

# Arts & Entertainment

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## The Cherry Stone steps into the future

By Susan Rand Brown

BANNER CORRESPONDENT

**T**he Parisian cultural salon created by Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas in the 1920s is the stuff of legend. We can picture the artists known today as the foundation of 20th century modernism, the urbane Matisse and the rumped Picasso, along with the collectors, writers and assorted bohemians Stein and Toklas brought together.

Skip ahead half a century, insert sandy meandering roads and cottage roses for the grand boulevards of Paris and you have Wellfleet's Cherry Stone Gallery, with founders Lizzie Upham, who died in 1988, and Sally Nerber, at 90 still clear-eyed and animated, the stuff of legend in our time. To celebrate the gallery's 35th anniversary and also to mark a significant evolution in the way the Cherry Stone will operate after this season, the gallery has mounted "35@35," a showcase of 35 important American artists with local ties. A gala mid-summer reception will be held on Tuesday, July 25, from 5 to 9 p.m. The Cherry Stone Gallery is located at 70 East Commercial St., Wellfleet. This will be the last year for regularly scheduled exhibitions at the gallery.

Artists whose work will be shown include Berenice Abbott, Will Barnet, Robert Beauchamp, Louise Bourgeois, Paul Bowen, Sideo Fromboluti, Red Grooms, James Lechay, Lisette Model, Robert Motherwell, Gloria Nardin, Claes Oldenberg, Jack Tworok, Peter Watts — for starters. All are represented by the Cherry Stone, or are invited guests.

The Cherry Stone's original location was tucked away in a modest storefront on Railroad Avenue, off the beaten path even by Wellfleet standards. In those years Upham and Nerber supported the enterprise through an antique and collectable shop in an attached shed named, in the wry, unassuming manner typical of the couple, the Junk Collaborative. Running a com-

mercial gallery that barely returned a profit defied common sense: yet, equipped with impressive academic and creative backgrounds, Yankee ingenuity, business sense, charm and peerless taste, these grande dames made it work.

Upham was the artist and arts administrator: she had attended Cranbrook Academy, studied printmaking and was an animator for United Artists studios in Hollywood. Nerber, a University of Chicago graduate and former teacher who had owned a family farm, had an important connection in photographer Berenice Abbott, a student of Man Ray in Paris at the same time Stein and Toklas were holding court.

Abbott was the first well-known artist to show at the Cherry Stone; her interest inspired others. When the gallery outgrew the Railroad Avenue location, the couple found an idyllic spot on East Commercial Street, across from Uncle Tim's Bridge where it cuts through the spiky reeds of Duck Creek.

Like the Stein-Toklas salon, from the beginning the Cherry Stone functioned as a summer showcase for artists at the vanguard of modernism, most living and painting locally for part of the year, including abstract expressionists Robert Motherwell and Jack Tworok. As more Outer Cape artists sought Cherry Stone's representation, a community of art lovers, patrons, writers and assorted Outer Cape bohemians embraced the gallery as their creative and social commons. Casually elegant couples, with kids and dogs, spilled out onto the lawn during openings.

The Motherwell connection proved especially fruitful, personally and financially. At the time Nerber and Upham approached Motherwell, the eminent man had not been especially interested in showing work locally. Yet, as Nerber recalls, Motherwell felt a powerful affinity for the Cherry Stone: it seemed to him like the artist-run galleries of his youth, when art was a passion and business an afterthought.

Motherwell, esteemed for collaborative print projects with



PHOTO SUSAN RAND BROWN

Gallery owner Sally Nerber and gallery director Brenda Correia are changing the traditional gallery structure at the Cherry Stone to eliminate openings.



PHOTOS COURTESY CHERRY STONE

"Higgins Pond," oil by Sideo Fromboluti.



"Gesture Series IV," lift ground etching and aquatint by Robert Motherwell.

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master etchers and lithographers, encouraged the Cherry Stone to become the exclusive commercial gallery on the Cape for the sale of his prints. These sold very well, seeming to jump off the walls.

