



Putting down roots

Hope Von Stengel

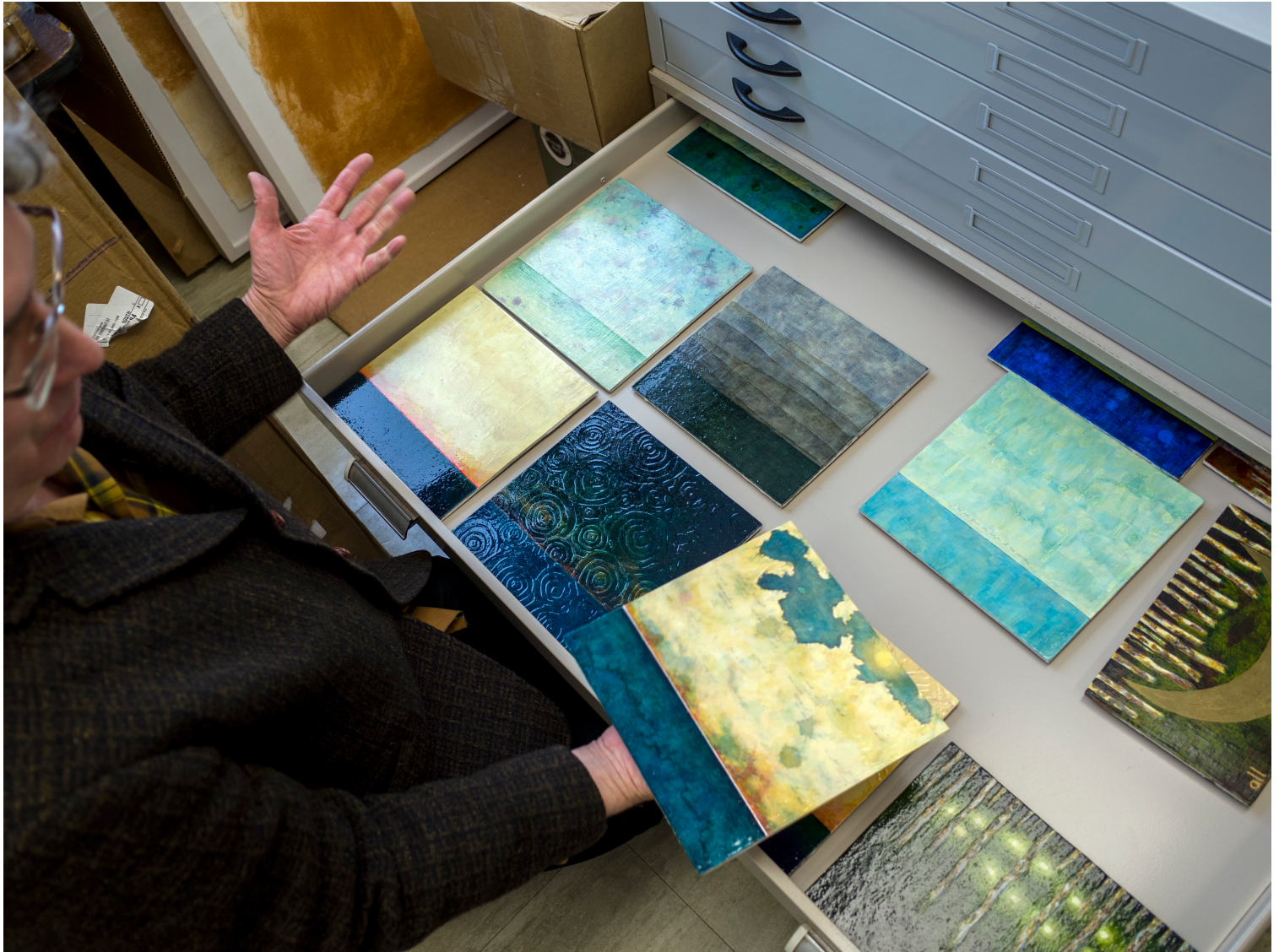
Walking into a person's home, especially an artist's, is a revelatory experience. The furniture, mementos, and art chosen are as much a representation of someone's personality as their passions and personal history. Opening the door to Richard Barlow's Oneonta apartment is like entering an art gallery that doubles as someone's home—although his electric guitar, record player, and impressive record collection hold prominent places amongst mid-century furniture and a smattering of retro toys, I was engulfed in art as I sat in his living room. Framed drawings, ceramics, paintings, and prints, all by other contemporary artists, dominate the walls and surfaces.





