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SEARCHING FOR MOTIF #1 LECTURE FINDING AID & TRANSCRIPT

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Video Description

From 2011 Press Release: L.M. Vincent, author of "In Search of Motif No.1," discussed his personal journey exploring the artistic inspiration behind Rockport's famous fish shack.

Motif No. 1, a red fish shack, sits at the end of a granite pier in Rockport, Massachusetts. How did a humble fish house painted by numerous artists, including Aldro Hibbard, Anthony Thieme, Emil Gruppé and Harrison Cady, become an icon? Author L.M. Vincent examined the shack's colorful history from

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its origins to the present day to answer the question. His exploration of this symbol of coastal New England, arguably one of the most painted buildings of its time, is a uniquely American story that will both inform and entertain.

Cape Ann resident L. M. Vincent was born and raised in Kansas City. He is a comic writer by disposition, having cut his literary teeth during his undergraduate years as a literary editor of the *Harvard Lampoon*. He has published two non-fiction dance-related books, two murder mysteries, and two of his plays have been produced off-off-Broadway and regionally.

Transcription

Courtney Richardson

00:22

Hi! Nice to see you again.

00:26

Thank you for coming on this busy afternoon. My name is Courtney Richardson. I'm Director of Education and Public Programs here at the Cape Ann Museum. I just want to encourage some of you who might not be members to pick up our winter program of events. We have a really busy weekend next weekend. It's the Middle Street Walk and we'll have chorus—chorus concerts, art and crafts activities for children, decorated Davis house tours, a book signing and a book launch in the afternoon. And then we have a concert on Sunday, so there's a lot happening. So please consider grabbing one of these. Consider becoming a member if you aren't already. And maybe if you are a member, maybe you'd like to give a gift membership; it is the gift giving season.

Today we are joined by Larry Vincent, who just wrote this wonderful book *In Search of Motif No. 1*, and just so you're aware, you can purchase copies of this upstairs and Larry will happily sign it for you back down here. So consider doing that after the talk. That's another good gift idea, just in case you needed some more. Larry was born and raised in Kansas City. He's a comic writer by disposition having cut his literary teeth during his undergraduate years as a literary editor for the *Harvard Lampoon*. He has published two nonfiction dance related books, two murder mysteries, and two of his plays have been produced off-off Broadway and regionally. Today, he will discuss his personal journey exploring the artistic inspiration behind Rockport's famous fish shack.

02:08

Please join me in welcoming Larry Vincent.

Larry Vincent

02:19

Can everybody hear me? It's okay?

02:23

I wanted to give a little bit of background about me. Courtney alluded to the fact that I was born—I'm from Kansas City. So the important thing is I'm from Kansas. And the first time I saw Motif No. 1 was in October 2004. And I was standing on T-Wharf looking out. Everything was very quaint and picturesque. And I just didn't get it. I mean, it was, it was... Rockport was fabulous, but I didn't understand how a fish shack had become famous. And what I learned, and what you'll see a little bit today, is that no tourist site, no famous site becomes famous by destiny or by something that's predetermined. It wasn't that the shack was just so quaint and picturesque, more than anything else. Coming from Kansas, again, you can't turn around up here without bumping into something quaint and picturesque. So what was special about this shack that it became, really, achieved iconic status. So what I learned, and I'm not giving a spoiler here, but basically, these locations become famous because of an, usually because of, an economic necessity—usually collective, individual or collective. And it's the same thing with Motif No. 1. People, really, it's about the economy. And that's really how these sites become famous.

So there's another thing that I want to mention. I talk a little bit about my personal journey and discovering how this happened. But along the way, I couldn't help but discover that there was this Gloucester/Rockport thing. And, you know, this is hopefully mainly a Gloucester audience. So I told Courtney that this was the title of my talk, but actually it isn't.

04:20

I changed... the alternative title is *In Search of Why Gloucesterites Find Rockport So Irritating*. And I guess everybody gets it, so it wasn't my imagination... being from Kansas.

04:36

Okay, this is the Motif. And back at that wharf, I, you know, saw it and I was very curious. So I said, I'll just go take a tour. I'll just take the next tour. Of course, I walked over there and the place was empty. I looked through the windows and I think yeah, that's surprising. There are no tours. I travel a lot. There's always a tour. I said, well, I'll find that little plastic container and look at a brochure that gives the history of it. Of course I walked all the way around, and then I was very puzzled. So I went and asked people in town and they were very nice to me because they knew I was very sincerely interested in something that was near and dear to them. I suppose if I had asked them directions to the fudge shop, they might not have been so nice. But they, they...I was amazed that they didn't know that much about it. And the things that they did know was contradictory.

There were certain things that everybody told me about the parade float in 1933. I also heard about a secret paint formula that Aldro Hibbard whipped up with crankcase oil. But when I asked, "When was it built?" I got different things. You know, no one...some people assumed it's a civil war structure. I went on Wikipedia today and they said that it was in the 1840s. And of course, the structure that I was looking at in October of 2004, we know exactly when that was built. It was built about eight years after the Beatles broke up. And I remember it was 1978, the Great Blizzard... I don't remember, I wasn't here for the Great Blizzard, but I remember it as the year that Roman Polanski skipped bail and went to Europe. So that's how I keep things straight.

I found that it was convenient that nobody really knew when the original Motif was built, because there's, there was this mythology. And if people knew exactly the date, then they couldn't exaggerate or be a little bit loose with the facts. As I said, most people thought it was a civil war structure. And that was because when Irma Whitney wrote a very small piece for the Rockport Art Association book in 1940, she said approximately 75 years ago. And you'll find looking in, in newspaper accounts people go, oh, 95 years ago, etc. No one couldn't really pin people down. And even Aldro Hibbard, and he knew how old the shack was, I think, or had an idea. In 1963, he was interviewed and told some reporter that it was 150 years old, about 150 years old, which kind of put it at 1812. So the shack was built in.... that's, that's of course, what happened. And the picture before was—this may be the last picture ever taken. This was, this is February 6 at 9 am, and it was gone a few hours later.

07:37

So, about there, I don't want to go too much into the history. But I think it's important to get the dates right.

07:44

This is a photograph from about 1882. And what we're looking at is not the Motif. What we're looking at is what's sometimes called Pool's Fish House. I'm not sure if that's really what it is. I think it belonged to the Rockport Fish Company. It was certainly there in about 1882 or earlier. It was gone by 1898. And it sat on the end of T-Wharf. So what we're looking, where the Motif would be, would be right there on what people commonly call Bradley Wharf. It's really not Bradley Wharf, it was the north pier that came off of Bradley Wharf, but you don't want to tell people in Rockport that they don't have the right name for the pier where it's located. But this little projection of, that comes off of Bradley Wharf, was called the Northern Pier, and that's where the Motif would eventually be. And it would be there in 1884, maybe early 1885. And what happened was that the Sandy Bay Pier company decided they were going to build a new wharf, which is Tuna Wharf. It was called the "New Wharf" because this was the "Old Wharf." And one thing happened—and this is speculation—they got about 20 to 25 investors from Boston to come in on it and build the wharf and then build buildings on and have their businesses there. And they lowballed the construction bid. The contractor was about \$3,000 cheaper than the one they should have gotten, and they had construction delays. And what I think happened is the investor said, "We've got to get something up here so we can at least have a counting house or some kind of a presence here." And I think that's why they put the little shack on the end of Northern Pier. And that is speculation. There's other speculation, which, which I think is probably accurate, is why would they build this anyway? In 1884, the fishing industry was just basically terrible. And so why would they embark on this very expensive project of building this wharf? And the answer is that everybody was very bullish on Rockport because of the great breakwater that they were going to build that they've been planning since about 1882. And it was started I believe, in 1885. So Rockport was going to be the second largest harbor in the world. And people thought, well, this has got to be a great investment. Of course, the breakwater never happened. They put a lot of granite at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean and now they succeeded in building one of the greatest hazards of navigation that has ever been produced by man. That's, that's out there off of Rockport, but it didn't get built.

