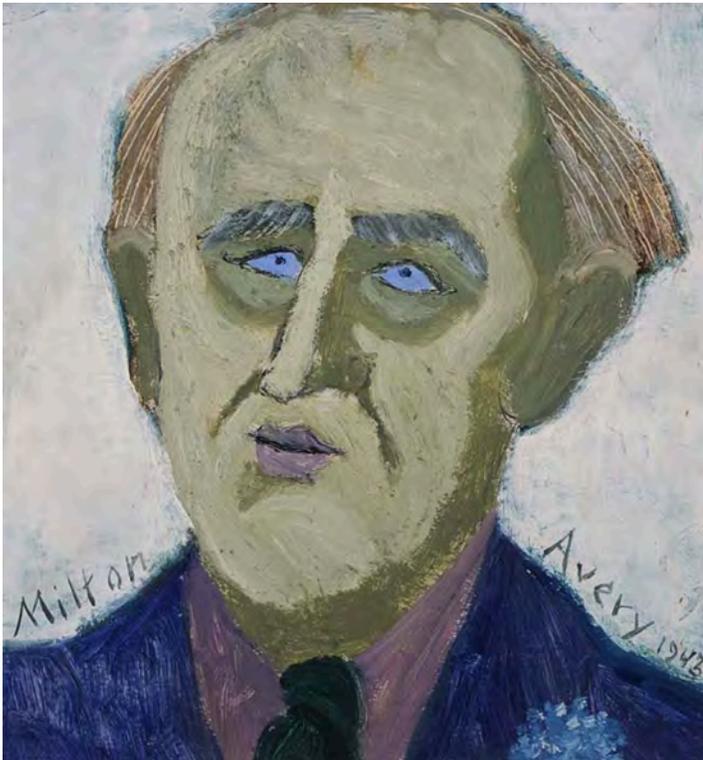


Fig. 14. Milton Avery. *Portrait of Marsden Hartley*, 1943. Oil on canvas. 12½ x 12 inches. The Phillips Collection.

I had the opportunity to chat with Marsden and I see that the three of us have a love of sailboats, especially as subject for our work. And your friend Adolph Gottlieb was an avid sailor as well.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Eliza Rathbone, introduction to *Milton Avery: Early Works on Paper and Late Paintings*, (Yares Art, New York, February 24 – April 30, 2018), 7.

<sup>11</sup> David Ebony, "Milton Avery: The Quality of the Day", *Milton Avery: Early Works on Paper and Late Paintings*, (Yares Art, New York, February 24 – April 30, 2018), 31.

I imagine being in Provincetown and other coastal villages afforded you the opportunity to observe the movement of the boats, the sails and the sea. And we have a number of very differently executed paintings to enjoy from your observations and work.



Fig 15. Milton Avery, *Sails in Sunset Sea*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 72 x 52 inches.

**MA:** Yes, Duncan was a marvelous supporter of many of us. I believe he bought a number of first-time museum purchases of painters, including Nikolas de Staël.<sup>12</sup> I can see from your work that he may have influenced you as well. Thank you for this chat. As Marsden may have told you, we paint what we love.

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<sup>12</sup> Laughlin Phillips, foreword to *Nicolas de Staël in America*. (Washington D.C.: The Phillips Collection, 1990).

## Chapter 7: Paint What You Love and Make It Your Own—Conclusion

Based on my conversations, both actual and fictive, with New England painters and my own practice, I have come to appreciate that we need to listen to our individual voices. Indeed, many artists have depicted the same subjects over the centuries—flowers, seascapes, friends, interiors—and have represented them as their own. I learned from my five New England artists that what we observe serves as a basis for our art but should not limit or define our interpretations. Alfred Maurer summarized it well:

Perhaps art should be an intensification of nature; at least it should express an inherent feeling which cannot be obtained from nature except through a process of association.... The artist must be free to paint his effects. Nature must not bind him.<sup>13</sup>

I came away from each conversation understanding a key theme in my work and the work of these artists: Paint what you love and make it your own. For William Irvine, this means returning to the comfort of his cottages, while visiting their inhabitants, giving new meaning to cloud formation and capturing the emotion of boats moving through the water in front of a beloved island. When Paul Resika works, he does so with a similar affection for his subject—and his own subjectivity. His decades observing Outer Cape Cod landscapes let him dissolve shapes into colors and objects into forms, abstracting what his eye sees but the viewer can no longer name. Harold Garde is interested in what he remembers but is particular about what he will allow into the picture. He focuses on what might not be there and in creating

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<sup>13</sup> Anne Harrell, "The Forum Exhibition: Selections and Additions." (Whitney Museum of American Art, exhibition catalogue, May 81-June 22, 1983), 25.

something that succeeds on his terms. At almost 95, Garde understands he is his most important critic at this point of his life. Similarly, Marsden Hartley befriended other artists, finding camaraderie and community, but he sang his own tune. His work testified to a singular vision, regardless of whether his style and subjects were in fashion, or were even accepted at the time. And finally, Milton Avery wanted to paint, not talk. Through his canvases, he evoked his love for the people, landscape and animals around him. I bring the same attitude to my paintings—spending time in cherished rooms, before inspiring landscapes and with beloved friends, depicting something of the deep well of feeling I have for each of them. I embrace what is familiar and what is imagined. It is a balance I strive to achieve in the company of my New Englanders.



Fig 16. Jill Finsen,  
*Studio View 7*, 2017.  
Oil on canvas, 18 x 18  
inches.



Fig 17. Jill Finsen,  
*Studio View 16*, 2018.  
Oil on canvas, 22 x 28  
inches.



Fig 18. Jill Finsen, *Yellow  
Chair*, 2018. Oil on canvas,  
36 x 36 inches.



Fig 19. Jill Finsen, *White Sail*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 36 x 36 inches.

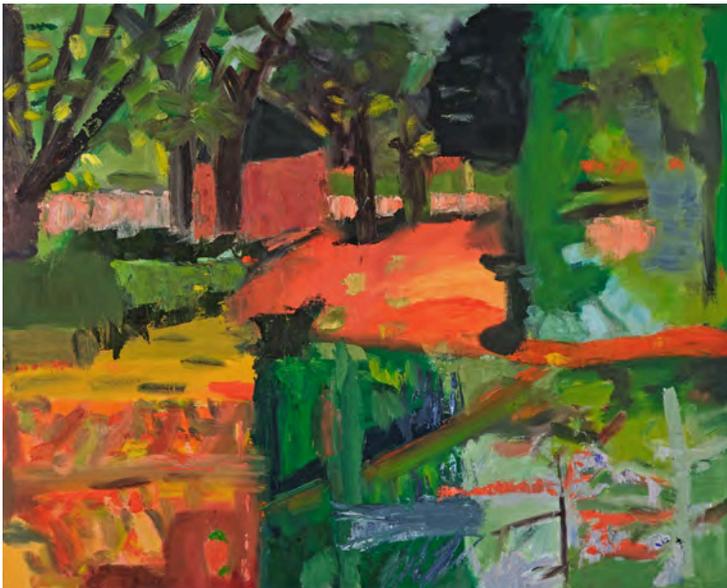


Fig 20. Jill Finsen, *Locale One*, 2015. Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches.



Fig 21. Jill Finsen, *Rimmed Sun*, 2013. Oil on linen, 30 x 30 inches.



Fig 22. Jill Finsen, *Virginia*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 20 x 16 inches.



Fig 23. Jill Finsen, *Yellow Sail*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 20 x 20 inches.



Fig 24. Jill Finsen, *Self Portrait*, 2014. Oil on board, 30 x 30 inches.

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