

Monhegan Windows by Matthew Kiell

Midway through Matthew Kiell's novel, *Monhegan Windows*, the artist Saskia says that the "one true thing about art" is that it is "a burst of focus, a moment of creation that takes an environment, a universe, with no fixed points, no clear edges, no center, and fixes everything in place." Like the paintings of Manet, once considered "unfinished," each of the bursts of clarity in narration, artwork, and photography in *Monhegan Windows* has its own integrity, sturdy as the rocky coast of Monhegan Island, but undefined around the edges.

The scenes visible through the windows are clear enough. A man running away from grief and obligations ends up broke on an island off the coast of Maine. He hires on as a handyman, has an affair with a local artist, and meets a writer who challenges him to deal with his pain by writing about it rather than escaping it. As if changing an **f**—stop or attaching a wide-angle lens, however, Kiell then offers another window, the story of a photographer who has lost his family in a car wreck. Like the castaway in the other story, he has come to Monhegan, where his wife spent many summers as a child. So the novel seems to braid two stories, although, like a surrealist collage, they differ so much in style, voice, artwork, and even type-font, that they reside uneasily on the same canvas. The photojournalist of the second story, also under the influence of a challenging guide and a talented artist, begins to express himself through photographs and story. The braid unravels when the reader discovers that the story the photographer is writing and posting, chapter by chapter, on the community bulletin board, is the first story about the handyman.

In multiple frames, distant shots, and close-ups, miniatures, and panoramas, Kiell assembles a literary installation whose supporting structure is the enduring landscape and way of life on this rugged island of artist colonies and lobster fishermen. With many surprising turns, the compelling story-line becomes even more intriguing as the residents of Monhegan respond to the mysterious outsider who's telling their stories. *Monhegan Windows* is an exquisitely curated exhibition of insights into the power of the narrative and visual arts.