

ART BARGE

A man we sent to Suffolk County in August to investigate holiday conditions there has just submitted a report on the Summer Art Center of the Institute of Modern Art, which is an affiliate of the Museum of Modern Art and has housed its Center picturesquely in a double-decked, beflagged, gleaming-white converted Navy barge that stands high and dry on an otherwise deserted stretch of beach at Napeague Harbor, Amagansett, providing the traffic on the Montauk Highway with a unique and commanding sight. Having ascertained that this cynosure's curriculum terminated a week before Labor Day, we accused our man of tardiness. He admitted that his notes had been left in a pocket of a pair of white ducks that only recently came back (along with the notes) from the laundry, but insisted that they were seasonable, since now is the time for one and all to sign up (through the Museum of Modern Art) for next summer's courses. These begin in July and include Creative Painting, Landscape Painting (apparently not considered creative), Sculpture Workshop, and Drawing and Figure Study; some call for ten three-hour sessions a week (five under instruction, five of independent work), and others require less time. "We started the Center three years ago," Victor D'Amico, its director, told our representative after receiving him on the port side of the sunny upper deck of the barge, looking out on Gardiners Bay and looking in on a studio in which a score or more people, mostly women, were busily painting. "This summer, we've had a hundred students--all we can handle--most of whom signed up for periods of two to four weeks," he went on. "Many are clerks, secretaries, or stenographers from offices in New York, New Jersey, or Connecticut, but we also get businessmen, doctors, dentists, dress designers, and quite a few teachers, some of whom have come from as far afield at Wisconsin and Georgia. About a quarter of the students are housewives who are summer residents here; the rest take rooms anywhere from Montauk to East Hampton. The students bring their lunch, which they prepare in our galley and eat on one of three terraces astern of the barge--or, in bad weather, in a mess hall below decks--and they swim off the beach here at high tide."

Mr. D'Amico, an intense man with a shock of black hair, is a teacher himself; he started the Museum's Department of Education and children's art classes, both of which he still runs, in 1937, and he conducts a course in Creative Painting for Advanced Students and Professional Artists (two weeks for \$115, four weeks for \$180) on the barge. He has a summer staff of half a dozen instructors, one of whom teaches Creative Painting for Beginners, Amateurs, and Advanced Students (two weeks for \$100, four weeks for \$150). The advanced student thus has an interesting financial, instructional, and classroom-neighbor choice. The director led our man to the starboard side of the deck and pointed out the Atlantic Ocean. "My wife comes from Greenport, and we've had a summer home at Lazy Point, near here, for fifteen years," he said. "We thought it would be a good idea to combine people's vacations with painting. We wanted a place where you could see the water, and in 1960, with the Museum's blessing, I began looking around for a big barge. I wrote the Navy and, after turning down several offers of battleships, located this boat--her only identification was 'No. 248 U.S. Navy'--in Jersey City. She was a seagoing barge that had been used for carrying dry materials--and had been sold to a private shipping company. She's a hundred and ten feet six inches long and



thirty feet wide. The Museum bought her for forty-five hundred dollars, and we've spent sixty thousand on her. We had to tow her through Long Island Sound, which was easy, and then get her up on the beach, which was not. She weighs two hundred and seventy-five tons. We put her on skids and employed five winch trucks, but the cables snapped like strings. We finally buried the winch trucks in the ground, put all the cables at one end, used two bulldozers, and, after two days, got her in place. We've put in plumbing, windows, doors, two studios, inside and outside staircases, this deck and the one below, and an office, which Miss Elinor Weis, my administrative assistant, runs. We christened the barge Kearsarge. Wait."

Mr. D'Amico called to Miss Weis, below, for a memorandum he had written on the nautical Center, and gave it to our agent, who has conscientiously turned it over to us.

This structure which houses our Art Center was brought up on the shore of Napeague three summers ago (it reads, in part). She then consisted of a plain black hull with a drab, houselike structure painted a battleship gray. The structure was a windowless, empty shell. The hull below could be entered only by manholes on the outer decks and down a steel ladder. Inside was dark and so crisscrossed with beams that one had to twist his way by crawling in and out of them. She was a Cinderella among her superior sister craft that sailed the waters.

Today our Cinderella has become an elegant lady. She wears a white garment and bands of shining windows flood her interiors with light. An upper deck has been added with a rakish roof line at the bow lifting her head with pride. From her upper deck one commands breathtaking views toward every point of the compass... Inside are many mansions. On the main deck is the master studio with its forest of easels where painters enjoy hours of mixed agony and ecstasy. On the upper deck are a glassed-in lounge and a modern art studio. Below decks are spacious areas for the students' gear, the Mess Hall and the Captain's Quarters...

From the very beginning there was a feeling that this magnificent structure should have a name befitting her character and station. Until recently none could be found that suited us all... Recently one of our group had an inspiration and proposed the name of Kearsarge. The Kearsarge is a renowned name in the annals of the United States Navy. During the Civil War, the Kearsarge defeated the Confederate raider, the Alabama, in a battle off Cherbourg in the English Channel. Only a few months back, the U.S.S. Kearsarge, an aircraft carrier, recovered the astronaut, Major Gordon Cooper, from the icy waters of the Pacific after his historic flight into outer space. But neither of these famous feats is responsible for choosing this name for our Art Center.



Kearsarge is an Indian word meaning "heaven" and this is the reason for choosing it... Heaven for each of us is the land of our heart's desire, and all of us who enjoy pursuing the arts in this good ship call it our heaven on earth.

"Except for landscape painting, most of the work done here is expressionistic--abstract or semi-abstract," Cinderella's captain said. "I've been devoted to this part of the Island ever since I spent my honeymoon here, eighteen years ago. I'm contented here. My only problem is that I don't have a vacation any more."