

# Springs Invitational Art Stories: Artists Phyllis Hammond and Tracy Harris Share Accabonac Harbor

August 4, 2017

by Dakota Arkin Cafourek

Artists [Phyllis Hammond](#) and [Tracy Harris](#), who each have art selected for this year's Springs Invitational at Ashawagh Hall, are neighbors with adjacent studio spaces on Accabonac Harbor in Springs, just outside of East Hampton Village, N.Y. Set on land encircled by marshes and the hamlet's main artery, Springs Fireplace Road, their workspaces are bathed with the extraordinary reflective light of the Springs.

[Hammond](#) and [Harris](#) have a deep mutual appreciation for each other's work and shared gratitude, inspired by the wonder and beauty of their idyllic surroundings, they said during a recent interview overlooking the sparkling waters of the Accabonac. While their creations stand in incredible contrast, Phyllis and Tracy share a grounded maturity in their own standalone pursuits.

Ashawagh is the Native American word for "place where two roads come together." This is the perfect description for capturing the ways these artists' divergent pathways and mediums synergize together on the Accabonac.



View of Accabonac Harbor from nearby the respective studios of Phyllis Hammond and Tracy Harris. Photo by Dakota Arkin Cafourek.

Phyllis Hammond's studio occupies a prefab building with ultra high ceilings and several glass garage doors bringing the outside in. Large scale aluminum pieces in bold, bright colors and curved shapes fill the room, as if we visitors were to be bug-sized in a garden of pinwheels. The studio is dedicated to the art of playfulness in sculpture form.

Hammond's pieces begin as drawings that are coded into vector programs, a skill she first developed creating schematic drawings for mainframe computers at the start of her career. Her "sketches" for her sculptures take on new iterations as they go through each phase in the multi-step process: expanding the tiny drawings to eight-foot sheets of aluminum that are cut with a waterjet machine, then pulled into three dimensions by a bending machine before being painted in solid colors. In each transition, Hammond practices the art of playful precision.

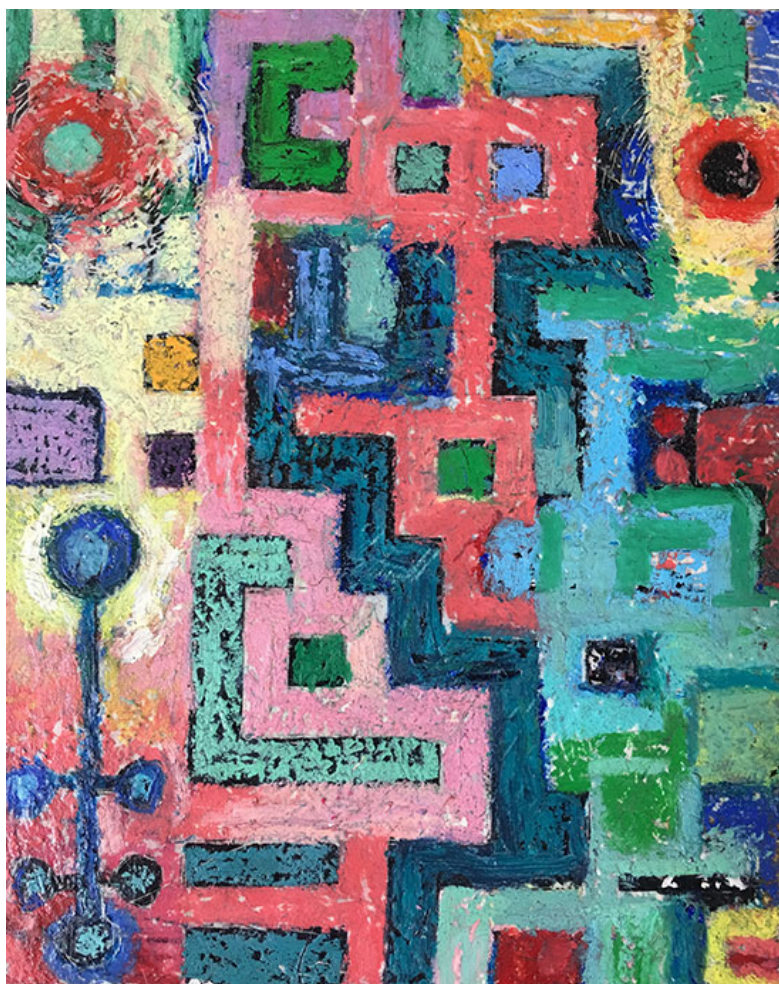
Just steps beyond Phyllis Hammond's light-filled space is Tracy Harris's studio. The walls of Harris's studio are covered and layered by her encaustic paintings. Encaustic—a painting method using melted wax infused with pigment—reveals her path of decisions. Though primarily abstract, Tracy Harris's work contains some literal references, inquisitively yielding to the audience to help tell the story of each painting. Forms incorporated into her paintings encourage viewers to wander into their own dreams and complete the loop from the artist's life to their own personal experience.