The wharf that it's on, by the way, the Northern Pier was built in 1837. And it was built about the same time, a little bit after, the Sandy Bay Breakwater, which was built in 1836. Now, it was very difficult coming up with this. People... I always say that if people in the 1880s had known how famous this shack was going to be, they would have paid more attention. This is very, very difficult to find these things out.

This is the Motif next to, you can see the Pool's Fish House and the Motif. And the interesting thing about this, and again, I've been fascinated with the color red and the color of the Motif. On orthochromatic film, red reads dark. And if you look at this, this we just saw was basically lead white or gray. And the Motif really isn't much darker on that. So I think that maybe the first few years of its existence, it was either just left to weather or treated with linseed oil. But it doesn't appear that it was really pigmented at that time. So what we can get for sure, the hard facts, and these are from the tax assessor's records. In May 1886, there was a building on the wharf, assessed to \$350, which was owned by the Boston Sandy Bay Fish Company. I assume this is the consortium of the investors from Boston and Rockport. In May of 1892, a guy named Walter Wonson from Gloucester, who's—who was a fish dealer in Gloucester, bought and owned the building. And he owned that building until his death. He died of a cerebral hemorrhage at, like, age 43 in 1901. And even though he is dead, the fish shack kept his name, and the ownership reverted back to the Sandy Bay Pier Company. But it was referred to in every year either as W.W. Wonson Fish House, or Building Wonson. And, of course, the people in town didn't know that and they didn't call it... I doubt they called it anything, frankly.

12:36

This is a Martha Harvey, Martha Hale Harvey, photograph from about the 1890s. And I'm showing this because you can see by this time that the shack is pigmented. I don't know if it's really red or if it's a rusty color, but it's clearly pigmented at this point in time. And I speculate that Walter Wonson may have put pigment on it in 1892 when he bought it. But I neglected to mention, which is following the trail of ownership. The Rock—the Sandy Bay Pier Company became reorganized as the Rockport Pier Company and they owned the entire wharf, the Bradley Wharf and the Northern Pier with the shack, in 1930. About 1930, they sold it to the boat builder, David Waddell, and he leased the Motif and the wharf to the artist John Buckley, beginning in 1931. And then Buckley bought it in 1933. From 1933 until 1945 it was the studio of John Buckley. And then the city of the town of Rockport bought it in 1945. Okay, the name... the first time we ever see the term “motif” associated with a painting, and it was “motive” originally, and people, old timers in Rockport, still refer to it as the “Motive.” Yet the first painting was by Lester Hornby. It was a black and white at the fourth annual exhibit of the Rockport Art Association in 1924. And the piece was called *Motive No. 1*, and I suspected that it had been referred to, the shack had been referred to as “The Motive” for maybe a couple years before that, certainly among the artists. It wasn't anything that was really for public consumption. In 1928, at the eighth annual exhibit, the next time I found mention of the shack was in a painting by Herbert Barnett and it was called *No. 1 Again*. So you can understand from this that it was painted fairly frequently in the interim. But I think it was an affectionate name. No one would call their painting... would make fun of their own painting by giving it a title that denigrated the work. So I think it might have been a little bit of an inside joke that the Motif was painted a lot. But I think it was hard for me, because my book—everything was very shack centric. And it almost sounds like well, every single person was painting the Motif. And they weren't, they were painting a lot... there are a lot of things in Rockport to paint. But if you had

an exhibit of 100 paintings, and five of them showed the shack that seemed like, that would seem like a lot. So in any case, they were painting and painting very frequently. But more importantly, the students were painting it a lot and I think that also contributed to the cliché-ish qualities when there's a lot of bad representations of it.

So the story of how the Motif got its name... this is like a Kipling tale. According to John Cooley, who was a Rockport partisan, "one day when a student brought for criticism a pencil drawing of the house, Hornby exclaimed, 'What–Motif No. 1 again!' It has been that ever since."

Now, let's see what the Gloucester person would say. Joe Garland referred to the "all too-familiar red shed derided by one art—bored art teacher as 'Motif'." So we're getting the sense here of a little bit of a thing between Gloucester and Rockport, and it didn't just start with Joe Garland. I do—my heart does go out to people in Gloucester. Every time I would read about people in Rockport painting the little wharves, you know from the reviews from A.J. Philpott of the *Boston Globe* from the early '20s, and everybody was going to Rockport. The wharves, the wharves... everybody went to paint them.

But let's look at the wharves. We have aerial views of Rockport and Gloucester. And I don't know how many wharves were there at this, when this picture was taken. But I can tell you that in 1880, there were 89 wharves in Gloucester. And let's look at Rockport and start doing a little counting. There are six wharves in Rockport. And this is the, what, the Old Harbor, the whirlpool, and nobody's going to paint that because the boats, the vessels, aren't... the waters aren't deep enough for decent sized vessels to be there. So let's rule out, let's exclude those three wharves that are associated with the Old Harbor and let's look at just Rockport Harbor here. We have three wharves, okay.

17:24

Now this wharf, which is the New Wharf or Tuna Wharf, if you want to paint that from from Bradley Wharf or the south side of the harbor and around here, well, it's blocked by this wharf with the stupid little shack on the end of it, right? And so we can eliminate that and now we're down to two wharves. So it gets worse. In 1918 to 1923, the years the Rockport art colony really took off, there was this building on T-Wharf which is the Rockport Cold Storage Company. And that was on the end of... now, no one was going to paint that. Okay, so what are we left with? Well, here's photographic proof of what we were left with (from a Gloucester perspective). You're gonna see the fishermen tarring the nets, there's the Motif, and there's a woman painter there. There's the Rockport Cold Storage Company on T-Wharf. So what else is she going to paint, right? Because there was nothing else there. Okay, but it's not about the wharves; it's about the art.

18:34

Okay. And if we're talking about how the Motif became famous and an icon, it's only partly about the art. And if we're talking about the rivalry between the art colonies of Gloucester and Rockport, it's not about the art. It's about the money. And that's an important thing to realize. So let's look at this list of names. They're not random here. Lane, Homer, William Morris Hunt, Frank Duveneck, Maurice Prendergast, Childe Hassam, William Metcalf, John Sloan, Edward Hopper, Stuart Davis, Milton Avery. What do these names have in common? Gloucester, they all have Gloucester in common. And they have something else in common. They never painted Motif No. 1. And since you've heard of them, they apparently did all right,

anyway. But I don't think the list of people who painted in Gloucester is all that helpful. For starters, Rockport was a late bloomer. It really didn't take off until the '20s. And although the first real painter to go there was Gilbert Tucker Margeson in 1873, which was the same year that Winslow Homer actually came here. But for a number of years it was just him and Parker Perkins looking out at the sea. And there weren't, there were some other good painters that were there, but not too many before the 1900s. Harrison Cady came by for the first time in about the turn of the century.

20:15

But if we look at this list, there's a quality of difference between this list of painters and what we're, what I'm going to be talking about that happened between 1920 and 1945, which was really the heyday of the colonies in Rockport. And they were doing good stuff in Gloucester, too, at that time. But these people, a lot of these people did paint in Gloucester, but they really weren't of Gloucester. I know Gloucester will claim them and I think, you know, you can't blame Gloucester for claiming them. It's almost if painters, you know, made a toilet stop in Gloucester, he painted in Gloucester and he's one of one theirs. It's not quite that bad, but think about... let's look at William Morris Hunt, who painted in Magnolia. We've heard of the art colony of Magnolia... he was actually a one summer, only one summer. Well of course, Fitz Henry Lane was dead by 1865. William Morris Hunt again. I didn't put John Twachtman's name down here, but he came in 1900. He's barely in Gloucester, but he was dead by 1902. So a lot of these painters really weren't of Gloucester although they painted here.

