



**National Park Service**  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**

Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller  
National Historical Park

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**For Immediate Release:**  
August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021

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### **Margaret Dwyer enters third and final year of Artist Residency at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park**

Written by Julia Carlisle

Margaret Dwyer could easily “phone it in” by drawing and painting beautiful watercolor botanicals of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller’s gorgeous plant life. Maybe draw some delicate green ferns, a popping dahlia or luscious Dutchman’s Pipe swirling up the side of a porch. Dwyer has the technical skills to line draw or paint a pretty picture and has done so. She could crank out perfect trees and scenery with her eyes shut. She could even complete her National Park residency by updating the pressed plants in Elizabeth Billings carefully created book of local botanical specimens. Call it good. We would see the intersection of the present and the past.

But that is not what Margaret Dwyer is about. If what she is creating is too comfortable, she is not interested, it would be too boring. If it is out of her comfort zone, that’s happily where she lands. It is what makes her face light up. This approach to creativity keeps Dwyer pushing the limits of her mind and craft - even decades into a long career as professional educator and artist. “Look at this,” she says. “Now, can you look deeper?” her paintings clearly ask. With a sense of fun at “what could be” and “what lies beneath” she will pull a string through paint, see what happens with a new technique when found leaves and ferns are washed with color, literally playing her works into being.

As many did last year during the Covid-19 pandemic, Dwyer found herself turning inward, in her case literally out of the forest into the recesses of imagination. But her creativity did not die, her paintings simply took on more abstract dimensions. In some cases, a painting might start with a typical Vermont landscape; snow falling and then, below, swirls from overlaid string creating visual voids beneath snow and earth, spaces asking for nesting, begging creatures to find homes. And so, these paintings draw us into a colorful subterranean world of near-psychedelic animal dwellings. On another level, these works seem almost medical, like connective tissue; a miasma of blood vessels through a fantastical brain.

The brain - all our brains - are key to Dwyer. She has always wanted to know what lies beneath, beyond what our eyes see first. While earning her MFA in Visual Art, Dwyer focused on

psychological themes like processing trauma and understanding the unconscious landscape. In addition to painting, her repertoire includes experimental art, photography, handmade books, sculpture, and murals.

A work Dwyer is still noodling over in her head and on paper shows fallen foliage leaves on the surface of the Pogue, the National Park's largest pond. We first see leaves floating on the water, then reflections of those leaves and finally - almost subliminally - more leaf shapes that have sunken underwater. We have pretty pictures here, for sure. But for Dwyer, there is more than meets the eye: this artist surely has a mathematical mind. It requires placing - perhaps just allowing - watercolor to find its way on paper in a methodology that seems more like three-dimensional chess. Dwyer might at first be stymied but pushes herself to break down an idea into its components, sometimes organizing layers ahead of time, other times leaving things to chance. It is a scenic landscape, yes. But, also, there's more, isn't there? What is going on below the water? Is that a frog, a fish, a snapping turtle? In this case, we'll have to wait and see. As the sun leaves its summer equinox and Fall approaches, the leaves will eventually drift into place.

Dwyer will be spending the rest of the summer and fall at the Artist Studio, located in the Pony Shed, on the grounds of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park. As part of her on-site residency she will be inviting children and adults to find success making things – call it art or not. Using the elements of farm, fauna and forest, Dwyer and visitors may create a hybrid version of where they sit, what they see, even what they feel, finding deeper elements of the material from which their art is created. And so, the care and stewardship principles of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller morph into new forms.

Artist-in-Residence Margaret Dwyer, leaning out of her comfort zone and into the discomfort of the unknown has the expertise to allow the flora, fauna and even architecture of the park transcend into bold, colorful two-dimensional imagery. But there is no simplicity here, only the compelling and very lovely visuals that draw one closer and deeper into the stories and landscape that are Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park.

Dwyer's work has been published and exhibited nationally and internationally. In addition to painting, her repertoire includes experimental art, photography, handmade books, sculpture, and murals. She currently teaches from her private studio/gallery space at the Windsor House in Windsor, Vermont, where she will be hosting an exhibit based on her National Park residency in October 2021 (date TBD). Her work will be on display and for sale under the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park tent on the green during the Woodstock Art Festival on September 11-12, 2021. For more information visit [MargaretDwyerArtist.com](http://MargaretDwyerArtist.com).

Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller NHP is one of over 50 national park areas that host Artist-in-Residence programs. These programs continue the legacy of artists' connection to national parks and the influence their art, photos, and prose have had on their creation and protection. Applications for the 2022 Artist-in-Residence program will be available in the fall. For more information, visit [www.nps.gov/mabi](http://www.nps.gov/mabi)