Tracy Harris's studio showing "Maze With Three Lights" ready to be transported to Ashawagh Hall for the 50th Annual Springs Invitational Art Show. Photo by Dakota Arkin Cafourek.

Through incised drawings and wax layers, every choice and action in Harris's transition from blank canvas to exhibited art piece is visible to the viewer. The raw process is unhidden, beautiful and vulnerable to witnesses who may formulate individualized meaning.

Both Harris and Hammond have previously had their work showcased in the Springs Invitational but they feel honored to be selected once again and are dazzled by its history. In this year's show, Harris will exhibit *Maze With Three Lights*, a small, bright encaustic painting she created five years ago. Filled with geometric shapes inspired by the floor plans for an art studio, her piece was made in a time of joy and anticipation.



"Maze with Three Lights" by Tracy Harris. Oil on Wood.  
Photo by Gary Mamay.

A creator of modern and bold large-scale metal sculptures, Hammond will exhibit something unexpected—a piece from her past. In the early 1970s, Phyllis Hammond's focus was pottery and she created sculptures of people inside containers; one of these pieces was selected for this year's Invitational.



Art works from Phyllis Hammond's Effigy Series outside her studio. Photo by Dakota Arkin Cafourek.

*Container* was created almost 50 years ago; nearly around the same time of the very first Springs Invitational which showcased local artists such as Jackson Pollock. She recalls, in retrospect, these effigies were built perhaps out of anger or the feeling of confinement. They were a sort of satire which grew both in physical size and the scope of attention they received, shown everywhere from museums to department stores.

These pieces proved irresistible to Teri Kennedy, this year's curator of the Springs Invitational Art Show.

"I visited Phyllis's studio in April and looked at her newer work, bold and bright with vibrant color and dynamic shape," said Kennedy. "As much as I have admired this work, I felt my challenge was to find a sculpture that would be content sitting inside Ashawagh Hall. Then I saw the ceramic sculpture from early in her career—these pieces speak to confinement. There was no question in my mind that this was the perfect work to select and I was thrilled when Phyllis agreed to include

this sculpture in the Invitational.”



“Container” by Phyllis Hammond. Photo by Gary Mamay.

Today, Hammond is overcome with a sense of optimism, driven by a notion of possibility. She now looks at these containers and feels more free from containment and in a state of liberation than ever before, she said. “Strange” was word of choice to describe looking at a piece of artistic expression from so many years ago.

Both longtime residents of the East End, for Tracy Harris and Phyllis Hammond, the awe from the movement of water and the area’s beauty hasn’t ceased to amaze them. The two artists are electrified by the unique, local community—an amalgam of creators and collectors, it co-mingles art and appreciation for the arts.

A friend told Harris, “At last, you’re among your own kind!” speaking to the joy and excitement of working in such proximity with another artist. A Texas native, Harris describes bringing her “beginner’s mind,” appreciating the local beauty. This is a place where experimentation and freedom may be celebrated. While these two women share utmost support and enthusiasm, Harris and Hammond work on a steadfast continuum, based on their own individual ways of looking at the world.



Artists Tracy Harris and Phyllis Hammond outside of their respective studios.  
Photo by Dakota Arkin Cafourek.

PHYLLIS HAMMOND is an award-winning sculptor renowned for her large-scale ceramic and aluminum work and based in Springs, N.Y. For Phyllis Hammond’s full bio, visit [phyllishammond.com](http://phyllishammond.com).

TRACY HARRIS is an award-winning painter living and working in Springs, N.Y., originally from Dallas, Texas. For Tracy Harris’s full bio, visit [tracyharris.com](http://tracyharris.com)

[The 2017 Springs Invitational Art Exhibition](#) presents art by around 114 artists with work selected by Invitational curator Teri Kennedy. The show will be on view from August 4 to 20, 2017 at Ashawagh Hall in East Hampton, N.Y. Presented by the Springs Improvement Society (SIS), the exhibition is a benefit for SIS which maintains and manages Ashawagh Hall.

The “Springs Invitational Art Stories Series” was arranged by Teri Kennedy to reveal the stories behind some of the art on view, presented from the point of view of the exhibiting artist or artists. To read the series introduction for the Springs Invitational Art Stories, click [here](#).

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**BASIC FACTS:** The Springs Invitational will be held August 4 to 20, 2017 at Ashawagh Hall. An Opening Reception will take place Friday, August 4 from 5 to 8 p.m. The Curator's Tour of the Invitational takes place on Sunday, August 13 from 11 a.m. to noon. Ashawagh Hall is located at 780 Springs Fireplace Rd, East Hampton, NY 11937. [www.ashawagh-hall.org](http://www.ashawagh-hall.org).

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