

Judith A. Curtis  
30 Riverview Road  
Gloucester, MA 01930-1614  
(978) 283-4135  
jcurtis1614@gmail.com

*IN RESPONSE: TWENTY-ONE IN TRURO CELEBRATES 21 YEARS*

by Judith A. Curtis

In keeping with the traditions of regional artist collectives such as California's Society of Six, Canada's Group of Seven and, more especially, Pennsylvania's popular women's group the Philadelphia Ten, 'Twenty-One in Truro' has evolved over the last two decades from the humble beginnings of a group of friends painting together, to a broader format offering diversity of vision and media by some of the most talented women artists of Cape Cod. Although inclusion was originally limited to Cape Cod residents, several members have since moved, some as far afield as New York, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Florida and Colorado, making the annual retreat in Truro especially important to "replenish ... body and soul," according to member M'Lou Sorrin. Whatever their professional affiliations, and the success they have achieved

on an individual basis, the Twenty-One in Truro differ from their Philadelphia Ten counterparts in the way they mandate an annual retreat to connect with each other, network, encourage and sometimes sustain each other during health crises. It is this personal connection that differentiates them from other art groups and makes their 21 years uniquely successful. As Jane Lincoln notes, “As an original member of Twenty One in Truro, the accumulation of years has grown to be a rich experience. To share the creativity of art, the demands women encounter, and the freedom the week permits is a rare gift.”

As the Twenty-One return to the Cahoon Museum for the second time in their remarkable history - their first exhibition was in 2000, just a year after they were formed - it is worth looking at the origins of this group and how it has developed in such a fluid way that, although there is a distinct sense of empowerment and strength in numbers, these 21 women have maintained their own distinctive vision in relation to the arts. Their mission statement, adopted in 2006 says it all:

We are women artists known professionally as Twenty-One in Truro, who convene annually for a week of retreat and companionship. This focused interval offers us the opportunity to express our individual responses to the natural beauty of the Outer Cape. During this time, dedicated to joy and ease, we support one another in meeting the challenges of leading a creative life.

That very phrase, ‘the challenges of leading a creative life,’ describes the biggest obstacle women face in fulfilling their creative nature. Jungian psychologist Clarissa Pinkola Estes, writing in her groundbreaking work *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, points out “I’ve seen women insist on cleaning everything in the house before

they could sit down to [create] .... A woman must be careful to not allow over-responsibility ... steal her necessary creative rests, riffs, and raptures. ... Art is not meant to be created in stolen moments only.”

Twenty-One in Truro found a perfect way to circumvent the dilemma of ‘stolen moments’ by organizing an annual retreat to the cottages on Corn Hill, Truro, made famous by Edward Hopper, before relocating to the nearby Sladeville Cottages in 2002, a rustic group of cottages built in 1920 by artist C. Arnold Slade. The proximity of the five buildings comprising this cottage colony - situated on a grassy expanse leading down to the Pamet River - encourages a communal feeling that promotes the joy of camaraderie, rich dialogues on relevant art topics, lawn school where individuals demonstrate and share different techniques with their sister artists, plus other stimulating events such as field trips to the art colony of Provincetown, visits to the dramatic shores of Ballston Beach and the Peaked Hill dunes of Provincetown, walking along the Old Colony railway bed, or a visit to Highland Light. Everywhere you look nature inspires the artist from the red pickleweed and purple thistles to the bright plumage of golden rod and the ever-present greens and gold of marsh grass. The unpretentious accommodation and simplicity of environment are major contributions to the inspiration and motivation so fundamental to the week. But, for all that, there is a very personal equation involved in this annual retreat, members of Twenty-One are also well aware of the opportunity it presents to promote their continuing influence in women’s art, as well as galvanizing interest in - as well as procuring gallery and museum representation for - their recent work.

In 2010, before retiring from the group, artist Barbara Wylan described the week in Truro as “a tapestry. ...rich and intricate, and surely a work-in-progress. Its threads include all the gifts we've frequently noted: ... friendship, love, support, inspiration, growth, adventure, rest, restoration, retreat, empowerment, challenge, wonder, and, oh yes, a setting of natural beauty wondrous beyond description.”<sup>1</sup> An eloquent description that holds well nine years later.

In mounting the current show *In Response: Twenty-One in Truro Celebrates 20 Years*, the mandate from the Cahoon Museum stipulated all works in the exhibition must relate to the Cahoon's mission and permanent collection. Therefore, Director Sarah Johnson chose five examples - Robert Cardinal's *Three Boats*, Margaret Patterson's *Salt Creek*, Erastus S. Field's *Portrait of a Woman*, Daisy Hughes' *Cape Dunes*, and Levi Wells Prentice's *Still Life* - from which the Twenty-One in Truro each selected one to be the challenge and inspiration for their own artwork.

One sees immediately the scope and variety of painting interests and subject matter present in this group. From bold color and the ubiquitous bravura brushwork, detailing texture and contrasting edges in oil, to the subtle nuances of watercolor or pastel, this gifted group of women provide 21 different viewpoints or, rather, variations on a theme. Those artists selecting boats, sand dunes and portraits as their subjects, have created their own personal concept within the theme. Some of them favor an abstract quality, while others prefer a traditional style, building up layers of paint and creating lost and found edges, while others seek a more whimsical approach. In addition, since their founding in 1999, the configuration of Twenty-One in Truro has developed and matured after several early members dropped out to be

replaced by artists of even more diverse talents. Two recent members who were invited to join in 2015, brought even broader dimensions to the group with the addition of sculpture, mixed media, collage and digital art work.

With its increasing success, Twenty-One in Truro has taken a leading role in enhancing the power of women in the current art world of New England.

In 2019, Twenty-One in Truro is comprised of artists Heather Blume, LaVerne Christopher, Michele Dangelo, Jane Eccles, Maryalice Eizenberg, Susan A. Hollis, Martine Jore, Jane Lincoln, Jerre Moriarty, Rosalie Nadeau, Kate Nelson, Carol Odell, Julie Olander, Suzanne M. Packer, Sarah Fielding Ricci, JoAnn Ritter, M'Lou Sorrin, Lorraine W. Trenholm, Christie Velesig, Linda S. Young, and Joyce Zavorskas.

<sup>1</sup> Wolk, Lauren. "The Richest of Tapestries: Between Sea and Sky, an Exhibit by 21 in Truro." *Cape Women Online-The Richest of Tapestries Between Sea and Sky, an Exhibit by 21 in Truro*, [capewomenonline.com/Fall\\_2010/Fall\\_2010Articles/Truro21.html](http://capewomenonline.com/Fall_2010/Fall_2010Articles/Truro21.html).