It's a very heterogeneous group. And these people represented different trends in art. There wasn't a cohesive trend in art among these artists. We look at Duveneck—he was the Cincinnati group, but he had his boys like Duchamp and Twachtman. And then some of these artists were part of The Ten, which people may have heard of... those was the American Impressionists. That was like Hassam. And then you had The Eight, which were the people that did, that became the Ashcan School, and you've got John Sloan was one of those. So there was a disparate group of people that really weren't unified that came through, they were all painting Gloucester because Gloucester is a great place to paint.

When we talk about the time that I'm interested in, about 1920, a lot of these people were gone. Hassam, last time he was in Gloucester was in 1919. Duveneck was dead by 1919. Twachtman was dead in 1902, even Stuart Davis in the Red Cottage Group, he left for New Mexico in 1919. So the, really the landscape, the artistic landscape, really changed in the 1920s and onward. It was, the amazing thing is how quickly it happened. It was just almost overnight.

Boston Sunday Herald reported in August 15, 1920, "Rockport at the tip of Cape Ann, has for a good many years been more or less attractive to artists. This summer they are there in such numbers as to promise the establishment of a permanent art colony of importance." And Lester Stevens and the *North Shore Breeze* said, "At first the painters came to East Gloucester, but of late the rocks, wharves, and quarries of Rockport have made a strong appeal... Last year there were about 45 painters and students here, with a promise of about twice that number this year."

I mean, this was really a new world. And there's some reasons for it. One is, is "National Tourism." National Tourism was when people between about 1880 and 1940, and people coming to see America. They were really coming, it was almost like a cultural obligation... turning to the past to discover American culture. And what happened with that era of tourism,

“National Tourism” in 1920, is the automobile. Because in 1920, there were about three—8 million cars in America. And by 1930, there were 23 million cars. So that was one thing that caused it.

The second thing that caused things to take off was what we call, we refer to as an “American Scene Painting” and “Regional Painting,” which kind of overlap. Basically, these American painters said, “you know, we don't have to look at Europe. We've got plenty to paint here.” And there is a usable past that we can paint. And that was the “American Scene.” And that's what we were seeing in the realistic painters in Rockport. They were really painting about America. And about, not just about any America, but about New England and coastal America. And these paintings tell storytelling, a narrative of how people lived and what they did. Now 1920, you also had the Associate—the Art Associations were formed. The Rockport Art Association in 1921, Gloucester—North Shore in 1922. And of course, it's a little bit of intrigue, the modernist versus the non-modernists, the people who wanted juried shows versus non-juried shows, they immediately split off and you had the Gloucester Society of Artists. This was different when Duveneck was coming, and all those other people coming to Gloucester. They didn't have art associations that had exhibit space, and that were centered around the town. You also had many new schools being started. So it was a whole different, different thing that was happening.

25:21

That's what I already mentioned about the convergence of “National Tourism” and “American Scene” and “Regionalism.” And this was really a special time. It's really remarkable that this happened and that this, I believe, accounts for the amazing growth of the Rockport art colony. Now Rockport also had some advantages over Gloucester leadership and that, by that, I mean Aldro Hibbard. He was a magnetic personality. He was part of the community. He played, you know, either played or managed the baseball team for 36 years. People really flocked to Hibbard.

There was also a cohesiveness and collegiality in Rockport that Gloucester didn't have and part of it was because of Hibbard, and part of it was because Rockport was a smaller town than Gloucester. It had about 3,500 people instead of 24,000 people. There was also, and this is the other side of the coin, Hibbard was in charge. So there were... if you were a modernist in Rockport, you were lonely. You know, you were either going to go to Provincetown, or you're going to go to Gloucester. So the people that were in Rockport were basically all on the same page. And that also allowed them to be, to have that cohesiveness that Gloucester didn't have. And the other thing that gave Rockport an advantage was there was a tremendous amount of media savvy, and they really milked it and they really expl—to an extent, they exploited the shack to establish their own brand and their own identity. So by 1930, F.W. Coburn of the *Boston Herald* said that “Rockport's emergence as a friendly and equal rival of Gloucester as an art center is an outstanding event of the present summer.”

So in less than a decade, Rockport basically achieved parity with Gloucester as far as what people thought about the art community. And I'm just talking about cohesiveness. The Art Balls, Art Week. Again, you know, with the Arts Association, this really provided a support group for the artist and gave them a place to exhibit. Before 1921, the only place to exhibit on all of Cape Ann was in the Gallery-on-the-Moors, which was from 1916 to 1922. And that imploded because of spats over how art was going to be judged and juried. By the way, the first...when the gallery opened in 1916, the first painting to sell was by Guy Wiggins, and it was called *Morning Light, Rockport* and it was of the Motif. That was, and John Sloan didn't sell a

painting the whole time. But anyway, that was the irony and kind of an idea of what was going to happen. But all these events tied the community together. And these artists were involved in making these costumes and really having a sense of community. And they also got press, and they also attracted tourists and art stalkers to come in and go to the balls and buy art. So having this collegiality was not only good for the community, it was good for business.

And then 1933 in the middle of all this, the parade float. And this is when the town of Rockport, the American Legion, they designed and built a replica of the wharf. It wasn't really of the Motif, it was the whole harbour scene with...you had the headlands and you had fishermen and lobster pots and whatnot and boats. But it was this little shack, and they drove this. They built it on a truck chassis, they drove it to Chicago and won first prize. And then that was what they say put Rockport on the map.

How could they not have won first prize? You had people like Anthony Thieme involved. Hibbard was in charge of design. John Buckley and Lester Stevens, painters of a national reputation, were making this parade float. Plus, you had a master shipbuilder in David Waddell, and you had professional fishermen, lobstermen, who were designing replicas of the lobster pots. It was really a fabulous thing. What, to me, it was about, is about the sense of community that they had in Rockport, and I can't imagine Gloucester doing this. You know, and everybody was involved. Every single merchant put an ad in the little booklet that went with this float.

30:02

So that was the big event.

Unidentified Speaker

30:05

Anything left of that float?

Larry Vincent

30:10

No, there's a seagull in the Sandy Bay Historical Society which I have in the book. But it, basically the float was parked on the dock and sat there for many, many, many years. And it just basically is, is gone. But you can see postcards from the '30s and '40s, where you can actually see that replica sitting on the dock. So here's... it won. And here's a cartoon with Rockport rubbing it in to Gloucester. Gloucester's The Man at the Wheel's going "ah, ah," and Rockport, the Motif, is going and "Whee, I knew my [?] in Chicago... Motive No. 1." The interesting, one of the interesting things, to me about this whole event, was less that it won the parade, but when it came back, it was the Motif. It left as "Motive" and it came back as "Motif." You can't find a postcard that says "Motive." But right around 1933 the postcards say "Motif No. 1" and it was really for outsiders, because the townies still called it the "Motive." And if you know any Rockporters or if you are a Rockporter, you may have heard "Mo-tiff". And that's a bastardization because you can't say "motive" when it's spelled with an "f" at the end. So they say "mo-tiff, a mo-tiff." But, but a lot of people, many people still call the "Motive" or "Mo-tiff" No. 1.

Unidentified Speaker

31:29

What was the size of the replica?

Larry Vincent

30:31

I don't remember... it was 48...

Unidentified Speaker

31:36

Or approximately like half the size?

Larry Vincent

31:37

It was on a chassis of a truck. You can see... Let's look at, here's a man standing on it. So a lot of these figures on it were figures that were not real, but this is what it looked like with Lester Peterson on the end of it. So it's basically the size of a large truck I think.

