

THE FENWAY NEWS

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The Arts

Fenway Studios Endures

By Phyllis Hanes



Photo by Lois Johnston

Marcia Vose, president of Friends of Fenway Studios, speaker at art exhibit opening.

The importance of visual art in Boston has long been an interest to the St Botolph Club, which recently hosted a showing of 30 artists as part of the Centennial Exhibition of Fenway Studios. The exhibition was shown from June through August, with Wednesdays open to visitors at the private club on Commonwealth Avenue.

Curated by Mary Hughes and Eugene F. Kelly, the exhibition brought together work from current studio artists who continue to be inspired by the beauty of the Fenway Studios building and its unimpeded northern light. The exhibition opened with an introduction by Marcia Vose, president of the Friends of Fenway Studios, a non-profit group that has given support and raised funds for much-needed building restoration.

Not only is the Fenway Studios celebrating its 100th anniversary; also the St. Botolph Club is celebrating its 125th anniversary. The connection between the groups goes back many years to 1904.

In that year Boston's art community suffered a disaster when a fire ruined Harcourt Studios, placing many prominent artists of the day out on the street. Painters were forced to rebuild their portfolios in any way they could; for example, Joseph DeCamp resorted to offering his portrait painting services to anyone who would have them.

In the wake of this calamity, members

of the St. Botolph Club demonstrated their interest in the artistic process by joining with the Copley Society to form a committee to plan the construction of new artists' studios. Within one year the Fenway Studios building was completed and its 46 studios were occupied.

The Fenway Studio building was constructed in the Arts & Crafts style with its studios modeled after ateliers of nineteenth-century Paris, and provides large open spaces to all studios with northern light – considered the most ideal light in which to work.

Over its 100 years the Fenway Studios has housed more than 350 artists including such notables as William Paxton and Edmund Tarbell.

In the 1970s the building was at risk of being sold by the heirs of the original shareholders. It was in disrepair and a large sum was owed in back taxes. In response, the artists of the Fenway Studios established a "not for profit" cooperative in 1981, enabling them to become shareholders.

Thanks to the hard work of many artist-residents and the support of the Friends of Fenway, a non-profit group that has raised funds for much-needed building restoration, Fenway Studios continues to prosper.

Phyllis Hanes is a member of the Fenway News Board of Directors.