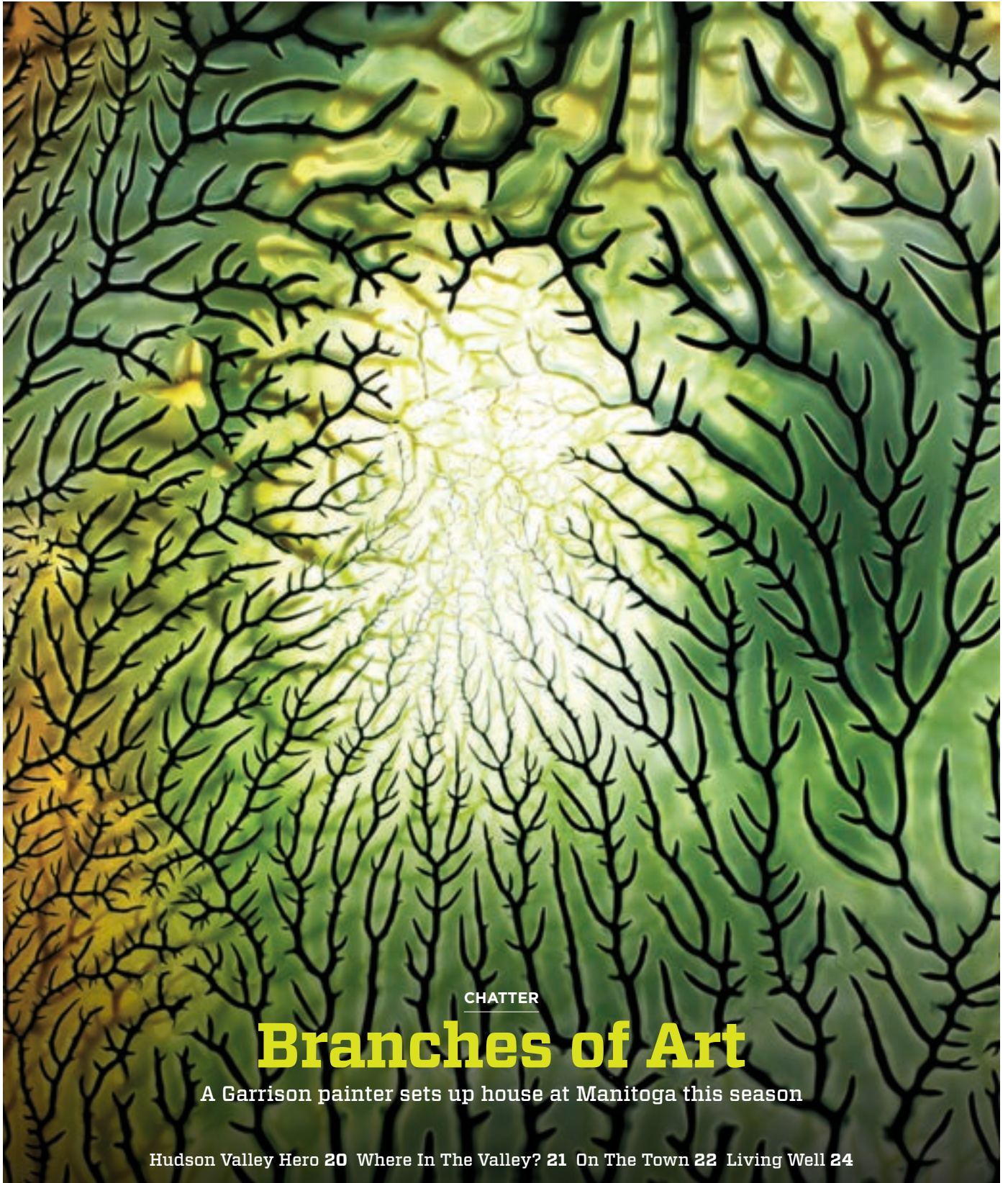


The **Pulse**



CHATTER

Branches of Art

A Garrison painter sets up house at Manitoga this season

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Light It Up

Manitoga's newest artist-in-residence explores light, paint, and the structures of nature.

