

# Obituaries

## Martha Malicoat Dunigan, 67

Artist, teacher was born and raised in Provincetown

Martha Malicoat Dunigan, 67, who returned to Provincetown and Truro to retire one year ago, died in her Truro home on June 20 after a 10-month illness.

She was born in Provincetown, the daughter of Barbara and Philip Malicoat and granddaughter of Florence and Harold Brown. She and her younger brother Conrad Malicoat "grew up in a family of artists, musicians, and writers, where to make and to do was to be." Formative years in the presence of these two generations of prominent local artists inspired her own vigorous career as a printmaker, ceramist, sculptor and teacher.

Martha graduated from Provincetown High School in 1952 and received a B.A. in Studio Art from Oberlin College in 1956. To help pay her college tuition, she worked over summer breaks as a swimming teacher in Provincetown. Among the many who remember her swimming lessons are local attorney Christopher Snow and Mojo's owner Mark Birnbaum, who, she recently teased, "had to be escorted past the crabs." She loved all kinds of clamming, but reveled in and excelled at diving for sea clams, which usually ended up in chowder.

Martha married flutist Philip Dunigan in 1958, and they had three daughters, Orin, Breon, and Seanad, between 1959 and 1963. While raising her family, Martha continued to produce and to study art, attending Pratt Graphic Art Center in New York, Atelier 17 in Paris, Penland School of Crafts in Penland, N.C., and the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, from which she earned an M.F.A. in 1974.

Based in Winston-Salem from 1965, Martha was very active in the local arts community throughout her residence there. She was an exhibiting member of the Arts and Crafts Association, Five Winston-Salem Printmakers, Piedmont Craftsmen, Inc., and Tri-State Sculptors, Inc., and was a founding and exhibiting member of the artists cooperative Artworks Gallery, Inc. In 1974, she began a 27-year career at the North Carolina School of the Arts in Winston-Salem, N.C., where she taught 11th and 12th graders in the visual arts program in the School of Design and Production.

Fellow visual arts teacher Clyde Fowler spoke warmly of the great love and respect generated by Martha among students, staff, and faculty at the North Carolina School of the Arts, where she has been sorely missed since she retired last year. She was able, he said, "to bring to the students a remarkable artistic professional-

ism, where she set consistently high standards for their accomplishment without ever losing sight of nurturing their growth with kindness, a maternal spirit, and a care and sincerity that was beyond question."

During the 1980s, Martha was awarded the SECCA-RJR Southeastern Artists Fellowship, an Emerging Artist Grant from the Winston-Salem Arts Council, and a Mellon Grant from the North Carolina School of the Arts. From 1973 through the summer of 2000, Martha taught summer sessions and sculpture workshops at Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill, the Penland School of Crafts, and the SUNY-Purchase summer program in Italy.

Martha's artwork is included in public and private collections

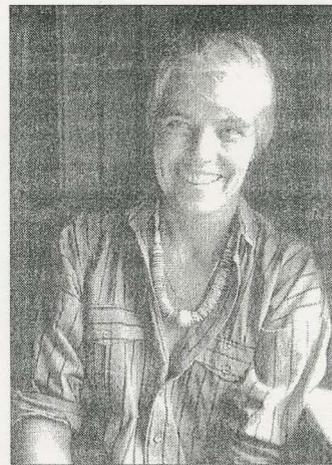
throughout the country, including Wake Forest University, Barclays, Wachovia Bank & Trust, the Graylyn Art Center, and the Mandala Art Center. She was a regular exhibitor in recent years at both the Artworks Gallery in Winston-Salem, N.C. and the Berta Walker Gallery in Provincetown.

Perhaps the most significant tribute to her achievements and service as an artist was the Sawtooth Center for Visual Arts recognition of her as Artist of the Year in 1994. During the year, she was the subject of features throughout the North Carolina Triad area (Winston-Salem, Greensboro, and High Point) and served as juror for the Sawtooth Center's annual student show. The finale of the year-long celebration was a solo show in

March, 1994 at the Sawtooth Center for Visual Arts, attended by over 350 friends and admirers.

She spent most summers in Truro, and a part of each summer on the northeastern coast of Maine in Jonesport.

Surviving are her children, Orin Dunigan, of Winston-Salem, N.C. and Provincetown; Breon Dunigan (and Robert) Bailey of Truro; and Seanad Dunigan (and Wei Tsun) Chang of Mt. Pleasant, Minn.; a brother, Conrad Malicoat, and his wife, Anne Lord; an uncle, Paul Malicoate; two grandsons, Max Dunigan and Liam Bailey; three nieces, Robena Malicoat, Galen Malicoat, and Bronwyn Malicoat Bois; two great-nephews, Kai and André Bois; a great-niece, Olivia Bois; and many beloved friends.



Martha Dunigan

A visual arts fund in her memory has been established at the North Carolina School of the Arts. Donations may be made to the Martha Dunigan Fund for the Visual Arts at NCSA, to Helping Our Women (HOW), or to Hospice of Cape Cod. A memorial service will be held later this summer in Provincetown.

