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# Preserving quiet: Artists work to capture natural soundscape at Canaveral National Seashore



Perry Lynch Howard is a resident sound artist who lives and works at Canaveral National Seashore, seen on Feb. 23, 2024. Along with Gordon Hempton, the artists work to document the natural soundscape at the Atlantic Center for the Arts Soundscape Field Station, based in the Doris Leeper House, for about two months. (Patrick Connolly/Orlando Sentinel)



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While many artist residency programs are geared toward visual artists, a unique opportunity based at [Canaveral National Seashore](#) is designed specifically with sound artists in mind.

The program, which began in 2019 as the first of its kind in the United States, invites an artist or a pair of artists to live in the Doris Leeper House within the park for five weeks each year and is dedicated to preserving natural sound. This year's [Atlantic Center for the Arts Soundscape Field Station](#) welcomes [Perri Lynch Howard](#), a multidisciplinary artist based in Washington, and [Gordon Hempton](#), an acoustic ecologist who co-founded [Quiet Parks International](#).

Several weeks into their residency, the pair have documented the dawn and dusk chorus of birds and insects, a rocket launch and the human-induced noise pollution that seeps into the natural soundscape.

"This is a very unique opportunity because it is based on sound. It's based on one's listening experience into the landscape," Howard said. "That unfolds within the incredible legacy of Doris Leeper, who was an artist and environmental activist."



Perry Lynch Howard is a resident sound artist at Canaveral National Seashore, living and working in the Doris Leeper House for about two months. (Patrick Connolly/Orlando Sentinel)

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## Continuing Leeper's legacy

The late [Leeper](#), a longtime resident of New Smyrna Beach, was an American sculptor and painter who was instrumental in the creation of Canaveral National Seashore in 1975 and the founding of the Atlantic Center for the Arts (ACA) in 1982.

With the risk of widespread development along the seashore, Leeper fought to preserve the land around her home alongside the Mosquito Lagoon, where she lived with her two Great Danes and created art. She also hosted parties with community members to solicit donations for the ACA.

"Perri and I have been exploring what it is about this house, this place and this setting that fed Doris Leeper's art," Hempton said. "Something nurtured her soul for her to take the next step to orchestrate the founding of Canaveral National Seashore."

While the acoustic ecologist spoke to the Sentinel by Zoom from Washington, Hempton is set to return to Florida for the last few weeks of the residency. This project marks the second collaboration between the two resident artists, who previously recorded together in the Amazon.



Gordon Hempton works in the field with Perri Lynch Howard during a residency at the Atlantic Center for the Arts Field Station at Canaveral National Seashore. In recording, he uses a head-shaped binaural recording device to simulate human hearing. (Courtesy Perry Lynch Howard)

“Something magic happens to you as a human being when you’re no longer reminded of the modern outside world. You’re no longer there as 50 or 30 or 20 years old,” Hempton said. “You’re there with the complete knowledge and experience that it took millions of years to get you here through your evolution. It’s a transformative experience.”

Howard welcomes this residency as a way to contemplate the role of quiet in our increasingly frantic modern world.

“I don’t know that we’ve ever been more challenged to establish or maintain a sense of place,” she said. “This residency is a chance to both engage with nature in a very beautiful, privileged way as individuals but it’s also a chance to engage park visitors and ask them to contemplate their own sense of place while they’re here.”



Nathan Wolek, a sound artist and audio researcher, works with his class of Stetson University students to conduct field recording at Canaveral National Seashore on Feb. 23. (Patrick Connolly/Orlando Sentinel)

## In the field

On a breezy Friday morning, Howard gathered her bag of gear and left the Leeper house to meet Nathan Wolek, a [professor of digital arts at Stetson University](#) and the 2020 ACA Soundscape Field Station artist in residency, and his students for a field recording session.

While the wind hampered efforts to capture natural sounds above the surface, Howard and the students used hydrophones (waterproof microphones) to record the crashing of waves beneath the sand and the clicking sounds of aquatic shrimp.

During Wolek’s 2020 work, he documented the natural soundscape during COVID-19 shutdowns and recorded the first visitors to return to the park when it reopened. His project centered on Turtle Mound, a Native American shell midden.