By DAVID LEVINE

Artist Peter Bynum has, according to not one but two experts, “invented a new way of painting.” One of those experts is Allison Cross, executive director of Manitoga/The Russel Wright Design Center in Garrison. A National Historic Landmark, the center includes the house, studio, and 75-acre woodland garden designed by influential 20th-century industrial designer Russel Wright. The center named Bynum its 2016 artist-in-residence and is presenting a site-specific installation of his works in Wright’s house and studio. While Manitoga started its artist-in-residence program in 2014 (previous participants include Melissa McGill, whose blockbuster public art project, *Constellation*, will light up Bannerman Island again this summer), this marks the first time a contemporary artist presents work in the interior spaces of Manitoga.

Bynum, 60, lives in Garrison. His work has been exhibited in Rome, Shanghai, Paris, and throughout the U.S. He has received commissions from New York’s Museum of Arts and Design; the New York Public Library; and the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, which mounted 10 of his massive canvases for the riverfront in Peekskill.

Bynum presses paint between multiple sheets of glass to, as Cross explains, “release its primal energy, then infuses it with light to



COURTESY TARA WING PHOTOGRAPHY

expose paint’s intrinsic branching behavior. These three-dimensional, illuminated paintings on glass evoke the life-force found in ecosystems throughout nature.” The new show is entitled *Ecstatic Light*. HV chatted with Bynum about his artistic endeavors.

Q: Why did you choose this title?

A: Ecstasy is a heightened state of consciousness when thought goes away, and we experience intense pleasure. Light lets us see the world — “in the beginning there was light” — and of course it’s a subject of intense interest to painters. I want to merge light and paint to trigger an ecstatic experience in the viewer. The theory is that when light comes through these vast networks of branches on multiple layers of glass, we feel the life-force in action and the interconnectedness of all living organisms. That deep experience of nature and connection is a form of cosmic consciousness, the kind of spiritual experience Russel Wright wanted people to have at Manitoga, which is Algonquin for “place of great spirit.”

Q: How did you become an artist?

A: I am originally from Atlanta. I grew up on my family’s cattle ranch — I was literally a cowboy. In 1979 I moved to the East Village in New York City and worked as a creative director for various causes. I was very involved in the antiwar movement in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Then I started my own agency for TV and print campaigns for progressive nonprofit organizations. I had gone to NYU to film school, and was also making films and doing photography throughout the ‘80s and ‘90s. I moved upstate in 1996. But after 9/11, I decided to completely dedicate my time to making art. The depth of my emotional response was such that the only way I felt I could deal with it was through painting.



COURTESY FRANK FANULIARO

Q: Why painting, and not your other mediums?

A: I was finding photography inadequate to express the full range of emotional and intellectual responses I was having to 9/11. I started painting on photographs, then became enchanted as I learned more and more about the nature of paint, the extraordinary properties it has, particularly when pressed between plates of glass. That was around 2005.

Q: How did you discover that?

A: It was a happy accident at first. I thought this branching architecture was extraordinary, and on glass it became even more profound. When I held it up to sunlight through a skylight in my loft — I lived in Beacon at the time — it was an epiphany, not only about the nature of paint but about the possibility of hope and renewal. I looked at these branches, and all this despair in my life — it was after 9/11 and I was going through a divorce — and it was a renewal of hope. The beauty of these incredible systems is found throughout nature: inside our bodies in our cardiovascular system and neural networks, which are all made of branches; and outside in nature in tree branches and root systems; we also find these patterns through which energy flows. It’s like you are looking at the life force in action, energy flowing through the paint. The Chinese might call it qi, in India they call it Prana. These are all distribution systems for different forms of energy, and a model for the interconnectedness of all things. When we feel that profound connection, it is as close as we come to feeling ecstasy.

Q: What does it mean to you to be named artist-in-residence at Manitoga?

A: It is such an honor, because Russel Wright was one of the great innovators in American design history. Manitoga has never brought a contemporary artist into his home and studio. To be thinking of him and how he thought, how he tried to break down barriers and de-



COURTESY VIVIAN LINARES

Modern manse Wright designed the interior of Dragon Rock, his circa 1960 home.



velop new ways of doing things — which is what I try to do in my paintings — is exciting and rewarding. I am standing on the shoulders of a giant. I am really humbled by it.

Q: Has living in the Hudson Valley influenced your art?

