

SCULPTURE REVIEW

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| *Change is in the air ...*



OUR NEW NAME IN JANUARY

*Sculpture, Monuments,
and Open Space*



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STUDIO EVOLUTION: FROM THE BASEMENT TO PERFECTION

BY GWEN MARCUS

Let me share with you the story of my current studio—a journey that will resonate with many sculptors. It's a tale of moving from makeshift workspaces to finally achieving my dream studio. Along the way I encountered challenges, overcame obstacles, and learned valuable lessons that shaped the functional and fulfilling space I have now.

For decades, my studio was a cramped, dimly lit, brick-walled basement in the heart of New York City. Despite its limitations, I cherished this humble space. Illumination was a constant struggle, relying on a single overhead light and portable lamps to create the necessary interplay of light and shadows. Artists make do with what's available. In that basement, I produced numerous life-size and larger-than-life sculptures, such as *Serenity*, a 7-foot

figure, *The Bather*, a 6-foot sculpture, and *Hatti*, another over-life-size figure. Countless other pieces and commissions found their genesis within those brick walls.

Though I was aware of the studio's limitations, it remained my sanctuary until a fateful day when my 8-foot figure, *The Tempest*, collided with the low ceiling. Faced with the impossible choice between art and living space, I dismantled the sculpture, transporting its sections to my New York City apartment. There, I bid farewell to my old furniture to make room for studio stands and tools. This was my new workspace, and it was, in fact, an improvement. But my small apartment, with its obstructed views and limited lighting, presented its own set of challenges. Track lighting and movable lamps became my allies, while mirrors strategically placed provided the



Left: Working on waxes in New York City apartment, which had become my new studio.
Right: Working on the clay version of *Hatti* in New York City basement studio. Photos by the author.

necessary perspective. At the end of each day, I studied photographs of my work, which provided insights and understanding of its evolving needs.

Then, the unexpected happened—a pandemic swept across the world, and my husband and I found ourselves living and working in a house on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. The uncertainty of those times left me unsure of what was temporary and what would become permanent in my situation. As I continued working on various commissions and projects, the three lower-level rooms of the house gradually transformed into makeshift workspaces. Initially, each room had a specific purpose, from clay modeling to mold-making, and wax and finished work storage. However, as my need for space and natural light grew, I found myself expanding into the main living area. Over time, the boundaries blurred, and the entire house transformed into my workshop.

The seamless transitions from daily life to art-making had its advantages, but once again the “make do” situation exposed a need—in this case a need for a dedicated space to accommodate both my work and the living environment I now shared with my put-upon (but understanding) husband. The longing for a studio that functioned seamlessly and eliminated the need for constant improvisation and workarounds led me to collaborate with architect Woody Pier of Pier, Fine Associates in New York on a new studio on the adjacent property to the house. Woody’s deep understanding of the sculpture creation process and his ability to merge functionality and aesthetics made him the perfect partner for this venture. Together, we embarked on an enjoyable and fruitful collaboration, and in May 2022, I stepped foot into the completed studio.

The studio’s openness, both in terms of space and light, fulfills a lifelong yearning. Its design allows me to step back, observing my work in progress from various angles and distances. Floor-to-ceiling windows adorn the eastern side, ushering in abundant natural light, a stark contrast to the solitary ceiling light of my first studio. It includes a spacious and adaptable work area, complete with a dedicated room for wax and mold work, boasting excellent exhaust and ventilation systems. A small gallery space, a convenient slop sink, and a kitchenette were also incorporated, ensuring uninterrupted focus on my work.



Above: Working on *The Bather* in clay in my basement studio, New York City. Below & Overleaf: *The Tempest* in clay in the New York City apartment, which ultimately became my new studio. Photos by the author.



“Though I was aware of the studio’s limitations, it remained my sanctuary until a fateful day when my 8-foot figure, *The Tempest*, collided with the low ceiling”





An outdoor deck provides an added unique work area, while a much-needed storage space caters to molds, plasters, and supplies. Mirrors continue to play an integral role in my artistic process: one wall is fully mirrored, and I also use a freestanding, wheeled mirror that can be moved to various positions.

Woody Pier has made the exterior of the studio structure both distinctive and captivating, we think, while making sure that the wood-shingled building blends seamlessly with the surrounding Cape Cod architecture. Over time, like a patina on a sculpture, the building will age gracefully in its natural environment.

It is interesting to hear Woody's thoughts on the application of architectural analysis to a sculpture studio design: "The design of the studio was inspired not just by great sculpture studios of the past, such as Chesterwood, but specifically by the beauty of this particular site and its position overlooking the ocean. I felt our task was to create a building that respected the architectural vocabulary of the Cape but interpreted it in a new way to take advantage of the spectacular views and abundant natural light available to us. Toward that end, we opened the east and north facades with large glass doors which led out to decks overlooking the ocean. The hipped roof is distorted to create an oculus at its peak that figuratively "reaches" for the north light. And the double-height studio space provides the volume to create larger works. The end result is a space that is intimate in scale, but feels grand and that takes full advantage of the spectacular light and views to provide inspiration to the sculptor at work within."

In this idyllic setting, my studio has become a space for creativity and inspiration, breathing life into each artistic endeavor. The inaugural piece I created within this sanctuary was a 4-foot seated young girl, a work that evolved from a smaller piece conceived during the pandemic. I was able to invite a mold maker to work in my dedicated casting room. I found that this ventilated room, which we tented, added critical safeguarding to the creative process. The little girl currently finds herself in New York at the Modern Art Foundry, where I recently completed the wax work, and where she now is being cast in bronze.



