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Springs Residents Bring Art Back To Duck Creek Farm



Shaye Weaver on Aug 19, 2014



Tucked away on a nearly 7-acre parcel off Three Mile Harbor and Squaw Road in Springs, the former John Little property, Duck Creek Farm, is undergoing an awakening.

While he lived on the property from the late 1940s through the 1980s, John Little, an abstract expressionist, painted in his barn and invited artists to stay with him and use his barn for their work, too.

In 2005, East Hampton Town purchased the property with Community Preservation Fund money. The property sat unused until last year, when an informal group called the John Little Society began working to rededicate the property to the arts by holding small community events there.

On Thursday, August 21, artist Christine Sciuilli will show her newest light installation, “Quiet Riot,” inside the barn—just one of many exhibitions the four-member John Little Society hopes to bring to the site.

Inside the barn, Ms. Sciuilli has strung lines from wall to wall and strategically draped white mesh across the space. Concentric circles are cast onto the mesh from nearly hidden projectors in the room.

“I need a space I feel I can interact with,” Ms. Sciuilli said on Friday inside the nearly pitch-black barn. “Part of what drives me is working with site conditions that are idiosyncratic. A white box is least inspiring to me. I see the same eye hooks in the walls used for the Halloween party or that John Little used to hang his work up on. It’s immersive.”

The John Little Society’s effort to provide unique experiences like this one started on a wing and a prayer, according to member Ira Barocas.

Last year, artist Sydney Albertini, niece of Springs resident Loring Bolger, who is chair of the Springs Citizens Advisory Committee and a Springs Improvement Society member, selected Duck Creek Farm as an exhibition space as part of a Parrish Art Museum road show. With Town Board approval, the event was a success, and the opportunity to use the barn was too good to pass up, according to the society’s members, Zach Cohen, who is also the town’s Nature Preserve Committee chair, Ms. Bolger, who has been dubbed “mayor of Springs,” Mr. Barocas, president of the Duck Creek Farm homeowners association, and architect Pamela Bickett.

With the encouragement of Springs resident Beth Meredith, the group decided to host a haunted barn last Halloween, and this summer the group struck gold with a William King sculpture exhibit on the grounds, as well as with Ms. Sciuilli’s installation. The haunted barn is expected to return this October, too, according to the members.

In September, the John Little Society plans to approach the Town Board with a request to license with the town for five years so that it can exclusively schedule and run programs at Duck Creek Farm by using privately donated funds. The group, which is not yet a 501(c)(3), will partner with Peconic Historic Preservation, a not-for-profit corporation, to collect funds.

With that ability, the members hope to schedule community, arts-oriented events like barn dances, small music and theater performances, art weekends and month-long art exhibitions. They also hope to form an advisory committee to decide on what types of events will be held.

The large lawn and the barn are best suited for sculpture, performances and art installations, Mr. Cohen said.

“The space is not really so perfect for hanging art on the walls,” he added about the barn. “That’s why we say we really are a complement to Brooks Park, where art displays will be hung in the former painting studios with white walls. The barn has natural dark wood.”

The Brooks Park parcel on Neck Path, once owned by abstract expressionists James Brooks and Charlotte Park, is set to be a community arts hub and museum of sorts exhibiting and celebrating the abstract expressionist movement in East Hampton with lecture series and exhibitions.

As an abstract expressionist himself, John Little rubbed elbows with the likes of Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner and was co-founder of the Signa Gallery in East Hampton alongside Alfonso Ossorio and Elizabeth Parker. From 1957 to 1960, the gallery was significant venue for artists and those who appreciated art.

Mr. Little’s barn still needs a new roof and floor and its windows need fixing, according to Scott Wilson, the town’s director of land acquisition and management. The town will be responsible for making those improvements, but any minor repairs will be undertaken by the John Little Society if the Town Board approves.

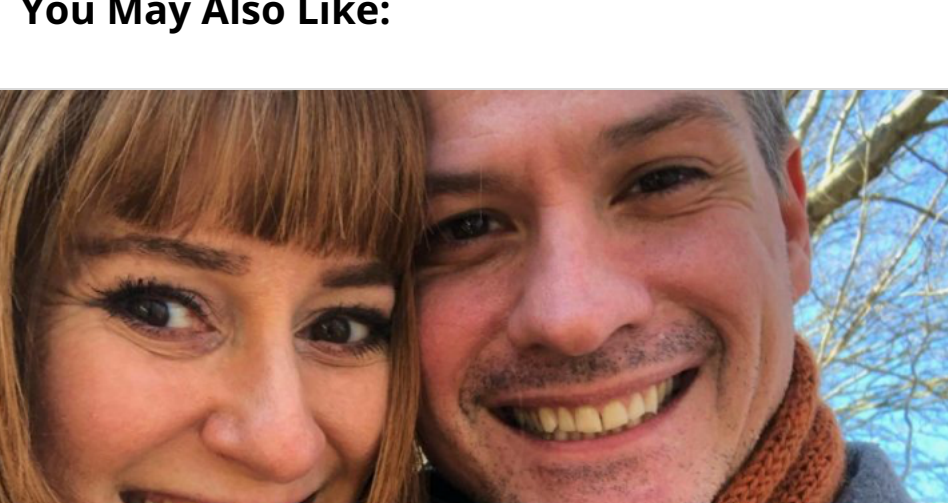
Mr. Little also maintained a house, built in 1795, which still sits on the property. That building, however, is in dire need of renovation. Currently the town has an engineer evaluating what needs to be done, Mr. Wilson said.

“When you arrive there, you go back in time,” Ms. Bolger said this week about the property. “You could really be in any time frame there and it has nothing to do with the hustle and bustle that we have unfortunately come to know as the Hamptons experience. It fuels your imagination to see what kind of programming could enhance the space, while the the space enhances the programming.”

Christine Sciuilli’s “Quiet Riot” will open to the public starting Thursday, August 21, from 5 to 8 p.m., and can be seen Fridays and Saturdays from 4 to 7 p.m. through September 20.

For more information on the John Little Society and Duck Creek Farm, visit duckcreekfarmarts.blogspot.com or email johnlittlesociety@gmail.com.

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