

The Hartford Courant

A Film Salute To John Marin

Documentary by Michael Maglaras Of Ashford Will Be Screened At New Britain Museum Thursday

By SUSAN DUNNE, sdunne@courant.com

May 25, 2010



Actor/director Michael Maglaras

When we last checked in with Michael Maglaras, in March 2007, he was at the [New Britain Museum of American Art](#), presenting his [documentary](#) about American modernist painter [Marsden Hartley](#). That film, "Cleophas and His Own," was the culmination of a years-long obsession Maglaras had with Hartley, a fixation that resulted in a second documentary.

Today, the Ashford filmmaker — who has a production company, 217 Films, with his wife, Terri Templeton — has found a new artistic soul mate. On Thursday, also at NBMAA, Maglaras will present his new documentary about another modernist: "[John Marin](#): Let the Paint Be Paint!"

Modernist painters are a labor of love for Maglaras, 60, who in his "day job" is a risk-management consultant. He sat down to discuss his affection for this style and this artist:

Q. Where does the title of your film come from?

A. This is actually a quotation from a letter that John Marin wrote to [Alfred Stieglitz](#).

Q. You were focused on Marsden Hartley for many years. What is it about John Marin that finally lured away your attention?

A. I am particularly interested in American modernism and in the kind of work that was done in what I consider to be America's "golden age," that is, the last 30 years of the 19th century and right up to our intervention in the first world war. It was a time of enormous artistic importance in American life. John Marin was alive, but so was [Mark Twain](#) and [Walt Whitman](#) and Marsden Hartley, as well as the finest composer we have produced in America, [Charles Ives](#). It was an enormously important period in the development of our country's artistic life.

Q. What is it about modernism that fascinates you?

A. I have a penchant for artists who are loners who go against the grain. ... I don't know of any period in American artistic life as fertile, as wonderfully challenging, as provocative and as satisfying as early modernism.

Q. Hartley and Marin both painted [Maine](#). Why were they both so inspired by the state?

A. First of all, it's just a great place to visit. There is something wonderful and magical about the quality of the light in Maine, particularly at the end of the summer. ... Maine is also known as a place where artists like to go in the summer. And contrary to some views, I think artists do better when they have an opportunity to see each other socially, to share ideas and visions, and possibly collaborate.

Q. You seem interested in the fact that Marin had a fairly commonplace life: a wife, kids, non-artistic hobbies. Why does this make him an anomaly?

A. I think it was the German novelist [Thomas Mann](#) who said, "I think all businessmen should look like artists, and all artists should look like businessmen." When I think of that quotation, I think of the wonderful [Wallace Stevens](#). There was never an artist who looked more like a businessman than he did! I'm not a painter and never will be, and I think I share the prejudice that so many of us share, which is that we expect the lives of painters, and particularly the lives of successful painters, to be filled with a lot of drama, a lot of turmoil and enormous amounts of sacrifice. This simply wasn't true in Marin's case. He lived a rather normal middle-class existence.

Q. Who were Marin's influences? Who was influenced by him?

A. As to those who influenced Marin, in particular it was James A. McNeill Whistler and the incomparable drawings and etchings Whistler did in the last 10 years or so of his life. ... Marin was influenced by the great and largely unknown painter Arthur Carles. ... As to those who've been influenced by his work ... virtually none of abstract Expressionism would exist without John Marin. That he influenced [Mark Rothko](#), that he influenced [Jackson Pollock](#) and many other artists, including [Robert Motherwell](#), who came to prominence particularly in the 1950s, is simply beyond doubt.

Q. You recently moved from Greenwich to Ashford. What drew you to the quiet corner?

A. Because it is very QUIET, and we very much hope that it stays that way!

"JOHN MARIN: LET THE PAINT BE PAINT!" *will be shown Thursday at the New Britain Museum of American Art, 56 Lexington St. The "red carpet" event begins at 5:30 p.m. with a cocktail reception, followed by the screening at 6:30 p.m. The film is 95 minutes. Black tie or festive attire is suggested. Tickets are \$20, and can be bought by calling 860-229-0257 or by e-mailing Heather Whitehouse at whitehouseh@nbmaa.org.*

<http://www.courant.com/entertainment/movies/hc-michael-maglaras-nbmaa-0525-20100525,0,3501924.story>