



FIRST PERSON - Led into the Midst: “Detours” and the North Fork Artist Scene

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by Franklin Hill Perrell

Some have said the North Fork’s art community is currently as vibrant as Springs during the 1950s. Who knows whether another Jackson Pollock labors amongst us? As a painter now working on the North Fork, it’s an exciting prospect to contemplate.

Best known as a curator, I moved to Southold on the North Fork, at least in part, to resume making my own art. However, it was an invitation to stop by the Greenport Harbor Brewery on a Wednesday night that led me into the midst of the area’s artists.

My link to this was Glen Hansen, whose paintings I had exhibited at the Nassau County Museum of Art in the early 2000s. After we became North Fork neighbors, Hansen invited me to the brewery. Wednesday evenings, artists gather at the bar. It could be three or four, or over twenty. Dubbed the Brewery Boys, in the spirit of the N.Y.’s rapsallion Bowery Boys, these “boys” are non-gendered since about half their number are girls.

Discussions are spirited: what’s showing in the galleries, movements and personalities past and present, art world gossip, and an occasional dust-up over politics. We never stop talking about studio practice. These meetings have become our version of the famed Cedar Bar.

Among this group, Adam Straus, who shows in New York with gallerist Nohra Haime, was already known to me as an artist. I soon discovered that art publicist Nicole Straus, married to Adam, is granddaughter of critic Jeanne Paris who reviewed my work in the 1970s.

Part of coming to Southold on the North Fork of Long Island was a chance to paint from a new vantage point. My subject, however, is more Coney Island than North Fork. I was happy that my fellow artists liked my work well enough to include it in the “Detours” exhibition presented during much of the summer 2019 by East End Arts in three venues divided between Riverhead and the North Fork.



“Inside the Field” by Franklin Hill Perrell. Acrylic on board, 18 x 24 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.

I learned about “Detours” in its early stages, the brainchild of Glen Hansen and Adam Straus, abetted by writer/ photographer Steve Capozzoli. The show would feature notable artists from both North and South Forks, utilizing the newly updated, sleek gallery spaces in the Victorian era headquarters of East End Arts (EEA) in Riverhead, NY, positioned between the two distinct East End communities. The hope was that drivers might detour into Riverhead on their way to points east.

The show would have two more venues, EEA’s Peconic Crossing Gallery (more of a LES style storefront gallery that’s set at the entrance to an affordable apartment building), and Hansen’s satellite studio, an artist’s loft in a barn by the railroad tracks in Southold, NY. Each artist would exhibit three pieces, one per location.

Hansen became the de facto curator of “Detours”; he not only selected the pieces and managed the installation, but also picked up and delivered the art. The handsomely presented show has a jaunty rhythm in its installation, which follows the character of each location. Some of the pieces that got my attention follow.

Steve Capozzoli, who often does his art and writing under the pseudonym Frankie Neptune, made the big photo on aluminum called *1463 Northville Turnpike*, 2014. It depicts an old potato barn, its industrial door bolted shut, with partially faded letters advertising “Champion Spark Plugs.” The late afternoon winter light, with long-angled shadows punctuating the site’s emphatic horizontality, gives the piece a Hopper-esque air of suspended time.



“1463 Northville Turnpike” by Stephen Capozzoli, 2019. Photograph on aluminum, 24 x 26 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

I drove out recently to have a look at the place itself, and the feel in August is different: surrounding weeds are leafed out, and the light instead of orange-yellow is a cool blue, yet the aptness of this motif as an emblem of Long Island’s vanishing rural life is inescapable. It is one of a series Capozzoli calls “save what’s left,” borrowing the slogan of local preservationists.

Paton Miller’s landscape, *Sage-Brush*, 2019, is a semi-abstract rendering of its subject, notable for the brushy, gestural quality of the paint handling, done in such a way that the surface (copper) shines through, especially under the inky sea-weed colored grass. Likewise, the blue and pink tinted sky creates a luminous effect reminiscent of paintings by Frederick Church.



“Sage-Brush” by Paton Miller, 2019. Oil on copper. Courtesy of the artist.

Arden Scott created a bas-relief utilizing textured effects from corrugated cardboard with shellac and rice paper in *Untitled*, 2009. A tracery of abstract pattern, causing the paper to begin resembling wood or metal, arises out of her unique handling of these materials. The two dominant curving forms enter into a visual dialogue like an encounter between organic elements.



“Untitled” by Arden Scott, 2009. Cardboard, rice paper, glue and shellac, 36 x 28 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Glen Hansen’s *How*, 2019, is a meticulously painted hyper-real oil on gessoed panel. Its subject, a life-sized pop sculpture of a Native American chief in western regalia with arm upraised in salutation, has become the iconic emblem of [Riverhead Raceway](#). Those driving along Route 58 in Riverhead may have undoubtedly passed it on the way to Costco or Tanger Outlets. These types of “cigar store Indians” were once mass produced.

Shown through the edge of a chain link fence, crisscrossed by barbed wire, and partially blocking a “welcome” sign, the implications of this motif are paradoxical, as the racetrack itself represents yet another mode of life under threat from gentrification.