A: Absolutely. The Hudson River School painters saw nature as touched by the hand of God. They didn't want to show any human interference with what was considered the perfection of nature. Living in the Hudson Valley and looking at the landscapes these painters painted is so inspiring. As an artist whose work is nature-based, I am essentially paganist in my attitudes toward nature. Nature is perfect, man is imperfect, and we need to learn from nature's perfection.

Q: Can you describe your work process?

A: I have a beautiful studio, 3,000 square feet, on the banks of the river with lots of windows. I try to work every day. I paint the same way Jackson Pollack painted. The glass is laid flat, and I lay paint on the glass. Then I put another piece of glass on top and walk on it to press the paint. Each piece has from one to 10 sheets of glass. They are actually light-infused sculptural paintings or illuminated paintings on glass. It has been likened to swimming through the painting, like being underwater.

Q: There is a famous quote that art is never finished, only abandoned. How do you know when one of your works is finished?

A: I know a painting is finished when it takes my breath away.

Ecstatic Light is on view from May 13 through November 14, 2016, during seasonal public tours and special programs. A Member Opening Celebration takes place on Saturday, May 21, from 5-7 p.m.

Artist-led tours with Peter Bynum are scheduled for July 2, August 6, and October 8 from 4-6 p.m. Registration for these and other Manitoga programs is available at www.visitmanitoga.org.

Laying Down the Law

A Mahopac mom juggles the ups and downs of parenting while serving as an NYPD cop. **By JILLIAN PHIPPS**



Dodging bullets is tricky. Cuffing a 250-pound man and stuffing him into a police cruiser is no walk in the park. But trying to get two kids up for school, organize car pools, and have a hot meal on the table before bedtime, that's next to impossible.

In honor of both Mother's Day (May 8) and National Police Week (May 11-16), we salute New York City Police Officer Kristen McKee, a 19-year veteran of the force. In her South Bronx precinct she is called Lieut. McKee, but at home she is simply Mom. For the last 11 years, she has lived in Mahopac with her husband Terry, a Port Authority sergeant, and their son Dylan, 7, and daughter Lylla, 8.

"We love Mahopac," McKee says. "It's the perfect little town for us." Her neighbors have even dubbed her the notorious strict mom. Children beware: McKee jokes that parents will scare their kids into staying in line before a play date at the McKee house, telling them, "you better behave yourself — they're cops!"

"I am *the* paranoid mom," she laughs. "My kids don't have as much freedom as a lot of their friends do."

But her children understand why mom puts the kibosh on some sleepovers and play dates. "The kids understand my job and are proud of what I do. Hopefully when they get older I will loosen up the reins a bit," she jokes.

And although the handcuffs and patrol car don't carry over to her second job as

a mother, McKee says it's the values that go along with being a police officer that she utilizes at home. "As New York City police officers, we set a positive example in the community; people look up to us. We wear the uniform with pride, all while treating people with respect. Those are the values that I teach my kids and hope they pick up on."

But then there are the negatives aspects of being a mom in blue. "My husband and I have missed a lot of things — school events, practices, games. We are not guaranteed holidays off, and when one of us is home with the kids the other has to rush off to work," she explains. "It's tough."

McKee looks to a strong support system of family and friends to help with her hectic schedule. "There are times when I'm at a scene and I just can't leave. Thankfully I have great backup at home, a team of people who understand that at any moment something could come up and I'll need to lean on them. I've been so fortunate."

In fact, her fellow officers not only back her up on the streets but on the parenting front as well. With more than 4,000 females serving as NYPD officers, and a whopping 19,000-plus males making up the bulk of department, the women on the force make a point to help each other. "There are so many women on the job right now, and a lot of them are moms. It's great because we all understand and look out for one another."

One of the common things these police moms have to deal with is the added danger factor. "It's always in the back of my head whenever I go out on patrol," she says. "I just think to myself 'I have to get back safely at the end of my shift, I absolutely have to. My kids need their mom.'"

Even after seeing the very worst that police work has to offer, McKee says that life is just too good to dwell on the negatives. "Of course there are things that occasionally pop up that haunt me, but my home life is so rewarding and positive," she says. "My kids keep me so busy that there isn't time to dwell."

So what's harder, being a mom or being a cop? "Being a mom is certainly harder," she laughs. "My kids are always on my mind, and no matter how old they get that will never go away. Motherhood is 24/7, it never ends."