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# The Art Guide *2019*

To SOUTH COAST MAINE and SEACOAST NEW HAMPSHIRE



## A Note from the Publishers

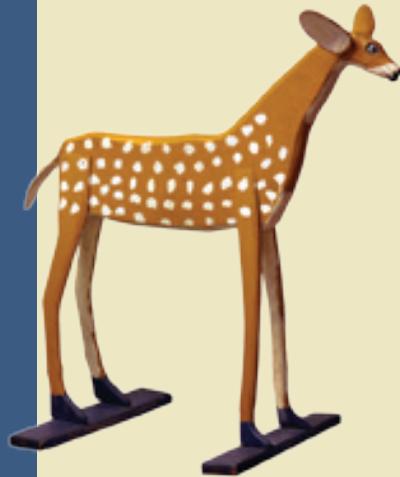
For this year's eighth edition of *The Art Guide* we chose a photograph of *Phragmites australis* by Chris Becker of Kennebunkport using a technique called light painting, taken at night with hand held light. Chris uses a large format film camera and often a long exposure to capture his images and no computer manipulation. The photo's drama, beauty and textural qualities drew us in!

Yet we had mixed feelings about featuring this species that has invaded our ecosystem, that we see along our roadways every day and that naturalists are trying to eradicate, including us on our own southern Maine properties. The non-native *Phragmites australis*, or common reed, is an invasive that rapidly crowds out native vegetation and turns rich habitats into monocultures devoid of the diversity needed to support a thriving ecosystem. These habitat changes threaten the wildlife that depend on those wetland areas for survival (there is a less vigorous native *Phragmites* but it is rare and non-invasive).

An artist can see beauty and capture it in a unique way but at the same time can evoke a need to question the subject, as the photographer has done here for us. The diversity of artists in this issue of *The Art Guide* suggests indeed a very healthy ecosystem of art in the Maine and New Hampshire seacoast communities with the variety of talent necessary to thrive!

Bill Hamilton

Susan Kress Hamilton



From "New Hampshire Folk Art Exhibit," see article on page 55. Archelas "Archie" Gilbert (1868–1947), *Spotted Fawn*, 1932. Carved & painted wood; H. 35½ in., W. 36 in., D. 20 in. League of NH Craftsmen. Photo, Charley Freiberg.

On this year's cover:  
Chris Becker, *Phragmites #3*, 2016, C-print, mounted and framed, 48" x 62", Ed. 4

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# Sculpture from found objects

**Michael Stasiuk**

Creative repurposing of found objects has been practiced throughout world history. Some repurposing is done resourcefully to satisfy a utilitarian need: a blacksmith transforming a discarded file into a knife blade. Some recycled materials are used in a decorative way: broken china that becomes a mosaic. Precious antiques are sometimes repurposed: a vintage clock becomes a designer coffee table. Artistic creations made by self-taught or unconventionally trained people are what we sometimes call Folk Art.

Folk Art could be defined as art created by regular folks, people of varying skill levels who have learned on their own or from a cultural tradition. Categories of Folk Art familiar to most of us include painting, carving, quilting and basketry (see article on NH Folk Art exhibit on page 55). Folk Art is sometimes a form of story telling characterized by a simple and innocent style. It can be a celebration of everyday life portraying people and animals. It can sometimes be work from an artist's imagination embellished with

great detail. In addition to entertaining us, Folk Art can serve as an important record of history through process, materials and subject matter.

I describe the work I do as folksy and puppet-like. I assemble found objects of mostly wood, but some metal and fiber. Usually this means drilling holes and gluing two pieces of wood together with wooden dowels. Though formally educated, woodworking was not part of my early training, so I do think of myself as a type of folk artist. I did not anticipate how long my commitment would be to this style of working. I have been collecting and assembling found objects for thirty years.

I began working with found objects in the late 1980s making crude figures that looked like backyard scarecrows, people and animals. After making several of them, it started to look like I was onto a new art form for myself. At that point the joinery was raw and casual: a lot of wire wrapping and crudely hammered nails. The wood was destined to decay, and it did. I eventually decided to apply



Basketball player. ANDY EDGAR PHOTO.  
INSET: Earliest backyard work, 1989, 17" x 12" x 7".





*The Lady with a Green Dress and her Husband.* ANDY EDGAR PHOTO.

a craftsman's sensibility and to make things that could live indoors.