"When Robert Motherwell came on board, he was already very famous," Nerber said. "He was very generous and loyal toward us; the sale of his prints carried so many of the other artists exhibiting here, local artists and renowned artists, many of whom were not entirely salable."

Eventually the gallery developed a specialty in works on paper by a range of well-known artists, including Louise Bourgeois, Jasper Johns, Barbara Kruger, Red Grooms and Robert Longo, and Robert Rauschenberg.

Surrounded by colors and textures in an intimate gallery respectfully retrofitted from an oyster shed, the elfin Nerber, now director emeritus, and Brenda Correia, Nerber's collaborator for the past six years, talk about what to expect after this current season.

"We will continue with the restructuring of the business, perform as private art dealers, deal with the sale of artwork outside the realm of running an exhibition space; our mission, what we are doing in the future, has everything to do with what we have done all along: promote and advance the careers of our artists. We will continue to curate shows, off site, as special projects emerge. We will continue in business as the Cherry Stone Gallery," with Outer Cape artists and collectors remaining a priority, says Correia.

"The art market has changed exponentially on the Outer Cape in the past few years," she says. "We



*Sally Nerber and Lizzie Upham at a dinner party in the late 1970s.*



*"Masters at the Met," limited edition by Red Grooms.*

will operate via e-commerce, and continue to work as art consultants. We have some very impressive blue chip artists; many private and public collections would love to have works in their collections by the artists we offer. We can do a better job if we are not in a constant state of production [producing and promoting shows]."

Nerber offers this example: "Most of today's customers don't come from around here. They come from the Midwest, from California. A recent sale was to a new buyer from Ann Arbor, who saw the Cherry Stone ad in an art magazine, and bought an expensive work."

The modest-looking yet major gallery whose roots reach back to the mid-20th century now looks to the 21st. Once local police were concerned about auto traffic during gallery openings; future collectors will increasingly meet artists on line. "Change is always the hardest thing to embrace," Correia admits. Nerber sees de-emphasizing the physical space as the only way to preserve the Cherry Stone legacy. "It is the way to keep the impetus going, to help the artist make sales," Nerber says with conviction. "If this will be a successful move we don't know, but we've been experimenting forever."

## Music, comedy & history in Truro

Payomet Performing Arts Center has a slew of performances scheduled this week, all of which will be held under its tent at the Highlands Center in the Cape Cod National Seashore in North Truro. It all begins with comedian Mike McDonald, who will perform at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday. An ACE Award winner, he has appeared on HBO, Showtime, A&E, the Comedy Channel and on Conan O'Brien's show. McDonald has almost 25 years of experience sharing the stage with legends such as Robin Williams and Steven Wright.

Next come Beverly Bentley and Guy Strauss, who will perform "Love Letters" at 8 p.m. Sunday, followed by Elena Dodd as "Eleanor Roosevelt: Wife, Mother and First Lady" at 8 p.m. Monday. Stephen Smith



*Mike McDonald brings his comic flair to the Payomet tent.*

sings in "Gershwin, Tonight and Forever," at 8 p.m. Wednesday, July 26. He will be accompanied by keyboardist Joe Reid. For reservations or ticket information for any of these shows, call (508) 487-5400 or go online to ppactruro.org.

## MacLennan returns for reading, signing

Alex MacLennan, who began his recent novel, "The Zookeeper," while living in Provincetown, returns for a reading and two booksignings in July. He will read as part of the Provincetown Library reading series at 2 p.m. on Friday and will sign his book at Now Voyager Books, 357 Commercial St., at 4 p.m. on Sunday. The following week he will sign books at the HRC store in front of the Aquarium Mall on July 28.

MacLennan's book follows the story of a young man who takes care of the monkeys at the National Zoo in Washington D.C. He has great friends and a brand new boyfriend he meets in chapter one. Everything



seems perfect but, as in real life, there are always a few unexpected curves that make it hard to stay on the road.

The author formerly worked at the San Francisco Zoo and now teaches writing in Washington D.C. This is his first novel.