“Over a week, I recorded every hour of the day at all three of the platforms at Turtle Mound,” he said. “I have hours of recordings that I took for one week in November 2020.”



Artist Perry Lynch Howard works to bury a hydrophone, a waterproof microphone, in the sand at Canaveral National Seashore, seen on Feb. 23. Along with Gordon Hempton, the artists work to document the natural soundscape at the Atlantic Center for the Arts Soundscape Field Station, based in the Doris Leeper House, for about two months. (Patrick Connolly/Orlando Sentinel)

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While Howard previously used her hydrophone to capture “quiet waters” and whale sounds in the Arctic Circle, it was useful while working with Hempton in Florida for capturing the subterranean rumbles caused by a rocket launch.

“My first in-person rocket launch was exhilarating. The sound was incredible. The sight was incredible, truly a miraculous ‘How is this possible?’ sort of experience,” Hempton said. “The crashing ocean waves barely moved the gain on the microphone. The [rocket’s] sound wave came through the hydrophone, and it went off the charts and distorted. That’s a huge amount of acoustic energy, which certainly every living creature felt.”



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## A quest to save quiet

For more than three decades, the “[Sound Tracker](#)” Hempton has circled the globe three times in pursuit of the world’s quietest places. His experience led him to create [One Square Inch of Silence](#), a project founded in Olympic National Park based on the idea that protecting a small area of quiet can preserve large swaths of natural land.

“I hiked up on Earth Day 2005 to this location now known as One Square Inch of Silence, placed down a rock and quietly pledged to myself that I would defend it,” he said. Over the next decade, it became a book, film and a noise-control project.

About five years ago, Hempton co-founded [Quiet Parks International](#) to preserve wilderness areas, urban parks, quiet trails and conservation areas to keep them as free from human-caused noise pollution as possible.

“People are willing to travel the world to a quiet destination,” he said. “In the case of Canaveral National Seashore, I think it’s a very exciting opportunity because I believe that it can have its quiet.”

In their work, the artists have noticed “anthropogenic noise incursion” from boat traffic, low-flying flights and cars on State Road A1A at all hours of the night.



Perry Lynch Howard's sound recording gear sits on the porch of a historic building at Canaveral National Seashore. (Patrick Connolly/Orlando Sentinel)

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"At Canaveral National Seashore, what's the impact of a passing car or a passing plane on wildlife?" Hempton said. "We shouldn't ask ourselves, 'How loud are the loudest sounds?' We should consider even the faint sounds that we make and the impact on birds, reptiles and all the creatures who are detecting these faint sounds."

Together, the pair hope to produce recordings that help park staff and ecologists deepen their understanding of the natural ecosystem, and they aim to add to conservation efforts.

"If the recordings that we make down here become part of that knowledge that protects this place for the future, I can't imagine a better outcome for my time here," Howard said.





Perry Lynch Howard is a resident sound artist who lives and works at Canaveral National Seashore. (Patrick Connolly/Orlando Sentinel)

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## Public events with the artists

Atlantic Center for the Arts hosts several public events for visitors to meet the artists. All events are free. To learn more, visit [atlanticcenterforthearts.org](https://atlanticcenterforthearts.org).

- **Sound & Story** with Perri Lynch Howard is from 1-3 p.m., followed by an **Artist Talk** at 5:30 p.m. on March 2 at the ACA Harris House, 214 S. Riverside Drive in New Smyrna Beach.
- **Sound is an Expression of Space: The Art of Listening** features Gordon Hempton and Perri Lynch Howard sharing an evening of stories and conversations about their work. The event is at 7 p.m. March 8 at the ACA main campus amphitheater, 1414 Art Center Ave. in New Smyrna Beach.
- **A Soundwalk** with both artists takes place at Canaveral National Seashore from 11 a.m.- 1 p.m. March 9, meeting at the Eldora State House. The event is free, but the park requires paid admission. No registration is required. Ask at the ranger station for directions.
- **An open studio** invites the public to meet the artists from noon-2 p.m. March 14 at the ACA Harris House, 214 S. Riverside Drive in New Smyrna Beach.

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2024 > March > 1