Since committing to this art form I have increased my interest in work that shares a similar spirit. I have taught elementary art part time for thirty years and have taken inspiration from children's art. I appreciate all kinds of folk art including the work of developmentally disabled artists. What sustains me is my enjoyment of bringing characters to life of all sizes in a variety of materials.

Some artists call it "Found Object Art." Some call it "Recycled Art." Like many artists I am drawn towards collecting. The making is an outgrowth of all of that hunting and gathering. I began my education studying painting, but I wandered from that on a quest for ownership of something that combined work and play. I discovered that when I was "fooling around" I was really working and actually my best self as an artist. Playful problem solving put me on a road to discovery.

It took some time for me to allow child play into my adult work in order to capture the joy of an earlier, more innocent time. During that period of growth I made things that felt joyful, but I didn't acknowledge

them as art. I made elaborate Halloween costumes, and began crafting puppets and masks for local groups like The Children's Museum of Portsmouth.

One of my earliest childhood toys was the anthropomorphic Mr. Potato Head. The potato family was created by George Learner in 1958 for the Hasbro Corporation, two years before I was born. I consider myself part of the first generation of kids who played with him, and sometimes wonder if he was my greatest artistic inspiration.

It is a habit of mine to put facial features onto found objects and to assign human characteristics to objects, and I have come to describe myself as an "Animator Of Objects." So much of what I do is about discovery. It's about discovering the objects themselves. It's about what I can do with them and how I can transform them. It is a form of story telling. It is also a dialog with an audience. How to tell a story and leave some of the story untold continues to interest me, something left for the viewer to discover or interpret.

Found objects are a record of our history. What we use and what we throw away creates a portrait of who we are and the times in which we live.



*Lobster Marionette.* ANDY EDGAR PHOTO.

Commonly used objects for me include children's vintage toys (bowling pins and blocks mostly), coat hangers, tool handles, furniture fragments, baking pans, croquet mallet handles, kitchen pounding tools, shoe stretchers, rolling pins, wooden crutches, game boards, wooden crates, etc. It's basically everything you might find at a New England flea market, a place where I spend plenty of time.

I sometimes collect with an idea in mind. Certain objects look like a head or a torso. I work figuratively giving a new sense of context to otherwise commonplace or discarded items. The items I choose evoke nostalgia and a sense of memory.

Once I made an oversized lobster marionette. The starting point was a vintage child's baseball shin guard. When I found it I said, "Wouldn't it be great if I could find the rest of the parts needed and make a lobster?" The lobster took shape as a marionette, a format that references marionettes I collected as a child.

When I repurpose things I feel successful when a new context references the original history of the object. I had a group of snowshoe frames at one time. In one incarnation the snowshoe frame cut into two pieces gave me wooden runners for a miniature bobsled. In a second incarnation, the cut snowshoe frame became skis on a figure.

I often give figures a prop of some kind to enhance the sense of a story. It implies a question of what is this character doing, or where are they? When I first started this work I wanted the objects to remain recognizable in the finished work. I figured out joinery that kept most of the objects whole. The joinery issues kept me inventing, because there was always a new problem to solve. I was not welding or soldering. Instead I was stitching

Two incarnations of snowshoe frames: *Bobsled Bunny* at top and *Skiing Bunny*. ANDY EDGAR PHOTO.



Visiting the flea market.



Filing away the finds.

## Making the Mouse Cafe



Joining with wooden dowels.

with wire, interlocking screw eyes to make hinges, and toggling with bent wire to make rivets in addition to gluing many wooden pegs.

Eventually preserving whole objects became limiting. There was a point when I started cutting things up, and my inventory suddenly became much larger. Instead of looking at shapes for what they suggest, I began seeing the shapes within shapes.

My focus changed to become much more about gesture and color combinations that I could



Begin the search for ideas.



Selecting possible torsos.



A work in progress.



Sketching with tape, something about mice.

control. The story telling became more about the emotional life of the figures rather than just about a specific character doing something. Over time my inventory of objects grew, and the volume gave me choices. It allowed me to fine tune proportions and color combinations. It allowed me to make comparative observations when selecting objects.

How I sort things in boxes keeps me organized, but leaves plenty of room for discovery. Here are some labels of the contents of the inventory in my studio:  
Heads and Torsos  
Bowling Pins and Wooden Balls

Colored Blocks  
Skirts and Lady Hair  
Animals  
Roundy Browns  
Fancy Wood  
Those Dark and Dirty Little Spindles  
Robby and Betsy's Geometric Shapes

My methods of working and my tool choices would tend to label me as a low-tech craftsman. A drill and a two inch belt sander are my only power tools besides the vacuum cleaner. My cutting is mostly done with a hand held pull saw. My toolbox also includes files, rasps, pliers and wire

cutters. Sand paper, masking tape, wire and glue are on my supply list, and not much more.

