

By Carl Little



# Amy Pollien

**W**hen Amy Pollien and her husband Robert Pollien, both artists, moved from South Portland into their new Shelter Institute post-and-beam home in Town Hill on Mount Desert Island in 1995, she set up a studio in the upstairs bedroom while he rented a space over the Mystery Cove Book Shop in Hulls Cove. Over time that arrangement proved problematic: she couldn't paint anything larger than 18 by 24 inches—she'd be blocking access to the bathroom if she did—and he disliked traveling back and forth on the aptly named Crooked Road in all weathers and at all times of day.

To address these issues, ten years ago the couple built a separate two-story studio behind their house. Pollien calls it the “Katherine and E. B. White model” because, like that couple's writing space in Brooklin, Maine, the two floors do not connect. A set of outdoor stairs leads to her second-floor space. “If we need to talk, we yell through the register vents,” she says with a smile.

With its shelves of books and family photographs and prints, the cozy room reminded this visitor of St. Jerome's study. While the space has allowed Pollien to make larger paintings, she rarely goes beyond the aforementioned 18 by 24 inches, a size she feels suits her best. She cites a certain intimacy that attracts collectors—and that sometimes leads them to actually travel with their treasures.

Pollien also appreciates the ability to set up permanent placements for her paints, solvents, etc. One station serves a recent interest: encaustics. And there's room for a printing press (she started out as a printmaker at the Philadelphia College of Art). She uses odorless mineral spirits as a medium and cleans her brushes with safflower oil.

The space occasioned a new body of work, extraordinary paintings that combine still life and landscape, plus various creatures. With these works Pollien has gained avid fans. Her work sells so briskly she will need to borrow paintings for her show at the Littlefield Gallery in Winter Harbor next August.

Pollien often offers a backstory for her paintings. For *Wild Turkey Tom with Apples and Acorns* she explains how this bird only recently

The bog, Acadia Wildlife Center down the road, and dioramas in College of the Atlantic's Natural History Museum in Bar Harbor provide animal models. Her raised-bed Hügeltkultur practice draws additional creatures such as shrews, snakes, and toads, which in turn attract larger species.

Pollien prides herself in being accurate in her depictions of fauna. She uses Wikimedia Commons for images and Bones Clones for

“specific density” reproductions of animal skeletons. “You can't observe a fox correctly,” she notes, “unless you know how the body hangs off the spine.” In recording her relationship with plants and animals she feels it cheapens the endeavor if she doesn't pay attention to detail.

Pollien's palette consists of permanent yellow light, quinacridone red, and manganese blue, plus ivory black and titanium white. She doesn't find that this choice of colors constrains her “because honestly there's a lot out there to paint.” One benefit: if a lot of her work is hanging in one place, it looks like a suite.

An easel holds a work

in progress, a still life with quince and mushrooms, the former set in an 18th-century fruit bowl. A nearby computer monitor allows Pollien to run through photos for color references. She likes to listen to music while she works, including the sacred monophony of Hildegard of Bingen. The studio hums with purpose as she steps across the threshold, ready to create.

*Carl Little's most recent publications are* Blanket of the Night: Poems *and the monograph* John Moore: Portals.



Above, from left: *Hollyhocks with Peaches, Fly Agaric, and Trout*, 2025, oil on panel, 24 x 18". *Wild Turkey Tom with Apples and Acorns*, 2024, oil on panel, 24 x 18". Courtesy the artist. Top: A portrait of Amy Pollien by Susan Pink.

appeared in the area, thanks to the release of several hatches some years ago by a summer person. “This Tom probably weighs close to thirty pounds,” Pollien notes, “and displays healthy plumage.” The featured fruit includes Baldwin apples and Rhode Island Greenings, plus South Dakota plums that make a fine jewel-red jam. “I am not looking forward to the day the turkeys discover the plum tree,” she says.

Pollien's inspiration for many of her paintings lies nearby: an acre and half of garden, which she assiduously stewards every summer, and another three of bog. She follows the seasonal blooms and harvests, integrating everything from cherries to zinnias in her compositions.

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