Hansen’s strongly lit and dramatically angled treatment engenders the particular authority characterizing this mode of realism. Such artists have really come to understand what they’ve depicted. A close look at how the barbed wire is painted shows tints of blue and pink along the edges of a white central area to produce an effect that the eye interprets as silvery grey.



“How” by Glen Hansen, 2019. Oil on panel, 32 x 32 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Adam Straus’s luminist oil, *Moonrise Long Island Country Road*, 2005, suggests an undisturbed and potentially vast natural world removed from human activities. Encased in a box-like artist-made frame comprised of lead, the painting attains a quality of object-hood akin to Straus’s earlier oeuvre of sculpture and conveys its vista as if seen through a window.

A lonely road leading into the infinite, to a horizon line of puffy trees, is infused with the glow of a yellow moon and its pink halo. This composition, with intensely textured paint handling in richly hued pigments, evokes an other-worldly atmosphere akin to the sensibility of nineteenth century romantics like Ralph Blakelock or Albert Pinkham Ryder.



“Moonrise Long Island Country Road” by Adam Straus, 2005. Oil in canvas encased in lead , 22 x 28 x 28 x 2 1/2 inches. Courtesy of Nohra Haime Gallery.

Another work that takes viewers into a dream-like atmosphere is Meghan Boody’s *The Moon*, 2019. It is a photo-based piece combining a number of image sources, composed in such a way that from across the room it looks sculptural. Featuring an elliptical central motif, as if in a cut-away, two glowing orbs of light (actually the gate at the Horton Point lighthouse) lead us into a mysteriously dark landscape under a blue, moon-lit sky.

The area outside this crisp oval shows the night time cosmos above and a sunset landscape with silhouetted tree branches below. The viewer is uncertain as to which elements are coming forward or receding, or what prevails in the surreal juxtaposition of night, day, and twilight.



“The Moon” by Meghan Boody, 2019. Fuji Crystal Archive print. Courtesy of the artist.

I was especially excited that works by Connie Fox were included. This veteran abstract expressionist painter warrants her increased attention. Books such as *Ninth Street Women* and a spike in the number of exhibitions featuring work by female AB-EX artists points to an increased focus on women from this movement. Fox has been an integral figure in the Hamptons art scene as she worked for decades in proximity and friendship with all the major players. Her painting, *Vivonne*, 2014, is marked by vigorous brush work in a wide range of vibrant color amidst which cascading forms and angular shapes emerge.



“Vivonne” by Connie Fox, 2014. Acrylic on paper, 42 x 26 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

[Allan Wexler](#), an artist long associated with Ronald Feldman gallery, comes from a background in architecture. *Rock Bottom*, 2014, is a constructed photograph, meaning that the artist built a scale model and photographed it, working color and texture further by hand, to produce an image

showing a ladder going into a pit. One can envision grappling anxiously with the puzzle of being inside this enigmatic, desert-like, space.



“Rock Bottom” by Allan Wexler, 2014. Hand-worked inkjet prints on panel, 32 x 40 inches. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Louise Crandell’s *Eye of Gustav in the Age of Politics & Hurricanes*, 2007, refers to an incident when then presidential candidate John McCain caused a Republican convention to be postponed as he returned home to face Hurricane Gustav before it struck his state. One needn’t know this to appreciate the work which presents a storm-like central black disk surrounded by silvery light reflected on land and sea below, but the image certainly reminds us of the momentous power of nature.



“Eye of Gustav in the Age of Politics & Hurricanes” by Louise Crandell, 2007. Oil and wax on linen 20 x 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Being in good company is always the aspiration when being included in any such cooperative endeavors, and that proved to be very much the case. “All About Bob,” following the 2018 Cheeseball Show and the 2019 Pseudonymous Show at the Hansen Studio, is the upcoming next venture organized by Hansen, Straus and some other Brewery Boys. It will be an exhibition dedicated to the influence and image of the late artist, Bob Ross, who gained fame as a television personality teaching art on the air.

The topic is timely: populism in art, and an innocent mode of American folk culture that Ross is thought to represent. Perhaps to everyone’s surprise, Ross is currently featured in a [serious museum exhibition in Chicago](#), presenting several of his landscapes, along with the recent news that the Smithsonian acquired some of his work and another museum show to [open in September](#) in Virginia.

Surprise, with a strong note of wit and irony, seems to be characteristic of this artist group and its endeavors. Perhaps we are on to something!

Franklin Hill Perrell is a curator, artist, art critic, former Chief Curator of the Nassau County Museum of Art, founder and current co-owner of [Artful Circles](#) and contributor to Hamptons Art Hub. Perrell

has three paintings exhibited with “Detour,” installed in all three locations.

BASIC FACTS: “Detours” is on view June 1 to August 25, 2019 at East End Arts galleries located in Riverhead, NY at 133 East Main Street and 11 West Main Street as well as in Glen Hansen Studio, located at 1560 Youngs Ave., Southold, NY.

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