I generate ideas in a variety of ways. Sometimes I am guided by color rather than by story telling. I draw. I write down titles. Mostly I play with objects and combinations of objects. Sometimes the objects suggest a story. I tape things together to be able to sketch three dimensionally, and sometimes the slumping that occurs at this stage gives me gestures that look more natural than how I positioned the objects originally. Though I like to think of myself as a folk artist, my skills for rendering

the human figure come from figure drawing throughout my art school years.

Another way that I think about gesture is to reference what I do with cardboard. I have been a theatrical mask, prop, and puppet maker for as long as I have been working in found objects. When I build with cardboard I work quickly and intuitively. It is much like drawing three dimensionally for me. Wood is a slower material to manipulate than cardboard. If I want my decisions in wood to have gesture or asymmetry I have to make those decisions consciously, and I do.



Gluing begins.



Still sketching.



The finished sculpture: *The Mouse Cafe*. ANDY EDGAR PHOTO.



The artist gluing an airplane.  
LISA GRAY PHOTO.



*Airplane bunnies*.  
ANDY EDGAR PHOTO.



A bunny to be born. COURTESY PHOTO.

Telephone bunny. ANDY EDGAR PHOTO.



*MICHAEL STASIUK is a multimedia sculptor who lives and maintains a studio in Portsmouth, NH. He shows his found object sculpture locally at The George Marshall Store Gallery in York, Maine. He has been a theatrical prop master for the Mudd Butt Mystery Theatre Troupe in Telluride, Colorado for 28 years. The last 22 have included residencies collaborating with children and adults around the world bringing characters of all sizes to life in a variety of materials. He has taught elementary art on a part time basis in New Durham, NH for nearly 30 years. He also teaches workshops to adults in educational settings including Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle, Maine.*

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Studio visits  
by appointment

*Lars at the Wiggly Bridge, 2016*

## The Yorks Cape Neddick



## TIM ELLIS COLLECTION

YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

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May – June, 2019

*Opening reception*

May 14, 4:45-6:45 p.m.

All are welcome.

Arthur DiMambro

*New Brunswick Landscape, 1995*

Oil on Panel, 16" x 24"

# George Marshall Store Gallery

Since 1995 the George Marshall Store Gallery has presented high quality and compelling exhibitions featuring the region's finest established, as well as, rising artists. The varied exhibitions change every five weeks from May through year-end.

*A program and property of the Old York Historical Society*



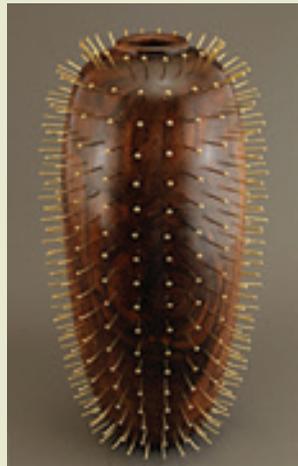
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Michael Stasiuk  
*Alphabet Teacher*  
45" x 26" x 13"  
2016  
Kitchen Pounder, Table Leg, Alphabet Stick, Gun Cleaning Rods, Assorted Fragments



## Nancy Morgan Art

Featuring the art of  
Fabric Artist Nancy Morgan

238 State Street  
Portsmouth, NH  
603-427-8611  
nancymorganart@aol.com  
www.nancymorganart.com

*Ceres Street, Fabric, 27 X 33 inches*



*Home for Suppah, oil, 18 x 20"*

## Lennie Mullaney

The Button Factory, Studio 222, 855 Islington St., Portsmouth, NH 03801  
603.828.4556 | lenniemullaney.com | lennie.mullaney@gmail.com



Fletcher Manley  
Lancaster Fair,  
Lancaster, NH, 2018

The **New Hampshire Society of Photographic Artists** are seeking volunteer photographers to document New Hampshire over the next year leading to several exhibits, image archiving in several institutions and a book documenting the work of the project. *Amateurs and professionals | are welcome to participate.* More info at [www.nhspa.org](http://www.nhspa.org)



*Bird Tree, 53" x 30" x 30"*

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