

Reading Group Guide



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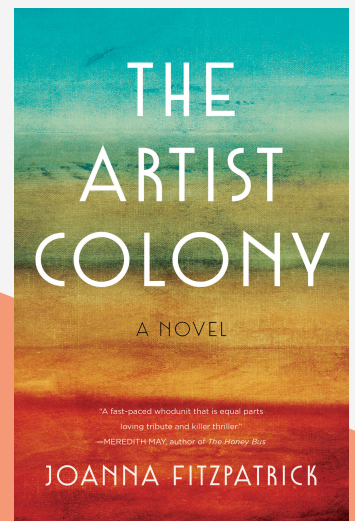
Joanna FitzPatrick

about

JOANNA FITZPATRICK was raised in Hollywood. She started her writing habit by applying her orange fountain pen and a wild imagination to screenplays, which led her early on to produce the film *White Lilacs and Pink Champagne*. Accepted at Sarah Lawrence College, she wrote her MFA thesis *Sha La La: Live for Today* about her life as a rock 'n' roll star's wife. Her more recent work includes two novels, *Katherine Mansfield*, Bronze Winner of the 2021 Independent Publisher Book Award (IPPY) in Historical Fiction, and *The Drummer's Widow*. *The Artist Colony* is her third book. Presently, FitzPatrick divides her time between a cottage by the sea in Pacific Grove, California and a hameau in rural southern France where she begins all her book projects.

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the details

THE ARTIST COLONY: A Novel

By Joanna FitzPatrick

She Writes Press

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Author photo by Michelle Magdalena

■ from the Introduction to **THE ARTIST COLONY**

"If I hadn't inherited a landscape painting by my great-aunt, Ada Belle Champlin, and if I hadn't moved to Carmel Valley, California, because of that wondrous landscape, I would still be in Manhattan and I would have written a different story.

After my husband, Jim, and I moved into our new home, I hung Ada Belle's landscape over the stone fireplace. I wondered where in Carmel she had stood to paint the country road bordered by a row of eucalyptus trees in a golden pasture lit by a blue sky brushed lightly with clouds like white powder puffs. In the background, a range of mountains rise in purple splendor.

I am not a painter but I think ***The Artist Colony*** started on a blank canvas, not a blank piece of paper. I had a palette of vivid ideas. As I brush-stroked layer upon layer of pigments onto that imaginary canvas, it evolved into an historical novel set in 1924 when Carmel-by-the-Sea was a thriving women's art colony.

I became very curious about an art colony populated by women who, like my great-aunt, had become painters at a time when it was declass  for a woman to do anything artistic beyond needlepoint. Women were expected to marry and make babies, not art. I wondered how Ada Belle succeeded as a painter under these restraints.

Soon I was deep into a mystery plot, interweaving the history of Carmel's artist colony with the actions of my characters. As my research expanded, I added real people—the poet Robinson Jeffers and his wife, Una; the painters Armin Hansen, William Ritschel, and August "Gus" Gay—and had them meet my fictional characters in the locations where they had lived. Then I stepped back and let them tell their story."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS for *THE ARTIST COLONY*

1. How much do you know about women painters and the history of women's art? Has this novel inspired you to learn more?
2. Did you know Robinson Jeffers and some of the other famous people mentioned in the novel? If not, did you look them up while reading? Why or why not?
3. Art and creative writing share similarities as well as key differences. Discuss.
4. Is this a feminist novel? Is any novel espousing equal rights feminist? How does this novel address the issue of equal rights more broadly?
5. In *The Artist Colony*, women gather together to paint in Carmel-by-the-Sea. Do you think there were other artists' colonies elsewhere? How does gathering to work together matter to the creative process? To the reading process? Do you think artists' colonies remain important today?
6. Why is the setting critical to the story? Would you ever want to visit Carmel-by-the-Sea?
7. How does the theme of sisterhood affect the plot?
8. What is the role of critics and criticism in this story?
9. How are families portrayed in this novel? What kinds of families are in the novel?
10. This novel is about how people see or don't see, in part, be it seeing a landscape, views of each other, or understanding themselves. How do these various ways of seeing matter in *The Artist Colony*?
11. Why is Albert important?
12. Why do you think the author added an Introduction?
13. Included in Notes on Sources is a reference to Nella Larsen's 1929 novel *Passing*. Its character Clare Kendry was a resource for this novel. How does the recent film adaptation by the same title, written and directed by Rebecca Hall, portray Clare's motives differently from Sirena's?