

Joyce Johnson

PROFILES IN ART

Editor's Note: When we were putting this issue of Cape Cod ART together, we received the sad news this spring that Joyce Johnson passed away. We felt that this influential artist's profile should remain in this issue, along with a testimonial to her written by one of many devoted supporters and friends from the Cape's art community.

"The human body is one of the more complex items in existence," said Joyce Johnson in a recent interview, describing her sculptures of the human form ranging from abstract renderings to detailed depictions. Johnson often worked with live models, a technique she was first exposed to at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. "It was a wonderful opportunity to examine space and line," she said in an interview before her death in April of this year.

Johnson, the founder of the Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill, died at a friend's home in Orleans after a hospital stay because of a stroke. She was recognized as an artistic inspiration to many for her work at Castle Hill as a teacher, a past president, a board member, and long-term executive director. In 2013, the Arts Foundation of Cape Cod awarded Johnson its Lifetime Achievement Award.

For many years before her death, Johnson's work had long been a staple of the Addison Art Gallery in Orleans. "I am there because [Helen] has a carefully run gallery and works hard for her artists and clients," said Johnson, recalling Addison's support of her work and that of other Cape and regional artists.

Johnson grew up in Concord, MA and credited the town's literary heritage as a pivotal influence on her artistic development. "We lived on Thoreau Street, only two blocks from the Emerson Library," the sculptor said. "I remember riding my bike there and reading anything I could get my hands on." Johnson loved the sea from an early age and delighted in reading about the sailors who whittled wood as they sat on deck. She started carving at the age of 10. "My first love was wood," Johnson said, "because it's warm and interesting and available and varied."

Uncertain of what she wanted to do with her life, Johnson moved to Spain in her mid-20s. "As soon as I arrived, I felt at home," she recalled. She ended up studying in Madrid under Don Ramon Mateu, an acclaimed Spanish sculptor. It was a formative experience that changed her life and provided clear direction.

When Johnson returned to the United States, she studied at the MFA, before moving to her family's summer home in Eastham. "I was the one in my family who always came back to Cape



Dune | mahogany | 16" x 12" x 8"



Sea Blossom | ceramic | 8" x 6" x 10"

"A Renaissance woman and a force of nature, our Joyce. She perceptively chronicled the passage of human stories for newspaper, or radio broadcast. She imaginatively sculpted powerful, yet graceful forms from wood, stone, clay, and bronze. She created organizations which honored and enriched the natural beauty of the Outer Cape, or which educated and empowered artists and writers to also create works of subliminal beauty. She made a difference.

In the tradition of Beston and Brancusi. Joyce will forever be inseparable from the profound simplicity of an artful life that she truly embodied and so clearly loved."

-Kim Kettler, artist and president of the board, Truro Center for the Arts, Castle Hill

Cod,” she said. “I gravitated to the ocean and the sound of the sea.”

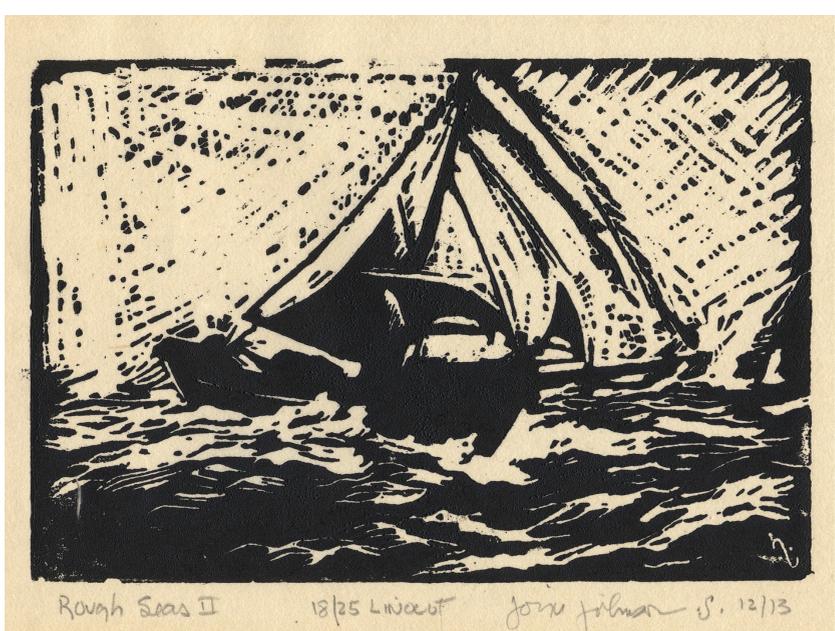
Johnson had taught while at the MFA, and saw an opportunity to open a sculpture school in Eastham. “My mother let me set up a deck in the woods behind the house and that’s where the school got started,” she said. Four years later, the school had become so popular that when a barn became available in Truro, Johnson seized the opportunity to expand. “There were a lot of artists in Truro. So they supported it and we came out of the woods,” she said with a chuckle. That’s how the School of Sculpture evolved into the Truro Center for the Arts.

As a year-round resident since the 1960s, Johnson found parts of Cape Cod’s commercial development to be excessive. “Too many machines, too many cars, too many houses,” she said. “Thank God for the National Seashore. At least there’s that reprieve from all this advancing.”

Yet, Johnson did not view external change as detrimental to her work. “It might even enhance it,” she said, “because it forces you to focus on your studio and yourself.” As part of this introspection, Johnson started doing pastel drawings late in life, which offered insight into her sculptures and creative process. “I love to refine things down to their essence,” she said. “I’ve come to realize that my inclination is to simplify and eliminate as much as possible.”

Top: *Lady In Hat* | resin | 9” x 7.5” x 12”

Bottom: *Rough Seas II* | linocut | 4” x 6”



Joyce Johnson’s work may be seen at the Addison Art Gallery, 43 Route 28, Orleans, addisonart.com