# ARTISTS

## Martha Dunigan in Retrospect An Homage

BY DOUGLAS BOHR

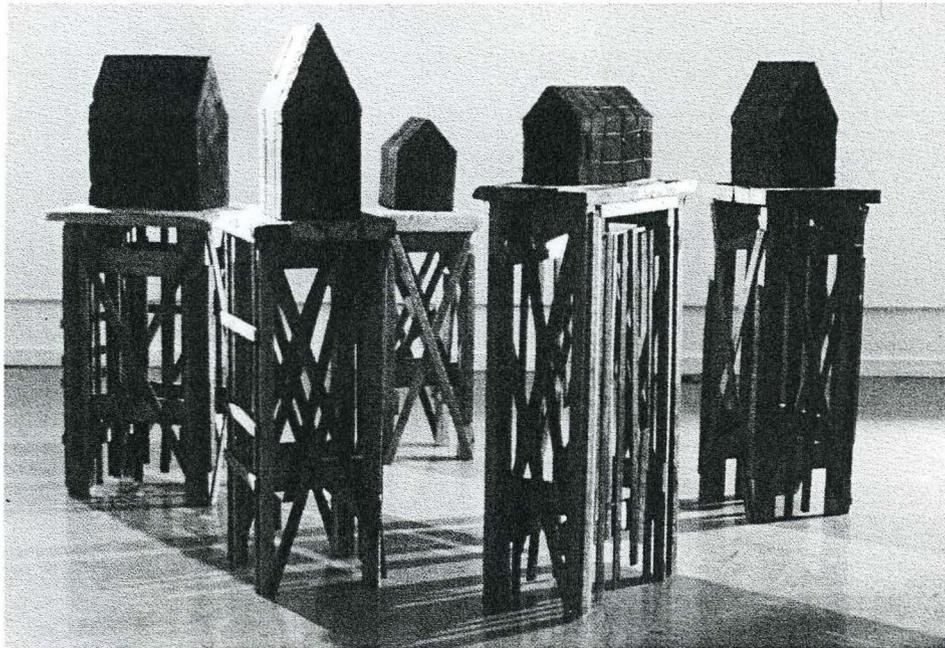
*White bone found  
on the grazing:  
the rough, porous  
language of touch*

—SEAMUS HEANEY

A retrospective exhibition is an opportunity to reflect, reconsider, and remember. It is a rare occasion to have a selection of some of the more significant and seminal works of an artist's career assembled together. For some it is an opportunity to become better acquainted with a life's work. For others, it is simply an opportunity to remember a life lived through art. On the occasion of the upcoming retrospective survey of Martha Dunigan's prolific career, we are given the unique opportunity to see a large selection of her body of work, dating from earliest to latest. A selection of such breadth may never be possible logistically to assemble again.

The works show Dunigan's passage through various chapters of her life and career. Some mark a turning point. Some carry with them the seeds of an idea that germinates or culminates in later works. Common threads connect distinct works throughout the decades. She worked with skill in a range of media; her versatility was the very way she remained steadfast as her work deepened and matured. She negotiated a delicate balance between form and content, between thought and expression, and prudently exercised her understanding and mastery of the visual language in order to convey meaning above all else.

She was raised in a family of painters, sculptors, writers, and musicians. She grew up in a family of artists, she once said, "where to make and do was to be." The daughter of painter Philip Malicoat, Martha was raised to see art as an extension of herself and a vehicle to establish her place in the world. Born in 1934 in Provincetown, amid economic hardship, Martha was drawn close to her immediate surroundings of Cape Cod to nourish and shelter her. As for any of us, her vision of *home* would become the setting and departure point for her personal journey: the subject of her art, in



MARTHA DUNIGAN, *SMALL COVE*, 1992, WOOD, CARDBOARD, FABRIC, TAR, STRING, CONCRETE, DIMENSIONS VARIABLE

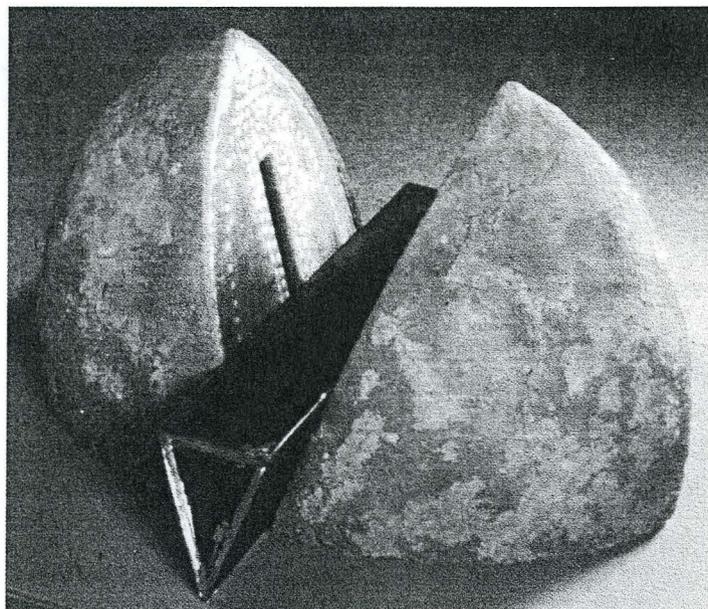
some shape or form, for the rest of her life. The details of her childhood surroundings would become the vocabulary, the language, and the constant reference for the telling of the story.