First piece created in the new studio on Cape Cod. The bronze will be completed shortly.
Photo by the author.



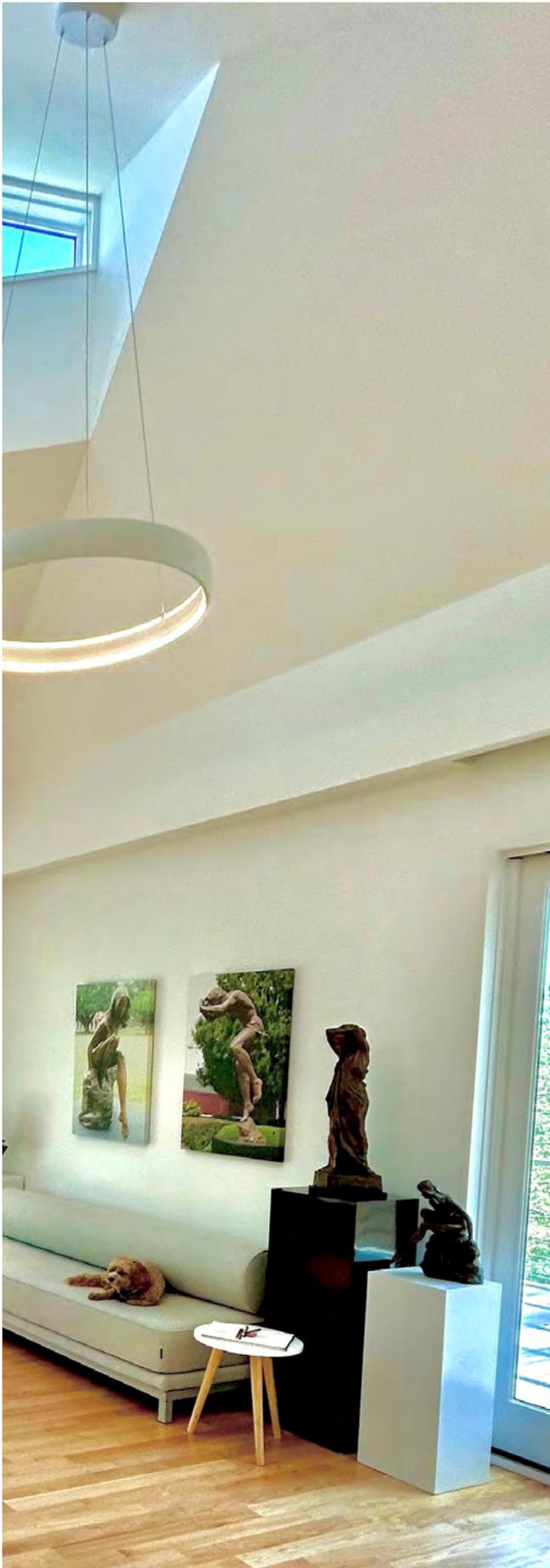
“Being by the ocean in this secluded and enchanting location fuels my artistic spirit The past sounds of traffic from the city have been replaced by birds and the serene sound of rolling waves.”

The new studio space, with its functional design and added conveniences, now welcomes numerous visitors, a luxury previously unattainable in my smaller workspaces. Recently, the Cape Cod Museum approached me, requesting a visit for a group of docents to explore the studio. This visit was an enriching addition to their program, coinciding with an upcoming exhibition of my work in late August, where I will also deliver a lecture. As the Museum’s director and docents roamed through my space, I had rearranged my pieces, facilitating a smooth flow and leading engaging discussions about my inspirations and challenges. The insights gained during this visit will be shared with the Museum’s future visitors. Those visitors will first be introduced to my work by my 8-foot sculpture, *The Tempest*, which currently stands at the front of the Cape Cod Museum.

Being by the ocean in this secluded and enchanting location fuels my artistic spirit. However, the solitude comes with its own set of challenges, such as limited access to specialized supplies and services. Yet the joys and creative stimulation offered by Cape Cod’s unique ambiance far outweigh any inconveniences. The past sounds of traffic from the city have been replaced by birds and the serene sound of rolling waves.



Main Room in my new studio. Photo by the author.



Outside the front of the studio
with my sculpture *Hatti*.
Photo by Taylor McDade.



As the summer months arrive, the seashore teems with life, I'm filled with ideas and inspirations. These moments, whether I'm walking along the beach or observing visitors collecting shells and rocks, with all the various activities breathe life into new concepts waiting to be transformed into tangible works of art.

I find great joy in seeing how my sculptures have become woven into the fabric of Cape Cod and its captivating landscape. Years ago, my sculpture of a boy playing baseball, *The Catch*, was permanently installed at the baseball field in Eldridge Park, home of the Orleans Firebirds. The field and team are steeped in a century of history as



Top: View of slop sink area and side door. **Bottom:** Docent visit from The Cape Cod Museum of Art, prior to my upcoming exhibition and lecture. Photos by Hannah Conway.



an important part of the Cape Cod Baseball League, and I'm thrilled to feel a special sense of connection to my new environment.

"... I'm thrilled to feel a special sense of connection to my new environment."

I knew, undoubtedly, that a well-functioning studio space would bring me joy and convenience, eliminating the need for constant improvisation and workarounds that had plagued my previous studios. Yet I could not have anticipated the profound impact that working amidst the natural surroundings in this beautiful and cherished space would have on my life. ●



Top: View of Gallery in the studio. **Bottom:** View of the wax and mold room in the studio. Photos by Hannah Conway.



Above: Main Room facing the entrance of studio. Photo by Hannah Conway.
Below: *The Raincatcher* on the studio deck, facing the National Seashore. Photo by the author.