32:02

So by 1930, Rockport had achieved parity with Gloucester. Now, 1938, A.J. Philpott: "In spite of the fact that it is only four miles from Gloucester, the town of Rockport has a charm all its own. It attracts a greater variety of literary and artistic people than any of the other colonies on the North Shore." This is 1938, okay? 1941, though, I think this is even more telling. From the *New York Times*, the critic says, "I suppose Gloucester and Rockport would be considered virtually one, when we approach them as art colonies. It is only five miles from Gloucester to Rockport and the exhibition rosters are virtually interchangeable."

And this is the reality. There is no Rockport School in my opinion, okay? There is, there were people that chose to paint... like-minded painter, people who chose to paint and live and be associated with Rockport. But there's not really a Rockport School. What Rockport was able to do was to distinguish themselves from the rest of the artists on Cape Ann as Rockport artists, when they were all really Cape Ann artists. And I think that's a fair thing, at least that's the way I view it. And I think it's very telling what really, and a lot of the bad blood between Rockport and Gloucester, was that battle for, you know, the fact that Rockport established their own brand, and it was a very effective brand. And they basically outdid Gloucester economically and artistically for a while. So I think that's really what it's about.

And this is Aldro Hibbard, the leader of the colony, quite a character. The interesting thing is he's really not... he didn't really paint Rockport that much. He did paint Motif No. 1 a number of times, but he had a national reputation in the late '20s and '30s as a landscape painter of winter scenes in Vermont. And that's really where he painted was in Vermont. He lived in Rockport. He did his baseball in Rockport. He had his school in Rockport, but he was really a Vermont painter. And that's what he was known for.

This is a Rockport scene, though, and it's quite a lovely painting that he did of Motif No. 1. And this is John Buckley. John Buckley is one of my favorite characters. And I think, it's really because he was completely overshadowed by Hibbard. Hibbard cast a very long shadow. But Buckley was kind of the right hand man that you could always depend on. And he was very instrumental in developing the colony. And also I think he was a decent draftsman and a good artist. But he just, a lot of people just don't even know about him. Not only, well one thing he did... I think he did a couple things. He sold the shack to the town in 1945 at a financial loss to himself. I mean, he could have made a lot more money had he sold it to somebody who would

eventually put a [?] there. And, but he wanted it to be preserved and he felt that it should belong to the town.

The other thing is it was his studio from 1931 to 1945. And because it was a studio there were no lobster buoys hanging on the shack. It was a naked shack for all those years. And I think if Thieme had to paint all those buoys, he probably would not have done as many paintings as he did. And you will see when you look at the paintings that most of time, but in most of these paintings that you'll see don't have buoys on the shack because it was not a functioning fish shack or lobster shack at the time.

Buckley was a war hero. He was gassed and shot in World War I. He came back in 1919. He enrolled at age 27 in the Massachusetts Normal School of Art, which is now the Mass School of Art and Design. And in the summers, he would go to Rockport and went to study with Hibbard, as did a lot of disabled World War I veterans who went to study art... with Hibbard but with Hornby as well in Rockport.

This is called *Rockport Holiday* from 1929, and it gives you an idea that he was really quite a good draftsman. I, just for fun, I put up a Hibbard with two Buckleys for comparison. This is not the greatest Hibbard in the world...it's what I call, these are my standard issue Motif shots, you know. It's kind of the same angle, you've got the ice flows, and you got the boats, it's just a pretty straight, straight Motif. And if you look, you can see that Buckley's is a little bit brighter in his palette, and he's got a little broader brushstroke, and he's a little bit, got a little more verve and pop and than Hibbard did.

36:57

He's a little more modern in his painting, I think, at least in these examples. Just not quite as tight as Hibbard was, and Hibbard had to fight the accusation of being a "calendar painter" during this lifetime. But anyway, I think it's interesting to look at Buckley compared with Hibbard.

And then of course, there's Thieme. If anybody made the Motif famous on the walls of collector's houses and in museums, it was Thieme because he was a fine painter, and he painted the Motif a lot. So he's really responsible for a lot of the fame of the Motif in art circles. But I think the other stuff like the costume balls, and the shenanigans with public relations is really what made the Motif more famous.

This is a quote from an ad for the Thieme Gallery in 1952. And, putting him, choosing, using it for a reason at first. "In old Rockport for many years Anthony Thieme has been painting it's old wharves, charming crooked streets, Cape Ann houses aged and gentle, incorporating into his canvasses the passing life of the people who have made this New England village a place to be remembered."

What we're describing, what he's describing, is "American Scene," and he's describing the narrative, the story that these paintings tell. And the paintings of the Motif in this period, tell the story of a New England coastal fishing village. You know, you don't see the inside of the shack, but you know what people are doing in that shack. You know how people are living, what they're doing. And that's the narrative of these paintings. And I'm going to show some of them, and I want you to think of two things when you're looking at them. One is, see if you agree with the narrative. And secondly, look at the different ways that artists approached the Motif to paint it, because a lot of people were painting it and everybody would have to try and find a new and different way to look at it. So we're going to start...

Unidentified Speaker

39:08

Excuse me. Do you think it was staged in terms of dress for that painting?

Larry Vincent

39:13

No, that's the way he painted it.

Unidentified Speaker

39:14

That's the way he painted it.

Larry Vincent

39:16

That's the way he painted it.

Unidentified Speaker

39:17

Astounding.

Larry Vincent

39:21

He was European...

Audience Member, William Trayes

39:22

Larry, I disagree. Ann Fisk said that that was a staged...

Larry Vincent

39:25

Oh the photograph or in general?

Unidentified speaker

39:27

Oh, that was definitely staged.

Larry Vincent

39:29

Oh, the painting was staged, yeah.

Unidentified speaker

39:31

Because the painting is taken the other side.

Larry Vincent

39:35

Oh the photograph is staged. But I thought he was rather formal in his dress when he painted, is that...?

Audience Member, William Trayes

39:41

Not that formal.

Larry Vincent

39:48

He also had a wagon and he cut the floor out of the wagon so that he could paint in during the rain. So he would actually have his feet through the floorboards in his car, with the windshield wipers going so he could paint. And particularly, he was very interested in light. So that's what he did.

So I'm showing this Thieme— it's not my favorite Thieme. I don't think it's a particularly strong Thieme, but I'm showing it for a reason. A couple of reasons. One, you see the buoys there, this was done in 1928, before John Buckley took over. So there were some buoys that were hanging, but look at the color of it. It's... I mean, it's a gray shack, right? And when the, if you read the articles about the replica, there's no mention of the old red fish shack on the end of the wharf. It's just the old shack. So it wasn't perceived as red, or if it had a personality— if shacks can have a personality—that wasn't how it viewed itself. It was really weathered. And I, you know, it had not been painted for years. So this is gray. Of course, the painting calls for a gray shack and... the sky is overcast and waters kind of brownish, and dull.

But look at the difference, now 1935. Okay, so what's happened in between them? Well, first of all, the Motif became famous. It went to Chicago and came back; it was now the "Motif," and not just a fish shack on the end of the wharf. And look, you've got kind of a sexy angle here, and you've got a much bolder red. And... but the shack had not been painted in between 1928 and 1935. It was still the same weathered shack. And this is what it looked like. And again, if you look at orthochromatic film, this is not... it doesn't read very dark, or very pigmented. It was really quite weathered. I'll get back to that in a second.

This is Harrison Cady. And when I saw this, this watercolor, the first time, it completely blew me away for a number of reasons. Number one, it's dated 1908. And it's the earliest signed picture of the Motif that I've ever seen of. Though, you might have come across older ones, but this is the oldest I've come across. And it's 1908. And that's not... now, think about it. The Cape Ann painters, they'd been painting, you know, from the 1880s. And yet, this is the earliest and this was Cady.