Rich explains that some of the pieces he displays are the result of trading work with peers, while other work was gifted by friends or purchased from artists he didn't know, but admired. Arranged in a thoughtful, organized manner, a mutual respect and appreciation for the work

other artists create is clearly demonstrated. It's no surprise to learn that Rich is intimately involved in working with other artists, both through his teaching and through his role as chair of exhibitions at the Community Arts Network of Oneonta (CANO).



Artist, professor, board member, guitarist and maker-of-noise in Oneonta's experimental noise band Brave Cosmonauts—since moving from Minneapolis to upstate New York less than two years ago, Rich's enthusiasm for being an active member of the local arts community has already yielded deep roots.

Trained as an oil painter, Rich's younger work reflected what he describes as "romantic notions about the artist and inspiration." But he has evolved, and his art now can be best described as conceptual work that incites dialogue with the viewer. While his art is aesthetically beautiful, it goes deeper than that, exploring memory, place, and environment through a variety of mediums.

One of my favorite of his series of work, *Covers*, asks fundamental questions about how and why we attribute memory and significance to images in the natural world. Each work is based on landscape imagery from various album covers; taken out of their original context, it was impossible to relate the drawings of forests, sunsets, and mountains to their original meaning. Created from multiple layers of silver leaf on vellum, the drawings appear precious. Before knowing anything about the work, I projected and assigned value, believing that each work reflected a powerful memory or significant place in Rich's life—as most of the images could be drawn from my own composite of experiences.





More recently, Rich has been working with chalk and blackboard paint to create site-specific, temporary murals, through which he investigates “how landscape is used to produce meaning.” *The Copse*, a mural drawn and designed specifically for the Hathaway Gallery at CANO, wraps itself around all four walls, placing the viewer in the center of the landscape, which is the copse (or thicket). Unlike a 15th-century landscape painting that co-exists with other two-dimensional works on a museum wall, *The Copse* monopolizes the observer’s attention, putting them “in touch with their own drive to discover and create meaning,” Rich explains.

Within a week of his students' graduation this past May, Rich embarked on a month-long artist residency in Wassaic. Rich first visited the Wassaic Project, located in Dutchess County, while he was touring various regional art galleries. Impressed by the contemporary art exhibit in Wassaic's Maxon Mill, he "needed to find a way to be a part of it," he says.



See Richard Barlow's work on display at Maxon Mill in Wassaic until September 20 (<http://wassaicproject.org/>).

In early June, Rich installed *P1020786.jpg*, a piece that is best described as a large, fantastic, shimmering billboard made of sequins and latex, on the exterior of the historic Maxon Mill, set against a gorgeous backdrop of mountains. Last summer, Rich visited early photographer Fox Talbot's home in England, Lacock Abbey, where the world's oldest camera negative in existence was taken. When creating *P1020786.jpg*, Rich worked from his own cell phone

photo of the oriel window at Lacock Abbey in an attempt to digitally recreate *The Oriel Window*—Talbot’s first successful photographic print—from the same angle. The undulating, glimmering piece simulates the original’s ephemeral quality, which also used sunlight to coax its image into existence.

Much of Rich’s time at Wassaic involves devoted daily studio practice. “I have a few projects I am working on simultaneously, though also remaining open to surprise and new ideas,” he explains. “The concentrated work time and routine has been great.”

Rich describes Wassaic as “a great example of the kind of creative energy and community throughout the Catskills and Hudson Valley.” The weekend that he installed his piece, the Wassaic Project hosted their Community Day Parade and Block Party. Throughout the year, they dedicate their time to organizing several benefits and arts events that bring locals and resident artists together.



Photos of Richard Barlow in his home by Joe Von Stengel.

Images of Richard Barlow’s work courtesy of the artist.

Becoming part of a residency that celebrates local engagement with the arts is reflective of the way that Rich has interwoven his roles as visual artist and community member. His commitment to connecting and creating an open dialogue with others through his art has established him as a vital member of the upstate New York artist tribe.

See more from [Richard Barlow \(http://www.rbarlow.net/\)](http://www.rbarlow.net/)

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