



FROM ACK TO ATHENS: ONE ARTIST'S JOURNEY WITH NATURE

By Chris White



Among art's contributions to the world is the way it can transport people. Think of how Monet's impressionism can send one on a trip to the water lilies of Giverny or how Rothko's blocks of color go beyond illustration by providing passage into one's primordial emotions or feelings. Visitors to art museums go to see and appreciate paintings, textiles, sculptures, and installations, but they also go to enter different worlds, cultures, and perspectives. As a painter whose work arises from the natural world, Katherine Downey Miller cultivates this sense of transport. She also teaches painting, and from the early days of her career, she has added regional and global excursions to her palette. Miller says, "I love to travel, and I realized I can teach people to paint while I'm traveling."

Miller's teaching journeys have taken her to some fantastically gorgeous destinations—one of her first gigs took place at the Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass, Colorado, and she followed this with a stint in Florence, Italy, on a teaching scholarship at the Studio Arts College International. Today, she continues to fill her creative well with fresh vistas and locations. She teaches on Nantucket, paints from different vantage points on the Cape, and she'll venture to the South of France in 2026 to teach with Paint Away Tours. "I'll probably go back to Greece again in 2026, too," she muses. Also in 2026, she'll launch a solo show at the Jane Deering Gallery in Gloucester. Recently, she has been leading classes at Concord Art, the New Art Center in Newton, and online at Winslow Art in Seattle. This spring, she branched out into Vermont, where the Woodstock Gallery represents her. All the while, the natural world remains at the core of her work, along with environmental issues such as the wildfires of Australia, around which she created a collection of



paintings a few years ago. In other words, amidst her own painting, shows, travels, and teaching, she's letting no moss grow on the proverbial rolling stone.

Miller grew up in Weston, Massachusetts, where she says, "We were surrounded by land, and I learned that Nature is the best teacher." She works mostly in oil, acrylic, and aqua oil, which she likes because, she explains, "It's water soluble, so there's no need to use solvents. It's great for a green studio, and it's versatile: I can use it to work more opaquely or very thinly, or 'wash.'" Her process often involves spending time outdoors, where she's looking to capture "dynamic compositions." This goes back to the basics of landscape painting, where she says, "You use a viewfinder to find the lines. I like taking lots of pictures for my work, but I use the photos just for inspiration. My landscapes are recognizable still, but not exact renderings." For example,

in *Alta*—a 36" x 36" oil painting—she captures the grandeur of the Wasatch Range, but without the painting's title, it's unlikely that you'd identify the celebrated ski mountain.

For quite some time, Miller has been based in the greater Boston area, but she considers Nantucket a second home, saying, "I grew up going there. It's my spiritual home." At age 24, she joined the Artists Association of Nantucket (AAN), and except for a hiatus of a couple of years around COVID, she's been a member ever since. She also enjoys long-running representation from the Robert Foster Fine Arts gallery there. 2024 was a busy year for Miller, and she seized the opportunity to collaborate with other artists and to teach in a few different settings. In order to work in a larger space, she moved her studio from Boston's SoWa neighborhood (in the South End) to Somerville's Miller Street Studios. Then she partnered with Jennifer Odell

of Osterville’s Paris and Lily for a show last June entitled *Two Girls and an Island*, for which she contributed five paintings that capture the mood, feeling, and colors of specific spots around the Cape. Odell is a goldsmith inspired by mythology and nature (among other forces), and she recalls being drawn to Miller’s landscapes in abstraction, including “her magical violet sunsets... and her natural, timeless expressions of our beautiful New England.” In turn, Miller appreciates Odell’s jewelry, especially, she says, “its visual and aesthetic connection to the past—most notably the antiquities.” About a month after *Two Girls and an Island* opened, Miller boarded the ferry for a two-week stint as Artist in Residence with the Artists Association of Nantucket. There she lived in an apartment above the AAN offices, worked on her own painting, taught classes,

and delivered an artist’s talk and critique. About six weeks later, in August of 2024, she sailed for Greece, where she taught a two-week class called *Reading the Lines of the Land* at the Island Centre for the Arts on Skopelos. “This was where they filmed *Mamma Mia*,” she says. “It took about seven hours to get there, we went by bus from Athens to Idra, and then a three-and-a-half-hour-long ferry to Skopelos.” In addition to teaching there, she spent a lot of time out on location. “I love going *en plein air* painting, though I tend to use it more as a resource. But on Skopelos, where there are so many beautiful places, I did more of it. It was very, very hot, but I would go out with my sketchbooks, cameras, and watercolors, stand out there with my easel, then bring the images back to the studio.”

As a teacher, Miller has focused

on a variety of different painting techniques, and she has taught a wide range of students. “I work with artists of mixed levels,” she says, “mostly adults, but sometimes college kids or recent graduates.” She has also led classes in the *Zen of Painting* for different art centers. “This is about reacting to one’s ‘mark,’” she explains. “I believe that every artist has a unique mark, like handwriting. Zen is an intuitive process. Where landscape painting is about looking out, processing, bringing things back in, then pushing out again, Zen is kind of therapeutic and starts more from within—from the mark—and is the intuitive process of building up that mark. It’s very mindful, and everything I know about painting comes up, both from the conscious and subconscious. I teach people to stand back, then make decisions; it’s like looking out, like through a window.” When Miller teaches

Landscape to Abstraction, she says, “I work with people to use unexpected color or looser brushstrokes. Lots of people want to loosen up as artists, and we can use landscape painting to do that. It starts in its foundations of trying to find dynamic compositions that are going to give you direct lines.” She emphasizes “streamlining” different depths of field in the process: the background, middle ground, and foreground. “This helps people come up with beautiful abstract painting,” she says.

