

Decor Maine

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LIVING BEAUTIFULLY IN MAINE

the
**LIVING
BEAUTIFULLY
ISSUE**

ESCAPE TO
THREE
of the
MAINE COAST'S
Most Iconic Regions:
**Mount Desert Island,
the Kennebunks
& York**

STEP INSIDE
*A Seaside Retreat
in Boothbay &
A 1925
John Calvin Stevens
Classic Shingle Style*

**THE
DEFINITIVE
GUIDE IS HERE!**

100
of the best
*places to eat,
sip, shop, and spa*

Plus!
Summers
in Cushing:
visit artist
LOIS DODD





INBLOOM:

The Perennial Creativity of Lois Dodd

Lois sits behind her home and studio in Cushing, where the beauty of Maine summers has drawn her back for decades.

FOR THE PAINTER,
MAINE SUMMERS OFFER
ENDLESS INSPIRATION

BY **ALLISON PAIGE**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **DAVE CLOUGH**

She trained her eye outward, in clear-eyed depictions of everything from the men's shelter next door to a tree in leaf.

Lois at work painting the fiery daylilies that surround the property.

To reach Lois Dodd's summer home in Cushing, you must follow Route 220 South, a portion of which is called Friendship Road. How fitting, as it was friendship that first brought Lois to Maine over seventy years ago, and what largely keeps her returning today. She and Alex Katz, who met at Cooper Union, along with their significant others at the time, bought a place on Slab City Road in Lincolnville. Lured from the sweltering lower Manhattan summer by its untrammelled beauty and proximity to Coleman Pond, Lois found the region to be a boon for plein air painting, a practice she took up at the urging of Katz. On the July day I visit, the winding road is lined with wild daylilies, their vivid orange blazing like brush fires. As I arrive at the house and barn that Lois has owned since 1963, I see the flowers are there too, crowding the back field and even populating her latest painting.

Born in Montclair, New Jersey, in 1927, Lois studied painting at Cooper Union and settled in the East Village, where rents were cheap and space plentiful. Her loft on East 2nd Street may be more familiar for the view from its window than its interior. She trained her eye outward, in clear-eyed depictions of everything from the men's shelter next door to a tree in leaf. Once a downtown fixture of the New York City abstract art scene, Lois now credits her community of fellow artists as the incentive that kept—and keeps—her going. “I mean, you’re doing it for yourself, but you’re hoping to get some response back. You know, you’re not *totally* doing it for yourself,” Lois emphasizes. “You have to have that part. But it also helps to know that some other people respond to what you’re doing.”

In 1952 she co-founded the Tanager Gallery, an artists' cooperative that served as an influential abstract art hub for a decade. Lois was the lone female of the five founders: Charles Cajori, Angelo Ippolito, Fred Mitchell, and Bill King, the sculptor to whom she was briefly married and with whom she had her son, Eli. Lois recalls, “Bill had had a Fulbright; we spent a year in Rome. That’s where we met Angelo and Fred, there on GI Bills, too. When we got back to New York, everybody realized de Kooning and people like that were just beginning to be shown. There was no way anybody in our category was gonna be shown. We were just too young.” Their solution was to start a gallery for the up-and-coming abstract artists like themselves, hungry to break onto the scene.

“Although we weren’t *that* young,” she amends. “I don’t know whose brainstorm it was that we should start our own place. But somebody dreamed it up. It wasn’t me; I could tell you that!” Launched on East 4th Street and later moved to East 10th, the gallery’s surroundings were more scrappy than auspicious. “It was up a little flight of stairs, just one little room. The elevated train was still running down 3rd Avenue. It was really the Bowery, full of bars for guys.” Drunks would loiter on the stoop. “Somebody said, ‘Is that your doorman?’” she laughs. “That was what was great about East 10th Street. It was like a graduate program. Except of the best kind. And, also, free!”

Alongside her prolific output, Lois taught at Brooklyn College for over 20 years and maintained a strong connection with the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, as a faculty member and board governor. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Academy, she has been the subject of more than 50 solo exhibitions, and her work is held by numerous museums



Treasured objects and artwork from dear friends fill a desk in the painted bedroom.



opposite, top: Burning House, Night, with Fireman, 2007, oil on linen, 46 x 64 inches, is one in a dramatic series of buildings ablaze. opposite, bottom left: Sunflower Petal in Grass, 2010, 5 x 7 inches captures Lois's attention to nature's smallest details. opposite, bottom right: Spring at Blaisey's Sheds, 2003, oil on Masonite, 10 x 18 inches, reflects Lois's ongoing interest in outbuildings as a motif. above: Red Gladioli, 2004, oil on Masonite, 16 x 10 inches.

All artwork images: © Lois Dodd. Courtesy Alexandre Gallery, New York



left: In the vintage kitchen, Lois scattered Pollock-like dribbles of paint across the floor. above: A trompe-l'œil window painted in Lois's bedroom. below: Lois's iconic bedroom, familiar from *The Painted Room* (1982), is set within a surrounding landscape of nature. opposite, top: A bucolic view that Lois never tires of. opposite, bottom: In the field beside Lois's home, blooming flowers provide a favorite subject.



and private collections. *Catching the Light*, her first American retrospective, debuted in 2013 at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, in Kansas City. In August 2024, the Kunstmuseum in The Hague, Netherlands, mounted her first international retrospective, *Framing the Ephemeral*.

For years, Lois enjoyed working *en plein air*, making small-scale paintings on Masonite and later, aluminum roofing panels (she dubbed them “flashings”), finishing in a few hours, with brisk handwork that gives the pictures immediacy and rigor. Now, the proliferation of ticks keeps her mostly painting in the adjacent barn and solarium-like studio built by her architect son, Eli. The interior of the house feels like a work of art itself, with Pollock-style paint splatters on the kitchen floor and the glade-like “Painted Room” where she sleeps surrounded by walls she painted like a pine forest.

Ranging from the dramatic, as a building ablaze (*Burning House, Night, with Firemen*, 2007), to the contemplative, as a single fallen petal (*Sunflower Petal in Grass*, 2010), her work is comprised of careful observation and a democratic treatment of her subjects, depicted swiftly, unsentimentally, with keen attention to the vagaries of weather and time. If her themes remain largely quotidian—the view from her window, the side of a derelict barn, laundry flapping on the line, her depictions mesmerize, elevating the ordinary with her unstinting regard.

Glimpses of the artist as subject are few, refracted through windowpanes or rendered in silhouette, as in *Shadow with Easel* (2010), a rare self-portrait. Dodd captured herself mid-brushstroke, both observer and participant, a dark outline on the ground bristling with green grass. When I ask if painting feels like meditation, she cautiously agrees, resisting esoteric palaver. And as for what

her paintings mean? She leaves that up to the viewers and critics. “I consider that I’m painting, basically, what I see. It’s pretty much landscape. I mean, if somebody has to describe it, they have to dream up some kind of language. But I’m not into language. This is my language.”

As plain-spoken as she is industrious, Lois, like most artists, is attuned to the light. When I take my leave, she notes that the cloud cover of the morning is finally beginning to lift. The day is young—there is still time to paint—and the sun is just breaking above the trees. ■