Many of the forms and motifs that emerge are a direct response to Cape Cod or Maine, the sites she returned to again and again throughout her lifetime. Intuitive and personal, her forms are equally archetypal: boat, house, pod, stones. In every endeavor she unearths objects that we are able to enter as a personal journey. The personal mingles with the universal.

Upon closer inspection, we recognize images of isolation and gathering, concealment and revelation, connection and division, transience and immobility, beginning and end, and perhaps the cycle of all things. Consider the impenetrable lead-

en structure of *Dusk House* or any of the tar-bound house-like structures, where we sense concealment. These bodily forms are singular, stoic structures that appear almost confrontational, warding off trespassers. Without question, there is a clearly established boundary of interior and exterior. Others like *Island House* which appear to have tightly concealed their interior under the same tar and wax, have opened and now reveal their contents—the tightly wrapped secrets, the personal correspondence of the artist. A work aptly titled *Guardian*, like that of *Parable*, rests firmly on its pedestal, the house form wrapped, painted in thick black tar, entrenched and unwelcoming. *Small Cove*, however, appears as a gathering of these same private individuals, reluctant, but communal nonetheless, like the homes of coastal Maine in

winter, like the people of a rural New England community. Others, like *Double Pod* and *Pleiades* take a more organic form, but the theme is nonetheless the same. Based on the Greek myth of Atlas's seven daughters turned into a cluster of stars, *Pleiades* suggests the concealment of the human form in an otherworldly, organic form, whereas *Double Pod*, like *Island House*, has opened. Its contents of the same bound letters spill from its shell, as if seeds of ideas, or seeds of memory. This sense of concealment and revelation is addressed in a more aggressive manner in *Mitose*. The cellular form of *Mitose*, as the title suggests, is forcibly split down the middle by a steel wedge, divided at its poles to become two distinct, autonomous structures—divorced. In contradiction, or perhaps simply in relation to *Mitose*, stands *Conduc-*



MARTHA DUNIGAN, *MITOSE*, 1994, WOOD, WIRE, MESH, PAPIER MACHÉ, RED DIRT, LEAD, TACKS, WELDED STEEL, 29" X 44" X 41"

tor, a rigid, self-contained structure with one major difference: a lightning rod reaches from its roof top into the air as if trying to make contact.

These images of concealment and revelation appeared on the artist's earliest woodcut prints in which she directly referred to literary sources as the conceit for her subject. In comparison to the latter sculptures such as *Double Pod* or *Pleiades*, the editions of *Pomegranate* or *Pear* prints, as simple as they may seem in comparison, foreshadowed the latter works. In these prints, the organic forms are split open. We see a cross-section view, not merely a rendering of the surface. Perhaps intuitively, Dunigan was aware of interior and exterior, of containment, of deliberately choosing to reveal what was hidden beneath. It is all the more obvious and powerful in works such as *Jonah and the Whale* or *Peter and the Wolf*, where she cleverly reveals the interior, the gut, the cavity, and the inner being, not mattering how illustrative. And most marvelous is her complete suite of prints illustrating the *Canterbury Tales*, where the underlying theme is the allegorical journey of Everyman.

Of course there are the boats, the vessels, the vehicles of transcendence. The contradictions, the complexities of human nature, the ebb and the flow of a human life are as subtly and masterfully conveyed in these as in any of her works. There are the boats that have capsized. Others seem stranded, or raised upon wood pilings. There are the boats that clearly impart a sense of metaphorical journey, such as *Skin Boat* and *Dark Tide from Redhead*, that take on a bodily form. Like the whale or the wolf of the aforementioned prints, they carry inside them something of deeper significance, something of meaning. Sometimes filled with bones, sometimes filled with the wrapped letters, these boats may be thought of as surrogates for the body, the earthly vessels of soul and spirit.

From the first days of arriving in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, my wife, Julianna, and I remember looking out our window to see Martha hard at work early in the morning or late at night, when all else was quiet on the city street. That was our first image of an artist in our new home, and as far as we could see and as far as we were concerned, she set the standard for her peers and the whole of the artistic community of the region. Martha was the most ambitious, tenacious artist we had met upon our arrival and that impression never changed as we came to know her. She was a dedicated artist, teacher, and advocate for the arts and the community in which she lived, be it in North Carolina, Maine, or Massachusetts. The artist and her art are inextricably linked. In her absence her work is our link to a life of dedication and devotion.

*DOUGLAS BOHR is an artist and Director of Public Programs and Exhibitions at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As Associate Curator, he, along with Breon Dunigan, Martha's daughter, and Bob Bailey, her husband, organized the retrospective exhibition, Passage, for the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina in May, 2002.*