



Portrait of the Artists

HISTORIC ARTISTS' HOMES AND STUDIOS PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO THEIR WORK AND PERSONALITIES

by Meghan Drueding

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Above: Inside Daniel Chester French's studio at Chesterwood.

When sculptor Daniel Chester French was creating the hands of Abraham Lincoln for the Lincoln Memorial, he started by referencing plaster models cast in 1860 from the president's own hands. But both hands are clenched in these models, and French ultimately realized that wasn't how he wanted to portray Lincoln. He had models made of his own hands and used them to help him get Lincoln's just right on the final, carved marble statue, dedicated in 1922. One hand is still loosely clenched, but the other has its fingers relaxed, curled over the arm of his chair.

You can see French's plaster hands (as well as both a photo and a bronze reproduction of Lincoln's hands) on display at Chesterwood, a National Trust Historic Site in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Open to the public since 1969, the property served as French's summer residence and workplace, where he escaped the New York City heat and worked on high-profile sculptures such as the Melvin Memorial in Concord, Massachusetts, as well as the Lincoln Memorial statue.

Chesterwood is part of the National Trust's Historic Artists' Homes and Studios (HAHS) program, which receives support from the Wyeth Foundation for



American Art and the Henry Luce Foundation. In addition to French, the growing consortium of 36 HAHS sites across the country highlights a range of artists, including Winslow Homer, Clementine Hunter, and Donald Judd. They provide a hybrid experience of both a museum and a house tour, giving visitors a close-up look at how the artist lived and worked. “You get a sense, visiting these places, of who each artist was as a person, and as a creative person,” says Donna Hassler, Chesterwood’s executive director and the administrator of the HAHS program.

Starting this July, for example, a new collections gallery at Chesterwood will help visitors gain an even deeper appreciation of French and his work. Funded by a \$290,000 grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, the renovated exhibit space will showcase approximately 150 works that had been in storage, including models, maquettes, paintings, and sculptures. “People will understand more about his creative process,” Hassler says. “He really thought with his hands in three dimensions.”

Many of the HAHS sites also host exhibitions by contemporary artists that complement or challenge the work in

their permanent collections. At Olana State Historic Site, the Hudson, New York, home and studio of landscape painter Frederic Edwin Church, a current installation by Brooklyn-based sculptor Teresita Fernández is a direct response to assumptions about the landscape of the Americas that are inherent in the work of Church and his contemporaries. Called *OVERLOOK: Teresita Fernández Confronts Frederic Church*, the exhibition runs through November 5. “We see it as a key part of how we bring Church’s legacy forward,” says Sean Sawyer, president of The Olana Partnership.

The Georgia O’Keeffe Home and Studio is engaging the present and future in an equally innovative way. Four years ago, staff at the Abiquiu, New Mexico, site decided to team with the Santa Fe Botanical Garden and a local high school to resurrect O’Keeffe’s beloved vegetable garden. Student interns (now from two nearby high schools) and O’Keeffe Home and Studio employees cultivate items such as lettuce, peas, and peppers. The one-acre garden also contains flowers, as well as fruit-bearing shrubs and trees producing berries, figs, apples, pears, peaches, and

Clockwise from left: Olana State Historic Site in Hudson, New York; The Winslow Homer Studio in Prouts Neck, Maine; Georgia O’Keeffe Home and Studio in Abiquiu, New Mexico.

apricots. Students and staff take home some of the produce, and the rest is distributed to area food banks.

Site director Agapita Judy Lopez, who worked for O’Keeffe for 11 years, believes the popular garden project aligns perfectly with the artist’s character. “The garden was her second reason for wanting the house,” Lopez says. “The first reason was the black door that she painted so much. With the garden, she enjoyed fresh fruits and vegetables.”

That sense of the artist’s presence resonates with photographer Don Freeman, who chronicled 11 artists’ homes and studios for his 2016 documentary film *Art House*. (Three of the sites featured—Olana, the Wharton Esherick Museum, and Russel Wright’s Manitoga—are part of the HAHS program.) “I love the idea of spirit inhabiting these places,” he says. “The feeling I got was that the personalities are still there in the walls.” **P**