The other things: it's called the *Old Red Fish House*. And so I believe Harrison... I don't believe the colors they painted. But if somebody says it's red in the title, I believe that it was red. I don't know if it was as red as this, but I got confirmation that it was red. The other thing about this is, and this may sound odd to people, I see Fitz Henry Lane in this, in this piece. Two things: number one, this is a portrait of this shack. I mean, that's really unusual in 1908. People weren't painting shacks. It wasn't a worthy subject. They were painting, you know, big vessels out in storms. Before that the Hudson River people were doing these grand vistas, you know, and picturing the sublime. This is a shack, and it's the center of his painting. But to me, it's like a painting of a merchant ship that Lane might have done for a patron, you know. Also, if you look at the foreground and the low tide and all the stuff going on, it reminds me of Fitz Henry Lane

as well. What you might not see as often is there's always, usually a dog in a Cady picture.

And there's the dog on the end of the wharf.

This is a Charles Kaelin, and this is probably... Kaelin was in Rockport early on. He was one of Duveneck's Cincinnati boys. And he was in Rockport in the first part of the 20th century. And this is taken from Atlantic Avenue looking *en face* at the Motif and at Tuna Wharf. And I refer to these as kind of the "in the way" paintings that the Motif was painted not because it was faint, it was just, it was part of the landscape of the harbor. And somebody's painting the harbor, and that's there. So they painted it.

So this is an early painting, again, much before the Motif had an identity. And here's another great painting. This is from the Corcoran, and this is Jonas Lie. And again, it's kind of the same angle in a storm. The Motif is just another shack outlining Rockport Harbor. But it really tells the story, again, remind you of the narrative of what these paintings.... the story these paintings tell.

Unidentified speaker

44:38

What is the date of that watercolor?

Larry Vincent

44:41

I'm sorry?

Unidentified speaker

44:42

What was the date of that painting?

Larry Vincent

44:43

The last one?

Unidentified speaker

44:44

Yeah.

Larry Vincent

44:44

I don't know. I don't know. I suspect... he was there pretty early, but he also came back later. I suspect this is one of his earlier ones in the '20s or even before that.

Audience Member, William Trayes

44:57

He was here for a lot of years.

Larry Vincent

44:59

Yeah.

Audience Member, William Trayes

45:00

And he was the road to path which the, several artists on Cape Ann got to National Academy, the National Academy. And the famous story is that he went to Hibbard and said, “You know, you're a great painter, I can get you into the National Academy. This is how you do it. You've got to go to New York for the winter. You have to join the Salmagundi Club. You'd have to know the guys; in the spring time you'll get elected.” Hibbard looked at him and said, “I would still pay; I can't afford to do that.” So they went to Gruppé. And Gruppé effectively said the same thing: “You know, I have a gallery in Florida, and I'm going down there.” Thieme says the same thing.

Larry Vincent

45:51

But Lester Stevens took him up on that.

Audience Member, William Trayes

45:53

Yeah. He went to Lester Stevens and Lester Stevens said, “I'll go.”

Larry Vincent

46:01

So I think, probably, I think it was a little earlier in probably before 1920.

Audience Member, William Trayes

46:06

Incidentally, he lived on Gott Street, in the building that Max Kuehne had later on. There was a barn there as well and that was his studio.

Larry Vincent

46:26

So that's the Lie painting. And we're gonna go... the next one, this is a Harry Vincent painting. No relation, but it did get me in for some interviews because some of the painters thought I was related to Harry Vincent. I didn't mention that I wasn't.

This is a fairly early Vincent. And again, look how red the Motif is there. I don't think that it was that red, but how could you not have it that red in a painting with blues in the water like this, and the golds in the boats... he really needed some pop to keep up with everything else on this canvas. And I think that the artist made it that red. That didn't really reflect the way the Motif looked.

And this is another Harry Vincent, and this is absolutely a fabulous piece. It's a small piece. And it's a lovely piece. I, you know, working on this book and seeing this art for the first time in my life, I've always liked art or appreciated it, but I've never had really visceral responses to paintings. And when I see some of these ones, I actually, you know, when I saw this, I just felt a warmth coming over me. It was just a fabulous piece when I saw it the first time.

Now, this is another early... this is 1913. It's in Rockport National Bank, and this is a Lester Stevens. And he was the first native Rockport artist. He studied with Parker Perkins. And of

course, he knew, he grew up with this shack. And he painted [?] fairly early on, really, just about four years after the Cady piece.

The interesting thing... I mentioned that artists look for different angles and ways to approach the Motif. But we can also see artists whose styles evolve, painting the Motif at different times in their evolution as painters. So, this is a very young Lester Stevens. And here's a little bit older Lester Stevens, coming back again to paint the Motif (and probably one of the strongest Lester Stevens paintings I've ever seen). And then there's a little bit later, and this is the Lester Stevens who will be associated with a guy who left Rockport and went to the Berkshires and started painting this in this very bright, bright palette. Which is all again, very different views of the Motif by Stevens.

This is another wonderful painting by Cady. There's the dog, so you know it's a Cady, and this is a storm. And you can see the struggling fishermen out there in the harbor. And this is apparently, allegedly, the Max Kuehne family that he was painting out there in the snow, battling the elements and the Motif is kind of the backdrop.

49:11

And I think this is one of the finer Cady oils. I love this painting that he did of the Motif as well. I haven't looked for the dog, I'm sure there's one somewhere.

This is in the Rockport Art Association, it's Yarnall Abbot. I'm quite fond of him as a painter. And it's very interesting. You're looking through the two buildings to see the Motif in the background. It's quite a nice piece.

And this one by Carl Peters, from 19-, about 1932, and this was for sale for \$400. He never sold this, this painting was never sold. He could never sell this painting but it's absolutely a fabulous piece, I think. I love the aerial view of the Motif. I love the palette. But it never ever sold. Now here's a different angle, not a great piece by Carl Peters. But it's one from straight across where you see both the Motif and the, what some people have called Motif No. 2, but it actually isn't. But the building on the end of Tuna Wharf right beside it... you don't see a lot of paintings like this probably because I don't think composition works very well. But there it is anyway, Peters did it at least once.

This is an Otis Cook; very evocative atmosphere with the Motif shrouded in mist and fog.

Again, the narrative of the lobstermen working, that "American Scene" type of piece.

And this is a Gruppé. Again, taken from the opposite side. We're looking *en face* at the Motif.

And this is probably my favorite painter, Frederick Mulhaupt.

51:01

And another just fabulous piece, I think, of the Motif.

51:08

So I want to just talk a little bit about some of this PR business and how the Motif was promoted. And this is a story that isn't known as much as the parade. And in 1942, Mary Heaton Vorse came out with this book *Time and the Town*. She was a journalist, and she was writing about her town of Provincetown. And they went to an illustrator named Norman Reeves. And this is the cover that they made. It looks a lot like the Motif. So in a book about Provincetown, well, you know, I talked about the Rockport people and the cohesiveness and the collegiality. There was an "Animal House" aspect to it, to them. You know, you read about the people and you just kind of wanted to hang out with them because they were just a lot of fun.

And so this is what happened when that came out. Hibbard sends a telegram, “I was shocked to the camel hair bristles of my paintbrush to discover that you had used a drawing of Rockport’s famous Motif No. 1 on the jacket of Mary Heaton Vorse’s Provincetown book. We of the Rockport colony have always looked upon Provincetown as a weak sister in the family of art. And this theft of our most sacred subject is a confession that the Cape Cod village is, minus the house, suitable to be reproduced in the excellent book by Mrs. Vorse. And John Buckley wired, “Motif No. 1 is my personal studio, therefore I join others in Rockport colony in vigorous protest. In fact, I think I will see my lawyer.”

