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At a glance

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For many artists who've spent time at the MacDowell Colony over the years, the area's natural landscape remains etched in their minds.

The Thorne-Sagendorph Art Gallery will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Peterborough artists' colony with an exhibit of works by nine New England artists who know it well. "In Residence: Artists and the MacDowell Colony Experience" opens Tuesday, Sept. 4, and runs through Sunday, Oct 14. It will run simultaneously for a few weeks with the "From Cassatt to Wyeth" show.

On opening day, a screening of "Seasons of MacDowell," four short films by MacDowell fellows, will be featured at 7 p.m. at the college's Putnam Arts Lecture Hall at the Redfern Arts Center on Brickyard Pond. A reception at the gallery will follow.

The Thorne and The Art Gallery at the University of New Hampshire co-organized the exhibit by inviting MacDowell artists from New England to submit work and choosing a group that represents a varied range of style, media and subject matter.

Beth Galston, of Carlisle, Mass., does environmental sculptural installations that play with light and shadow and include natural and man-made materials. One of her pieces included in the show, "Ginkgo Wall," is a stack of 35 translucent plastic resin bricks formed in an "S"-shaped curve, each embedded with ginkgo leaves she collected. It was inspired by her wondering what a cross-section of a frozen pond in winter would look like. "The resin looks like ice," she said.

Galston completed a five-week MacDowell residency in 1995. Before she left for Peterborough, she was creating work she said was more architecturally-inspired, but knew she was ready for a change. Her walks from her cabin in the woods to the dining lodge at MacDowell Colony was what finally helped her step outside of the box as an artist. "I started collecting things," she said, and it led her to incorporate natural found objects into her work.

The MacDowell Colony was the nation's first multidisciplinary artist residency program, founded in 1907 by composer Edward MacDowell and his wife, Marian. More than 250 artists from all over the world come to work there every year. Some recognizable names who have done so are composers Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland and authors Willa Cather and Thornton Wilder.

Jim Coates, of Lyndeborough, who teaches sculpture, ceramics and printmaking at UMass-Lowell, also creates nature-inspired sculptural installations. One included in the show is a 3 1/2-foot-tall, 10-foot-long piece he created from hundreds of maple, ash and white birch branches he collected on 15 acres of forest near his home.

Reminiscent of a beaver lodge, the sounds of birds, bees and running water are amplified through it. It takes about

six hours for Coates to install it — the show marks the fourth time he's done so.

The other two pieces Coates will display were both inspired by his month-long residency at the MacDowell Colony in 1988. One is an homage to his studio space there, a piece that incorporates handmade paper and white birch branches in a configuration that reminds him of the view he had from the studio's window.

Like Galston, what really left the biggest impression on Coates from his MacDowell Colony experience was his walks in the surrounding woods. A hurricane that ripped through southern New Hampshire in 1938 shaped them, creating deformed tree roots. He collected some of the remnants left behind by natural events — one twisted root he incorporated into yet another piece in the show. These are things he never would have considered studying or using in his work before his time spent at the artists' colony. "It allowed me an opportunity to spend some intimate time with a very, very mature forest," he said.

u "In Residence: Artists and the MacDowell Colony Experience" opens Tuesday, Sept. 4, at the Thorne-Sagendorph Art Gallery at Keene State College. For more information, call 358-2720 or visit www.keene.edu/tsag/