

The Manis Lockwood mansion on the property of St. Philip Church now houses art studios.



# Artistic VISION

## NORWALK'S MANIS MANSION GETS NEW LIFE AS AN ART VENUE

By Abby Luby

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

For centuries, churches have been art patrons. From the Sistine Chapel ceiling painted by Michelangelo to Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" in the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, Italy, artists have been drawn to the church and other religious communities that appreciate their work.

So when the St. Philip Church in Norwalk offered up the old Manis Lockwood family mansion on their France Street property as a new art center, it seemed to be a good fit — for the clergy and artists.

"I was becoming very unhappy to see the building empty — it had been occupied for some 25 years by a rehabilitation group helping troubled teens," explains the Rev. Michael Boccaccio, pastor at St. Philip's for 20 years. "Since they moved off campus in 2000, we have been looking for another resident organization but haven't been very successful.

"One day I saw David Morico in the church parking lot moving some of his paintings into the basement of the mansion, which is a huge space. I thought, 'This is a good

way to use the building.'"

Converting the five spacious bedrooms of the 100-year-old mansion into artists' studios under the banner of the St. Philip Artists Guild seemed to work for everyone.

Morico, who grew up in New Haven, had been living in Norwalk for 10 years. He is married and had a small studio at home. About 18 months ago, when he was offered one of the rooms at the mansion for his studio, he was thrilled.

"When this opportunity came up, it was amazing. I was going from a closet-size space at home to a space with 18-foot ceilings and windows from floor to ceiling. Working in that space brought great energy to my work."

SPAG will host its first open studios event the weekend of Sept. 26.

Duvian Montoya says when he was contemplating returning to Norwalk from New Mexico about two years ago, he heard from relatives about SPAG. Before he made

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the trek home, he talked to Boccaccio. "He told me if I was coming back I could take a space in the mansion and use it as an artist's studio. The offer made my decision to come back home easier — it was comforting to know there was a space where I could paint." Like Morico, Montoya says the new venue motivated his work and he produced a body of paintings about immigrant workers.

Other artists working in the mansion's studios are the church's deacon, Frank Ciappetta, who creates religious icons; Ralph Dimarco and Steve Bagnell, who is the church administrator.

When they are not creating art, the guild members offer Boccaccio a helping hand.

"Having the artists help in the restoration and the general cleanup is their way of reciprocating and serving the parish," says Boccaccio. "It's a good way to use the building and the by-product is getting help restoring the building."

The artists also help decorate the church interior on holidays. Although the guild is open to all artists, Boccaccio says his preference is to invite others who would be willing to become involved in the parish.

Boccaccio has many more ideas about art in the mansion. "Down the line, it would be good to establish a little artist guild school for those interested in learning the arts."

Next weekend's "Grand

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The Rev. Michael Boccaccio  
 St. Philip Church

Unveiling" will showcase the work of the resident artists. Adding their work to the show are local painters Gary Recchia, Paul Favello and Tom Reilly, who are not members of SPAG.

"Now that this event is going on, it's bringing the artists together," says Morico. "It's nice to come in the evening and see the artists working, preparing for the show."

Montoya says the work in the show will mainly consist of paintings depicting landscapes, colorful abstractions, portraiture, religious icons and social issues.

St. Philip Artists' Guild will host its "Grand Unveiling" Friday, Sept. 26, to Sunday, Sept. 28. An artists' reception is planned for Friday, 6-9 p.m.; open studio hours are Saturday, noon-7 p.m.; and Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. SPAG is at 23 France St., Norwalk. Call (505) 400-4467 or e-mail [duvianm@duvianmontoya.com](mailto:duvianm@duvianmontoya.com).



"Our Cooks" by Duvian Montoya