

Painters capture Yarmouth's outdoors during Plein Air Art Festival

pressherald.com/2025/08/14/painters-capture-yarmouths-outdoors-during-plein-air-art-festival

August 14, 2025



North Yarmouth painter Pamela Shockey participates in the Plein Air Art Festival from Yarmouth's Madeleine Point on Aug. 13. (Sophie Burchell/Staff Writer)

At Madeleine Point on Yarmouth's Cousins Island, artist Pamela Shockey paints five dinghies tied to the dock.

Mixing oil paint shades of blue for the water and the exact orange for the lifejackets tied to the boats, she works quickly as elements of the scene before her change by the minute. The light, the tide, the clouds, even the arrangement of the dinghies shift with each brush stroke that attempts to pin them down.

"A lobster boat came in, and they totally rearranged," Shockey, a full-time painter from North Yarmouth, said with a laugh.

Despite the challenges, the dynamic process of painting “plein air,” or outside, is more than worth it to her. The process trains your eye to better see color and shape, as the changing environment highlights new features of the scene, said Shockey.

“You end up capturing something you really can’t capture in a photograph, or when you are set up inside,” she said.

This week on Yarmouth’s docks and beaches, in parks and gardens, painters are setting up their easels and working to capture the scenes before them. The Plein Air Art Festival runs from Aug. 13-23 and features more than 20 artists painting outside throughout the town. Guided by [a map](#) pinpointing where and when the artists will be painting, visitors are welcome to watch the artists work, talk with them about their process, or set up their own easels and join in.

“The idea is to learn the town through the eyes of the painters,” said Catherine Bickford, executive director of Artascope Studios and organizer of the event.



Working in pastels, Yarmouth artist Amy Toneys sketches Sandy Point Beach on Aug. 13. (Sophie Burchell/Staff Writer)

With the mission of peer-to-peer art education, Artascope Studios is an art school based in Yarmouth that employs a variety of working artists to teach classes. The [Plein Air Art Festival emerged from artists](#) meeting up to paint outside in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and grew from there.

This year, the festival is hosting artists from the Yarmouth area, across Maine and as far as New York City. In addition to the artists at work throughout town, the festival now includes plein air classes and a juried art show and soirée on Aug. 30 at 317 Main Community Music Center.

Bickford said a goal of the festival is to get people more comfortable approaching artists. Seeing artists at work can make the process of painting much more tangible and approachable, she said.

“Sometimes it can be mystifying because people are so good, but it’s nice to see people at different skill levels doing it because you realize, ‘Oh, everyone started in the same place,’” said Bickford.

Set up in the Yarmouth Community Garden, Falmouth painter Jessica LaPlante sketched out the corner of a stone wall with the surrounding flowers and trees on top of a bright orange background. Her third time in the festival and a frequent plein air painter, she is often approached by curious onlookers, particularly children.

LaPlante said that while children will come up and say they are artists themselves, adults typically frame painting as distant and unreachable.

“They usually say they used to paint, or they want to paint,” said LaPlante. “I encourage them to get a sketchbook. Just paint, and sketch — just do it.”



In the Yarmouth Community Garden, Linda Rowell-Kelley paints using a palette knife. (Sophie Burchell/Staff Writer)

Also in the garden, Linda Rowell-Kelley used a palette knife to lay down daps of color on her canvas to represent the growing flowers and vegetables. She described her painting style as scooping up a handful of strewn-about buttons into a bag.

“That’s how I paint. I put it all out, and in the last half-hour it starts to look like the place,” she said.

Painting outdoors even in winter from her home in Freeport, Rowell-Kelley said she encourages everyone to view themselves as an artist. Even if someone is not plein air oil painting all the time, the mindset of an artist leads to more careful observations of the world, she said.

“If you really look at those flowers and the colors, it does something to your spirit that we need,” she said.

Bickford said that painting in the always imperfect, always changing environment of the outdoors demonstrates the messiness of the creative process, which she hopes inspires onlookers at the festival to take up the brush themselves.

“That’s why I call it plein air for the people. Because it’s like, just give it a try,” she said.

IF YOU GO:

The Plein Air Art Festival runs from Aug. 13-23 at various locations throughout Yarmouth. For more information about where the artists will be painting, classes and events, visit artascope.org/artascope-plein-air-art-festival.

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