And there were others, and even Thieme’s wife who is no “shrinking violet” sent a letter. If you read the, I mean, this is too cute by a half and the reason is that they had a sandbagger named Dixie Johnston, who was a *Boston Herald*, former *Boston Herald*, sports reporter who hung out with Hibbard, old baseball friends. And this guy would be, was involved in all these shenanigans to promote Hibbard in sports, and this was their first venture outside of sports.

To give you an example, this was in 1942. In 1938, there was a pitcher for the Cincinnati Reds named Johnny Vander Meer, and he pitched two no-hitters in that year, and it was a big deal. So Dixie Johnston made the discovery that Vander Meer was related to Vermeer, and arranged for Aldro Hibbard to give him an art lesson. As, you know the papers cover this, and photo, and this is stuff that really reflected that it was more PR for the Rockport art colony, even though it’s about baseball. And poor John Vander Meer was sent down to the minors the next that season, but he did come back a couple years later. But this is the type of thing he did. Another thing he did for baseball fans.... the Rockport baseball team lost their first baseman to the Navy. And Hibbard wrote Frank Knox who was the Secretary of the Navy, and said, you know, “since Rockport has lost our first baseman, could you please send Bob Feller to be stationed at Thacher Island? So, you know, we could exchange.” I think that’s in the National Archives of the Library of Congress, that letter.

So this, all these things got publicity, so this was yet another publicity stunt. Gloucester, grateful that they weren’t, that Rockport was aiming their guns at Provincetown and not Rockport. And, of course, Provincetown, instead of just laughing it off, this is how they reacted. The Chairman of the Board of Selectmen says, “I feel it is a trivial matter... when we are engaged in wartime activities for the benefit of the town and all humanity.”

So the Rockport art, they really went after them in a big way. And they had the, the [?] press apologized, “What can we do?” And Hibbard says, “I’ll tell you what we can do. You send the Rockport artists over to Provincetown to do a new cover for that book.” So they send Buckley over and Buckley of course, was a war hero and, and it all became a raid on Provincetown commandos. And of course, Buckley went with Dixie Johnston. They went together and Dixie was writing these stories. He was embedded in his own story and writing these, and trashing Provincetown. And they just, they were like, it was like shooting fish in a barrel and there was nothing they could do about it. And it went on for over a week, every day in the papers.

55:44

Now, this is why it’s relevant. Back to the Gloucester/Rockport thing, back to Joe Garland, as a description of how the Motif came to be. In August after this thing had kind of blown over, they interview Gruppé, who of course was in Rocky Neck, although he had been in Rockport until about 1928 with his father Charles, and then they moved to Rocky Neck. And Gruppé says, “Rockport artists always [?] of Gloucester when they want to paint something worthwhile. Motif No. 1 is all right for students and tourists from the hinterland who don’t know what real seafaring

scenes are like, but the Rockport folks know very well that they couldn't get along without Gloucester and the area to draw upon. Even with gasoline and tires scarce, the Rockporters clutter at Gloucester wharves. We're glad to have them in Gloucester too. What I object to is the way the Rockport gang never lets on that it is dependent on Gloucester for art as well as fish." So we've got a little prickly Emile Gruppé here. He goes on to say, "What if something should happen to Jack Buckley's shack and there wasn't any Motif No. 1 anymore? The Rockport artists would be caught with their "paints down." So here's the volley from Gruppé. And then of course, Rockport comes back and wins the day. Here's what Hibbard has to say: "Gruppé's a very fine fellow, don't you know. Think the world of him. I suppose Gloucester's just got him down. You see, we've got all the business right here in Rockport. Poor old Gloucester. The town's as dead as a torpedoed whitefish. It's staggering along on its last legs, and the only time it gets any attention is when we send in some of the overflow crowds from Rockport. And Gruppé, he's an excellent fellow, really has been quite despondent. We all feel for him, we really do."

So there was a reason for that. The Gloucester directory in 1942 when this came out, Emile Gruppé was one of 37 artists listed in the business section. He knew what was happening because by 1948 and '49, he was one of nine artists listed in the Gloucester directory, while Rockport resident artists listings was 37. So I got my spreadsheet out, and I thought I'd do this graphically to take a look at them and what would come up. And the blue is Gloucester artists number in the directory, and the green is the Rockport artists. And you can see this crossover where Rockport starts to take over the number of artists listed in about 1938. And that was kind of the tipping point. And this goes up to about 1956. And I extended it out to 1975 going through the directories, and you can see the spike in Rockport in the '50s in the number of artists listed, and sort of Gloucester just kind of petering along here. And this yellow is the number of Gloucester galleries, and this is the number of Rockport galleries. So you can see the Rockport gallery listings going up while Gloucester's being very, very stable. So Gruppé realized that, he knew that, there was no difference between Cape Ann. Gruppé knew that they were all Cape Ann artists. And it irked him that they were, had established this separateness... this brand. Because he knew as well as everybody else that they were all Cape Ann artists, and they all painted in a similar fashion. So I think it did drive him a little bit crazy.

59:46

Okay, so I'm not very interested in the commerce. When the town bought the shack, it's more about commerce than art. And I'm only including that because I think it's important to realize this, this was stuff that made the Motif famous as well. In 1946, the town takes over. And in 1950, they have the dedication of the Motif and the first Motif No. 1 Day. And it didn't take four years for them... there wasn't a waiting list for bronze plaques here. There was a reason that they did this in 1950. And it's a reason that they also started the *Rockport Anchor*, which was a very slick brochure that had the Rockport Motif on the cover virtually every year. And the reason was, the bridge was being built and completed. And basically the town fathers, or rather the people, the Rockport Board of Trade, we're saying, "Okay, now it's easier to get here. If you cross that bridge to Gloucester, and you just keep going until you get to Rockport." And that's really what it was about. It was a big PR, it really wasn't about art at all. And, you know, at this point, I began to feel sorry for the Motif for being exploited. It was really a thing being used for just blatant commercial purposes.

The town fath—the Board of Trade, they didn't know, this was just going to get out of control. I mean, they did the *Anchor* and they, the Motif No. 1 Day, then you got Madison Avenue involved. You know, Ford in the 1940s used the Motif. Here's Kodak in the '50s. You had Winston cigarettes in the '60s, and you had Chevrolet in the '70s. So now you've had a national exposure.

1:01:30

You have to change it.

Tech Operator

1:01:32

Yeah, thanks.

Larry Vincent

1:01:34

...the Motif there. This was 1953, the fishermen came back in, the lobster came in 1947. And they needed to hang their buoys, their lobster buoys, to dry. Then, this is 1953, 1958 the Motif goes International. The Brussels World's Fair, 1958, they have a "circlerama," nine or 11 cameras projection called "America the Beautiful." In about a minute or two into it, you have a boat coming into Rockport Harbor for all seven seconds you see the Motif. And this played at Disneyland for years and years. And there's a lot of people in town, I'm sure you remember as kids seeing the Motif and seeing Rockport Harbor at Disneyland, in that film "America the Beautiful".

And then you had of course movies, right, because the Motif was a symbol of generic New England, and it would be used as a backdrop. But even before that, in 1958, there was a TV show called the "Harbormaster" with Barry Sullivan... I don't know if you remember that, but that featured the Motif as well. As far as movies go... Gloucester, I think, you know, "Captains Courageous" and the "Perfect Storm" is much, they're much better films than "The Proposal" and "Stuck on You." Gloucester can really say that there are better films about Gloucester, that are filmed in Gloucester, than Rockport.

1:03:05

Okay, so the one thing that I think about every morning when I'm having my coffee in my Rockport cup, and I can't decide which Rockport coaster to put it down on, I wonder why the Motif isn't painted that much. And I think it's, you know, I went to a show at the Rockport Art Association, and there was not a single shot of the Motif. And it's really not surprising. And everybody can say, well, it's a cliché, it's been done too much. If you look at the paintings I show, I think it's hard for you to call it a cliché. I think that people have painted it as a cliché, bad painters have painted it as a cliché, but the Motif isn't a cliché. But we're in a different historical period now. This is not not the interwar period.... things, things have changed. We live in different times, and the artists really don't want to be restricted thematically. They're proud of the tradition in Rockport, and a lot of them just don't want to be doing a Thieme. So you can understand that the people have moved on.

