Books

Review: "A Place for the Arts"

The MacDowell Colony, 1907–2007, by Carter Wiseman '72GSAS.

Winter 2007-08

Edward MacDowell was the preeminent American composer of his day and the first chairman of Columbia's music department. He believed strongly that music education was essential to everyone's life, that it should be integrated with the other arts, and that it ought to be a mandatory part of Columbia's curriculum. On the latter points he clashed mightily and publicly with President Nicholas Murray Butler. MacDowell resigned in 1904, packed up his scores, and moved with his wife, Marian, to their bucolic summer home in Peterborough, New Hampshire. There, the couple hit on the idea of establishing a quiet oasis where artists could work far from the distractions and stresses of modern life. Those stresses — and the tensions with Columbia in particular — may well have contributed to the composer's death in January 1908.

Since 1907, some 5500 visual artists, composers, architects, and writers have found calm and inspiration at the colony. In its neat little studios, Aaron Copland worked on Billy the Kid, Thornton Wilder on Our Town, Virgil Thomson on The Mother of Us All. Alice Walker was there twice. And so on, for much of artistic America.

Carter Wiseman '72GSAS, president of the MacDowell Colony and a lecturer at the Yale School of Architecture, has compiled and edited 14 essays, along with contemporary and archival photographs, in this visually appealing celebration of America's first and most fruitful arts colony.



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