

The arts in Maine

A photographer-painter seeks to simplify world



THE ARTS
News and views

By Robert H. Newall
Of the NEWS Staff

TRENTON — While George Daniell has made an enviable reputation as a photographer of classical elegance and subtlety, he is in the dichotomous position of wanting to be considered ultimately a good painter. In the latter department he is essentially impressionistic, though he calls himself a colorist.

Like many another he came under the spell of the Maine seacoast when he spent a summer vacation on Monhegan Island. His paintings reflect his obsession with the rock-studded coastline fringed by firs and pines. "I'm tapering off with photography now," he said with some definiteness. "The world is terribly complex these days and I, for one, am trying to simplify — for better balance and survival. And in painting I think I see the way."

Actually, Daniell has been consumed by painting all his life. Even when he was earning his bachelor's degree at Yale, he was taking art courses on the side. "But the problem was," he said with a trace of irony, "is that when I got out of college, I had to make money. And that propelled me into photography. It was pretty gruelling taking portraits in New York City, but I made a good living and became a Sunday painter on the side."

Because of his fascination with people, he was led easily into portraiture. As one with an unquenchable thirst for the film genre, he took photographs that often resemble movie stills. In fact, some years ago he even made a documentary in New York with his cousin Elizabeth Wheeler, a piece called "Light for the Traveller" (for the Traveller's Aid Society). But he is quick to add, "When I looked through the camera viewfinder, I didn't see things as fully as when I looked at them as a painter. I saw them merely as an arrangement whereas, sans camera, I can see them in full color and cinemascope."

Since Daniell always had a talent for drawing, he has never abandoned the form. For one thing he did the drawings for his college year book; for another he did cartoons for the Yale Record. "I just liked it," he remarked. "I wish I had devoted myself entirely to it. Photography just didn't satisfy me."

Photography, he asserted, is indubitably an art. "A good photographer," he explained, "expresses himself effectively, knows how to crop well, can print nicely with gradations of light, and so on. I don't really think photography impinges on painting at all. You can do anything you want with a painting, whereas a photograph is generally realistic. With the latter the color will sometimes fade. That's the trouble with Technicolor movies. 'Camelot,' filmed in London, has all faded out."

At a 1971 show at the University of Maine at Orono, Daniell submitted portrait studies of many of the celebrities he has captured on film: John Marin, Georgia O'Keefe, Anita Ekberg, Audrey Hepburn, Tennessee Williams. Over the years his work has slipped into publications like "Life," "Time," "Esquire," "Coronet" and "Down East." Some of his pictures are starkly dramatic, while others, depending on their subject, are mistily reflective, disarmingly nostalgic and — melodic.

"Up to this year I always have slung my camera over my shoulder," he commented. "But now I see so much more in a specific scene that I prefer to sketch it. At this point the camera becomes an adjunct. Oh, I've had good luck with photography. I've tried always to get people at their best. If they look like hell, some say that's fine — after all, that's realistic. I don't glamorize them, but neither do I try to get them when they are unkempt."

"I use a small camera entirely," he stipulated. "I'm basically a candid photographer, my work being close to that of Cartier-Bresson. Today everyone's taking photographs — and good ones, too. The competition is fierce. And in a place like New York, prices are astronomical."

"I still want to be known as a painter, though," he persisted. "After all, there were three in my family in England. I started out with watercolors, but I shifted to oils. Watercolors are hard to transport, being more fragile than oils."

One of his missed opportunities was the invitation to photograph Laurence Olivier (his favorite actor) and his then-wife, Vivien Leigh, when they were living in a restored abbey in England. The wages of procrastination.

He is proud, however, that another noted photographer, Bernice Abbott, bought one of his paintings.

In the atmosphere home that he shares with fellow painter Steve Dorland, about a third of the paintings that cover the walls are Daniell's, another third Dorland's and yet another third the work of others. It would seem that the camera is capitulating to the brush.



Trading lens for brush

Although George Daniell of Trenton has made a name for himself as a photographer with much of his work appearing in national magazines, his ultimate aim is to be recognized as a

painter and works continually on new oils. (NEWS Photo by Danny Maher)

NOVEMBER 1975

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BANGOR EVENTS

Downeast Chapter of National Association of Retired Federal Employees will hear Walter Parkash, executive director of the Senior Citizen Council, speak at the noon luncheon, Nov. 19 at Pilots Grill. Election also will be held. All federal retirees and government employees who are 50 years or more and have worked five years for the government are welcomed.

Christmas fairs and bazaars are as much a part of the Christmas season as Santa Claus and the wassail bowl. To inform the public and assist the sponsors, the NEWS will run a Christmas fair column. Items should be mailed to the NEWS Mainly People editor as soon as possible and no later than a week before the event. Clip and save for your holiday schedule.

BELFAST — First Church Christmas fair on Nov. 20, at the parish house, will open with a fish chowder luncheon at 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Booths will open at 12:30 p.m. and tea will be served from 3-5 p.m. Tables will feature sewing, plants, food, candy, wive elephants, and preserves as well as Christmas tree ornaments and wreath orders.

JONESBORO — Church Auxiliary of Jonesboro Christmas sale on Nov. 21 from 1 to 4 p.m. at the grange hall will include home cooked food, fancy articles, rummage and refreshments.