There's another thing and that's, I think that there's the sense that if there's so many trinkets that have the Motif on it, that using the Motif as a subject for art is kind of devalued. That, and I think people are maybe afraid of, you know, I could see a guy spending \$8,000 for a painting

of the Motif and coming to show someone, you know, very proud of their purchase and saying, “look at this.” And the guy goes, “Oh, I know that shack. I've got the right on my keychain.... same exact.” I think that that's part of it.

But really, what I think it is more than over exposure, is what I call narrative confusion. And that's, the shack, there's so much narrative baggage that it is very difficult to overcome it. And we've talked about one narrative, the main narrative, and that is that the fish shack represents a town and a village, a way of life, and fishing. But I want to look at some other narratives.

This is a great watercolor with the Motif. And notice the color, it's not very red. This is probably done in the early '30s. And that may have been what the Motif—more of an accurate representation, because the Motif isn't the focus in this picture. The lady in red is the focus of this picture. And the narrative of this is not about a shack that represents a fishing community. It's about a shack that is painted. Because it's an interest to artists, for whatever reason. So this is a different narrative. And we have the same narrative in these ads. I mean, here's an ad for Winston cigarettes, and there's people painting it. Right? And here's the Ford ad. And there's a woman being taught how to paint and the amazing thing about this ad is that the only things worth painting are obviously on the other side of the car, and the Motif, but she's looking the other way. So that is very, very odd.

But this is again, the narrative of a shack that is painted because it had historic importance, but not because it represents old New England. And then that's the same, this is a different, slightly different narrative. This is a narrative not of it being painted, but of it as a symbol of a town. This is Ellie Hershey and Rockport was near and dear to her. And when Samuel painted this, he put the Motif in there. And here it's really used as an icon, as a little symbol to represent Rockport, which was important to her. So this is the narrative of the Motif as a symbol and as an icon.

And here's an example of a photograph by Thomas Phillbrook. This is not about a colonial fish shack and a way of life in the community. This is not about people painting a fish shack because it's special. This is about an icon. Right? And this is absolutely brilliant. This is William Bradley, who did this. This is called *Icon One*. And this is really the condensation, the distillation of the narrative, because not only is it depicted as an icon, the painting... I mean, it is an icon. It's literally an icon. And so, again, so we have this narrative of the icon, and the narrative of the shack being painted, and the narrative of the old New England. And on the trinkets, there's a different narrative, and it's unambiguous. And it's, “hey, I went to Rockport and I brought this back.” So that's, that's the other narrative.

1:08:10

So how do you paint it now?

1:08:13

I think one way, and I've talked to artists they say, “well, you have to find a fresh and new way to do it.” Well, you know, people have been trying to find a fresh new way since 1921, to paint the Motif. And in fact, the whole sense of cliché or being overdone, goes as far back as in 1938. There was an amateur art competition, announced in the Cape Ann log, and you can submit anything as long as it wasn't the Motif. This was 1938. So, you know, at least they didn't want to see students paint it anymore.

But one way that you can do it is, basically you've got to kind of transcend or escape those narratives and that narrative confusion, and always just to make it part of the landscape, again,

just like Jonas Lie did in 19—, you know, whenever he painted that one. Just the way Charles Kaelin did, it's really nothing special. This is a harbor scene, and there just so happens to be that building there. This is really more about the yacht club than the Motif. That's one way of kind of escaping that baggage.

And this, I think this is lovely. This is by Tom Nicholas, and he doesn't paint the Motif. And I, I, frankly, went to Tom, because he had a painting that I wanted to use. I assumed that he hadn't done anything of the Motif and told me that he had done this one, and it is a wonderful piece. There's, you know, this is a very contemporary view. And it really doesn't, you don't think in terms of colonial lobster pots as much as guys, they just got their morning coffee, and they're going to work in a very contemporary New England town. So it really transcends those confusions as other narratives. And it has its own narrative. You know, it's a contemporary narrative.

And this, I love this piece. This is by David Tutwiler. Again, Rockport artist who doesn't paint the Motif. But he painted this one. And I'm reminded of the Yarnall Abbott where you see the Motif between the buildings. This is just so subtle, but it's there. You know, this is Rockport. And it has its own narrative. It has a different narrative of a rainy day and a person walking past the shop. But I was taken by a little light in the second floor window, because I know that Captain Bill Lee, who leases that, he has that light burning every night in honor of the American servicemen. And originally when the Motif was bought by the town it was as a war memorial. And so that little light really has a lot of significance, whether or not David knew about that at the time, I don't know. But that has another layer of meaning for me.

This again, I think you all would agree that this is a contemporary narrative. And these paintings that I've shown you, they're not clichés. They're really terrific paintings. So I'm gonna stop here, if anybody has time left on the meter and wants to ask questions. I'll be happy to address them.

Audience Member, William Trayes

1:11:13

Larry, can you go back to your first picture?

Larry Vincent

1:11:18

Very first?

Audience Member, William Trayes

1:11:19

Yeah, very first... your cover. Reason that I say that, a few months ago, a curator at the Taft Museum in Cincinnati wrote an article, part of which was "What is American about American Art"—which is always a matter of controversy. And I think this one is just a great example. If you look at the line of white across the top of Motif No. 1... only Americans would have done that.

Unidentified Speaker

1:12:09

That's funny.

Audience Member, William Trayes

1:12:12

There's a Lester Peterso—, Lester, oh you know what's the name... Stevens, of the Congregational Church, and he has the time of day with that. This is what is... European artists would have [?] the detail; the American artist has to put it in there.

Larry Vincent

1:12:37

Speaking of white on the roof... When I was interviewing Arnold [Nalf], he mentioned in the '50s, he said, "Well, did you know some vandals painted the roof white? The Motif?" And I thought, this is a great story, but when was this? And he didn't remember exactly when...it was in the '50s. I thought, you know, going back through a decade's worth of Gloucester Daily Times thinking that maybe someone would mention it. And you know, they might not mention things like that in the paper. So I just said, "Well, you know, I can't use it. It's a fun story, but it's not going to go in the book." And, you know, months later, I get a call from my neighbor, two doors down, and he says, "I've got a story about the Motif that I bet you haven't heard." And I said, "I bet you I have." So he came over and he said, "Did you know that in the 1950s someone painted the roof of the Motif?" And I said, "As a matter of fact, I do know that story." And he looks at me and says, "But do you know who did it?" And it turns out his wife's boyfriend did it. And I've got the name, but I wouldn't publish it. He was like a sophomore at Dartmouth. And he was a geeky guy, and he painted this, while he was dating my neighbor, he painted the roof of the Motif in the '50s sometime.

Unidentified Speaker

1:14:10

Question of some verbiage of that thing about the seagull...

Larry Vincent

1:14:12

It was actually "bird spell" is what we wrote. And I don't know exactly what that means. I don't think it was "bird spill," it was "bird spell" is what...

Unidentified Speaker

1:14:21

I'm trying to remember. I remember seeing it. Yeah, but I can't remember exactly the wording.

Larry Vincent

1:14:28

Yeah.

Unidentified Speaker

1:14:29

You know, barns were always painted red and assumed it was because it was the cheapest paint. And that would explain why it was painted, and he did have to be painted. I can remember as a kid, chipped off and it faded out. And when they repainted it you go, "Woah, what happened to the Motif?" Because it was bright all of a sudden. A couple years later, it was backwards, dull.

