

East End an art magnet since 19th century

Published: October 29, 2011 10:47 AM

By LIZA STATTON Special to Newsday



Photo credit: Anthony Barboza | Artist April Gornik works in her studio in North Haven. (Aug. 11, 2011)

There are certain places in the world that beckon artists: The East End of [Long Island](#) is one.

It's remote yet accessible, modest yet grand, communal yet individual. Such contrasts remain inherent to life on the East End, where a combination of cultures with diverse pursuits exists.

Replete with verdant lands and azure waters enveloped by open skies, the East End's natural beauty is the antithesis to Manhattan's industrial landscape.

In the 19th century, visual artists trekked to the outer edges of [Long Island](#) in pursuit of new ideas and uninterrupted views of nature. [William Merritt Chase](#) eschewed the opulence of his elite society subjects in New York City for luminous views of humble cottages in windswept landscapes near his summer home in Southampton Town.

Decades later, the desire for the physical and emotional space that stirs reflection and fosters innovation brought the abstract expressionists -- [Jackson Pollock](#), [Lee Krasner](#) and [Willem de Kooning](#), among many others -- to the East End, where some of the most important experimentations in modern art occurred.

The area is now home to many artists' studios and remains a critical outpost for artistic production.

Nationally and internationally known artists Terry Elkins, April Gornik, Lucy Winton, Mike Solomon, Frank Wimberley and Fulvio Massi live and work on the East End, from [Sagaponack](#) and [Sag Harbor](#) to [Bridgehampton](#) to [North Haven](#) to [Wainscott](#). Though each has highly individualistic approaches to art-making, they acknowledge the influence the locale has on their work.

Many of Elkins' atmospheric paintings result from his direct explorations of Long Island. Working within the traditions of plein-air painting, a style involving natural outdoor light, Elkins describes the landscape observed, its grandeur and increasing fragility. Conjured rather than surveyed, Gornik's [sublime](#) landscapes render nature transcendent and defiant.

Winton blends the mystical with the mischievous. Her nocturnal imagery of animals and children speaks unapologetically to the fairy tales that were central to the Romantic Movement.

The process of translating natural phenomena, and its psychological effects, into visual form similarly underscores Solomon's work. His abstract

sculptures embody events where transitions of energy occur, as in an ocean wave. Solomon considers these moments "metaphors for consciousness."

Accident and spontaneity figure strongly in the works of Wimberley and Massi. Both are drawn to the formal language of the abstract expressionists, wherein gestural drips, splatters and stains create texture and sculptural surfaces.

"I am very much affected by living on the East End of Long Island, including the way with which I think creatively," said Wimberley. "My life as an artist did not begin here, but it has developed here."