2025 is shaping up to be another fruitful year for Miller. After a fun and successful 2024 show, she and Jennifer Odell have decided to reunite this summer at Odell’s Paris & Lily Goldsmith Gallery on Main Street in Osterville for an exhibition called *Currents*, opening on June 28th. This time around, they’ve expanded from



shop done live enjoy

MASHPEE COMMONS AN OPEN-AIR SHOPPING DINING & LIVING COMMUNITY ON CAPE COD WITH OVER 100 SHOPS SET IN A CHARMING NEW ENGLAND-STYLE VILLAGE

DISCOVER UNIQUE DINING, LOCAL BOUTIQUES, NATIONAL FAVORITES, WELLNESS STUDIOS, BACKGARDEN MARKETS & CAFES, AND ENTER A NEW!

JOIN US FOR SUMMER EVENTS INCLUDING MOVIE NIGHTS, LIVE MUSIC NIGHTS, MASHPEE FARMERS MARKET & THE BOSTON25 Z-TRIP ON JULY 25!

NEW SHOPS THIS SEASON INCLUDE JVA WINE BOUTIQUE, PRETENTIOUS PICKLE, THE BEAUFORT BONNET CO. & J CREW

www.mashpeecommons.com

21st Annual
PROVINCETOWN
JAZZ
FESTIVAL

Photo by Amy Heller

AUGUST 4 & 12, 2025

Monday, August 4 • 7:30 pm
Cultural Center of Cape Cod

Shawnn Monteiro

Cape Cod Jazz Trio

Tuesday, August 12 • 6:00 pm
Provincetown Art Association and Museum

Kieran Brown

Matt Baker

Tickets \$35 Per Concert • 508-274-2513 • provincetownjazzfestival.org

A portion of the proceeds are donated to worthy causes including JAZZ at the State Arts program on Cape Cod. The Provincetown Jazz Festival is a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Organization.

74 | CAPE COD LIFE | JULY/AUGUST 2025

capecodlife.com | CAPE COD LIFE | 75



a duet to a nine-piece band that includes artists Amantha Tsaros, Charyl Weissbach, Lyn Coffey, Tom Riley, Rachel Jones, Sherri Star, and Cynthia Chapman.

Currents will be “A group artist show celebrating life by the shore,” and will offer nine distinct viewpoints into our region’s beauty and wonder. Then in July,

Miller is returning to the Artists Association of Nantucket to teach another workshop called *Reading the Lines of the Land*. In the course description, the AAN states: “Painting is about moving energy around. All good abstraction comes from reality.... Katherine will teach you to completely abstract your landscapes, take risks and problem-solve. We will be layering imagery and building up abstraction by creating a new language of shape and line.”

Throughout all of her classes and in her own painting, Katherine Downey Miller steers a true course in her dedication to the natural world. As she wrote in her artist’s statement for *Two Girls and an Island*: “In a society increasingly disconnected from the natural world, I believe it is more important than ever to cultivate an appreciation for the sanctity of life and the importance of preserving our

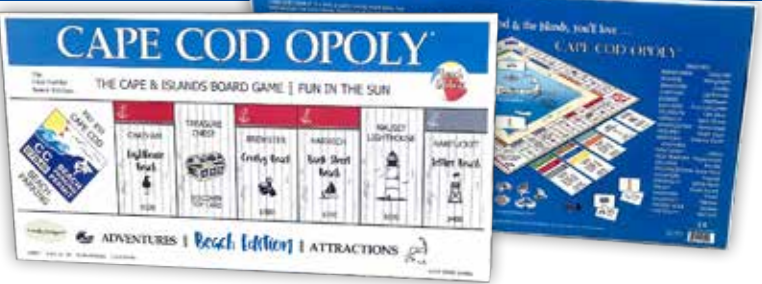
planet for future generations. I hope my paintings inspire others to reconnect with nature, to recognize its intrinsic value as a source of sustenance, inspiration, and solace. Ultimately, my work is a celebration of the enduring power and resilience of the natural world—a reminder that, despite our best efforts to tame and control it, nature will always assert its primacy. It is my hope that, through painting, I can share with others the profound sense of wonder and reverence that I feel in the presence of the ocean and nature’s elements, and inspire a renewed commitment to stewardship and conservation.”

To view more of Miller’s work and contact her for custom workshops or commissions, visit katherinedmiller.com.

Chris White is a freelance writer for Cape Cod Life Publications




CAPE COD OPOLY®



IF YOU LIKE CAPE COD & THE ISLANDS... YOU'LL LOVE CAPE COD OPOLY®

CAPE COD OPOLY® is a cool property trading board game that features Cape Cod & the Islands. It's a game of chance with adventures along the way. Whether you're just visiting on vacation, or living on Cape Cod, experience all the sites and attractions Cape Cod has to offer. The National Seashore, the Hyannis Port Compound, scenic lighthouses and much more! Ideal for playing with family and friends. Experience all the fun of wheeling and dealing with family and friends while buying and selling property on the Cape. You will be entertained as you share fond memories and strategize to build your wealth by owning property from Falmouth to Provincetown.

SOLD AT FINE SHOPS ACROSS CAPE COD • capecodopoly.com







Call to schedule your appointment today!

508-273-1920

Southcoast Health Orthopedics
1 Recovery Road
Wareham, MA 02571

Total Joint Replacement

At Southcoast Health, our team of board-certified, fellowship trained orthopedic providers have been established in the South Coast region for over 10 years, receiving their education from world-class institutions.

Southcoast Health Orthopedics

Michael Langworthy, MD
Chief of Orthopedics

Arthur Marzili, MD
Orthopedic Surgeon



Scan to listen to Ann's story