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The Liberation of Color

Carol Aronson-Shore at UNH

by **Edgar Allen Beem**

In his classic *A Child's Christmas in Wales*, Dylan Thomas remembers "a painting book in which I could make the grass, the trees, the sea and the animals any color I pleased, and still the dazzling sky-blue sheep are grazing in the red field under the rainbow-billed and pea-green birds."

There is an exhilaration that comes with the liberation of color from the slavish imitation of nature. When Henri Matisse and Andre Derain first did it around 1900, employing color to purely expressive rather than descriptive ends, the shock of the new was such that they were called Fauves - Wild Beasts. A century later, the free use of color has become an established convention of art with color routinely used to cosmetic, decorative, and evocative ends.

In the New England area, painters such as Philip Barter, Alison Goodwin, Connie Hayes, Eric Hopkins, and Cynthia Price use high-keyed palettes to elevate the mundane to the poetic. Painter Alfred Chadbourn was probably the best I ever saw at transforming the familiar with the simple application of salmon, mauve, ochre and ultramarine where they did not naturally occur.

[Carol Aronson-Shore's](#) use of color is somewhat more subtle in that her color selections seem dictated by existing hues, the intensity of which has simply been dialed up a notch or two. Aronson-Shore, a professor emerita at the University of New Hampshire who was named a Lifetime Fellow of the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts in 2005, is currently (through December 16) the subject of a solo exhibition at the [UNH Museum of Art](#).

Entitled *The Shape of Color: Recent Paintings* by Carol Aronson-Shore, the exhibition features more than 50 oils and gouaches of two regional subjects - New Hampshire's Strawberry Banke and Maine's Monhegan Island. The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue ([Blue Tree](#), Portsmouth NH, \$19.95 hardcover) in which the artist explains her chromatic mission quite succinctly.

"The museum village of Strawberry Banke has provided me with a wonderful visual opportunity to explore my primary subject, which is the way color shapes pictorial light and space," writes Aronson-Shore. "In these paintings, color captures and defines the 'privileged moments' during the day when light makes its appearance and disappearance, when shadows are at their longest and light is most clearly



Early Morning Light Star Island, 2008, oil on canvas



Fall Color at Strawberry Banke, 2008, oil on canvas



Red Tree at the Chase House, 2009, oil on canvas

directional. These brief but special moments give expression to a world both at rest and in transition."

The Monhegan paintings, painted over the past decade, are more naturalistic than the more recent Strawberry Banke paintings, but they are suffused with a rosy glow that romanticizes Maine's monumental little island community. The Strawberry Banke paintings focus on the static, stately presence of the historic buildings as they are illuminated by early and late sun. The chromatic key to the paintings is the bright mustard yellow of the little wooden buildings that seem to pose for the artist as she edifies them.

Natural and architectural beauty amplified by color.

[Museum of Art, Paul Creative Arts Center, UNH, 30 Academic Way, Durham NH, 603-862-3712.]



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