Larry Vincent

1:14:53

Right. And they first painted it allegedly in 1942. And they said that it hadn't been painted for 75 years. Of course, I don't believe anything that group of people said. But when they painted it, they made a big deal out of it. You know, they were going to paint, they were going to [?]. And they knocked on the door and Buckley was there. And he was like, he didn't know anything about it. "Do you mind if we paint your shack?" And he says, "Oh, that would be okay with me. It's getting a little, you know..." And, but the interesting thing to me when they painted it, is that I think they painted it the color of canvases... not necessarily a color that they remembered in real life.

1:15:26

You know, I think that it was really an example of life imitating art. And then they painted it that red color. It was the color that Harry Vincent used, you know, when he had to stand up to the blue of the water—not any color that was necessarily the one that was really there. And as far as that you're right, as far as cheapness, although they were using a lot of lead white and if you look at the Rockport, the other shack, it was white and the buildings on Tuna Wharf were gray. So I think it was a — well it's cheaper now, and barns used cows' blood because it was so available. And, but what they used here was like brick red, they could use brick and granite to get the dust, and so they were using, basically, is a ferrous red, an iron red. You could get it from clay, you could get it from bricks. It was readily accessible, and it was cheap. The question is, why did they choose that to be red when all those other buildings were not red?

Unidentified Speaker

1:16:24

It was clearly read before... when did Wonson have it?

Larry Vincent

1:16:28

Well, Wonson had an 1892. We know it was red in the eighth—well, we know that it was pigmented in the 1890s. And we know that Harrison Cady called red in 1908. But you know, I've talked to Erik Ronnberg about this, you know, the question is, well, was it really red or kind of a rusty color...what he calls ferrous red. And that typically, when it fades, it fades into kind of a brownish hue. And if you look at the WPA book on Massachusetts, when they describe the Motif, they talk about a little shack with a brown, brownish siding.

Unidentified Speaker

1:17:07

Well even in the photograph of the... I don't know whether it was the Winston ad or one of the ads. It looks about six different colors of red. I mean, it's just faded in different ways all over the building. So it may have been whatever was handy.

Larry Vincent

1:17:25

But the crankcase oil, I don't believe... that was another Dixie job. That was another Dixie Johnston thing.

Unidentified Speaker

1:17:32

I remember people talking about it being painted with copper paint, red copper paint from the paint factory in Gloucester. And I couldn't ever verify that they painted with that bottom paint—boat bottom paint

Larry Vincent

1:17:26

You mean the Wonson paint factory?

Unidentified Speaker

1:17:47

Yeah.

Larry Vincent

1:17:47

That was defouling paint; that was really dangerous stuff. They wouldn't have painted that on a building. That was used for, from my understanding, that was for boat bottoms for defouling.

Unidentified Speaker

1:17:58

Well it was expensive because it was copper based.

Larry Vincent

1:18:01

It was expensive and it was bad stuff. It was very toxic stuff. You know, I was, I thought well it was Wonson Paint Factory and you had this guy Wonson. Well, maybe he got it from his cousin or something. But, back to the crankcase oil. You know, the article reported in the *Boston Globe* reported that he got four gallons of crankcase oil. And of course, the same author says that the painting event was organized by Dixie Johnston. As soon as I saw that, I knew this was a scam. And years, you know, when they painted it again, in 1959, Hibbard was quoted as saying, talking about the secret formula. And you know, it was raw sienna and dashes of black and white, and colors known only to artists, but he didn't mention the crankcase oil.

But I was so taken in by it, and there were so many people in town that were taken in by it, that I went, that I got pieces of the old, original motif that had been salvaged. And I hired a company to do paint analysis. And is one of the most, probably the most embarrassing thing as a rube from Kansas who was snookered by this, that I actually, the woman said, "Should we look for anything in particular? You know, aside from the layers of paint." I said, "Yeah, can you look for crankcase oil residue?" And they did the analysis but the paint was too weathered to, for them to come up with anything definitive. But that, but people, you know, people in town really believed it; believed the secret formula, believed that there's this patented paint.

What they use is Cabot's barn red, now, with the Rotary Club. And the sad thing... sometimes I felt like I cared more about these things than the town of Rockport. But you look at the color, and it was described by one artist with just total contempt, saying he described it as denture pink. And you look at that color and it's just an orangey... it's just an odd color. And what I found out from Ben's Paint is that they changed the formulation of Cabot's barn red...this was a few years ago. And it's got the magenta, the, you know everything else in it, but it doesn't have the black in it. They took the black out of the formula. So what we're seeing is really a barn red minus the black that it really needs to give it a really barn red deeper color.

Unidentified Speaker

1:20:24

So that wasn't oil based, you couldn't throw in a little crankoil.

Larry Vincent

1:20:27

Exactly and it's latex.

Unidentified Speaker

1:20:33

In your studies of the paint formulations, if you go back in time, people used [?]. And you're using different [?] and that could either be opaque... it would depend on what it would be and how well it's going to hold that pigment. Because the pigment is always coming out, which is a self cleaning. And that would change it over the years as the different layers were being changed by the host, more than anything else. And how well it would hold the pigment.

Larry Vincent

1:21:06

I don't think they were painting it a lot between... until 1942. Well I think that originally that's treated with linseed oil or nothing, just let it weather. And then they painted it obviously in the 1890s. I don't think they painted... I think was really very weathered for a number of years. I talked to John Buckley's son, because I was wondering, well, did they paint it in the early '30s? And he said, "No, he didn't." So I don't know when, but after 1942 they painted it regularly, fairly regularly.

Audience Member, William Trayes

1:21:42

Larry, did you know you can tell the day of the week on which that painting was painted?

Larry Vincent

1:21:47

On the back or on the front?

Audience Member, William Trayes

1:21:49

No, those boats were from Boston. And they fished in Ipswich Bay. And, but, and they went out early in the morning and they came back late at night. A truck would come down from

Boston, pick up the catch of the day, and take it into Boston. They'd stay overnight and then the next morning out they'd go, but they didn't finish on Sunday. And so that's why you see them all tied up. I can, having grown up in Rockport, I can even remember one of the names of one of the boats, which was *Sebastiano and Figli*. I always thought that "Figli" meant a boy's name, when it turned out to be "son."

Larry Vincent

1:22:26

I've seen those pictures of those boats. And the Museum here has great pictures of them.

1:22:34

Anything else?

Unidentified Speaker

1:22:37

Do you have a next project?

Larry Vincent

1:22:40

No, I'm working on it, but it probably won't be a Rockport project.

Unidentified Speaker

1:22:45

Do the paint factory in the [?].

Unidentified Speaker

1:22:49

I've noticed in a lot of them that there's a change in the structure. In this one, there's two wooden things that come out of the side of it to put a "David" on to hoist stuff up and down. And the door is on this side. And then on a couple others the door was by the windows on the right hand side. And then I noticed a couple there was a skylight on that side of the roof, which disappeared. And the chimney moved from the other side of the roof to this one. So...

Larry Vincent

1:23:27

Yeah, the Harrison Cady and the 1908, I don't know if you look carefully at it, but the dimensions are all off. It's much too long and there's a skylight in front. It really, I don't know if he just had a long sheet of paper and he wanted it to fit better. But it really is not very accurate as far as what he drew.

Unidentified Speaker

1:23:44

Well it was like the Young Frankenstein when the [?] kept changing.

Larry Vincent

1:23:59

Well, you know, the pilings are all the same.

Unidentified Speaker

1:24:02

There's no, there's no curving.

Larry Vincent

1:24:04

There's no, well, when they, you know, when the builder who was going to do that asked the town if he could put a sway in the roof. And they said they said no. So, yeah. And he wanted to do that. Yeah, but they didn't want it to happen.

1:24:22

Okay, well it's been a pleasure. Thank you very much.