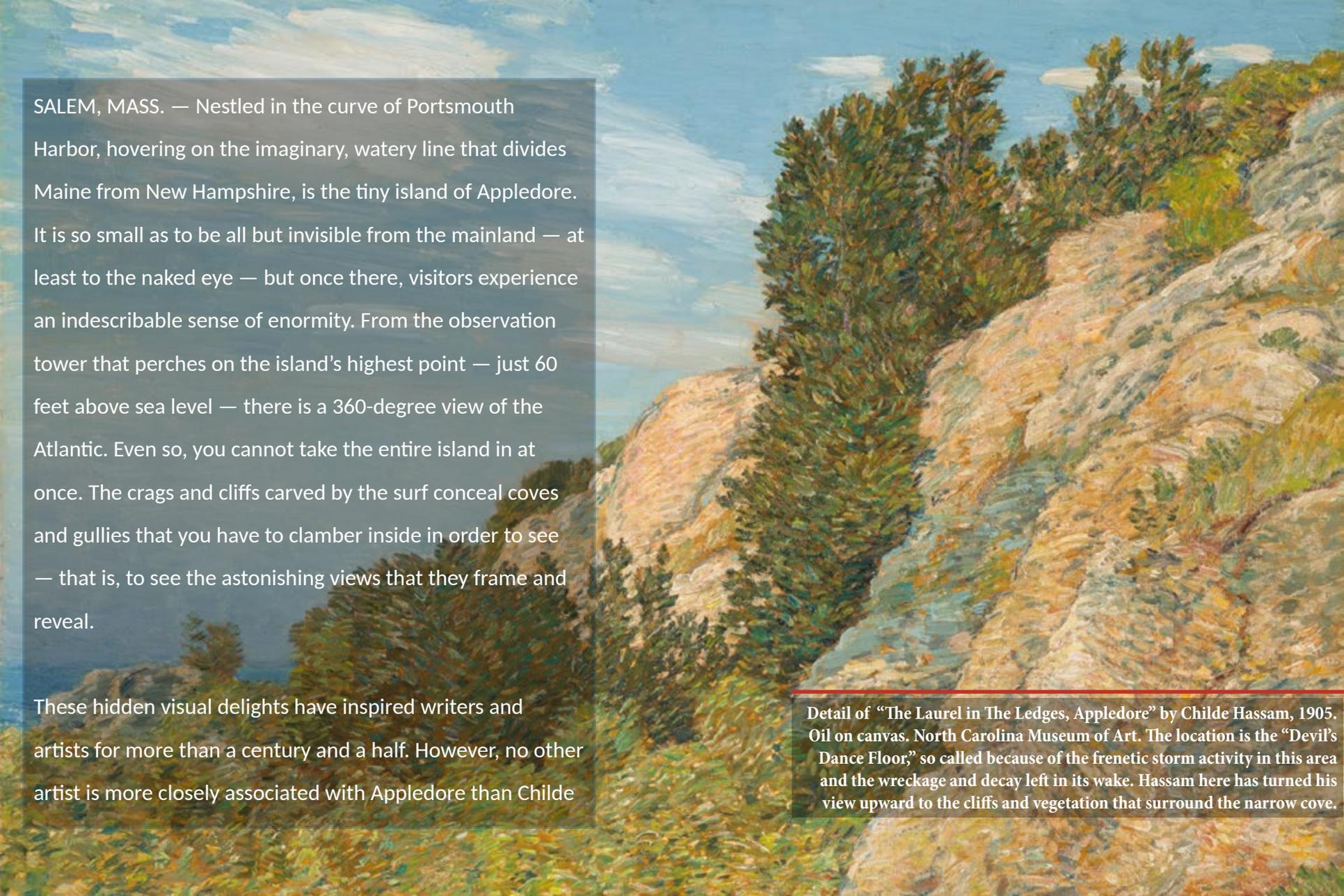
The background of the slide is a detail from the painting 'Poppies, Isles of Shoals' by Childe Hassam. It shows a rocky coastline with a dense field of red and pink poppies in the foreground. The water is a mix of blue and white, with a small white boat visible in the distance. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

# American Impressionist

Childe Hassam And The Isles Of Shoals

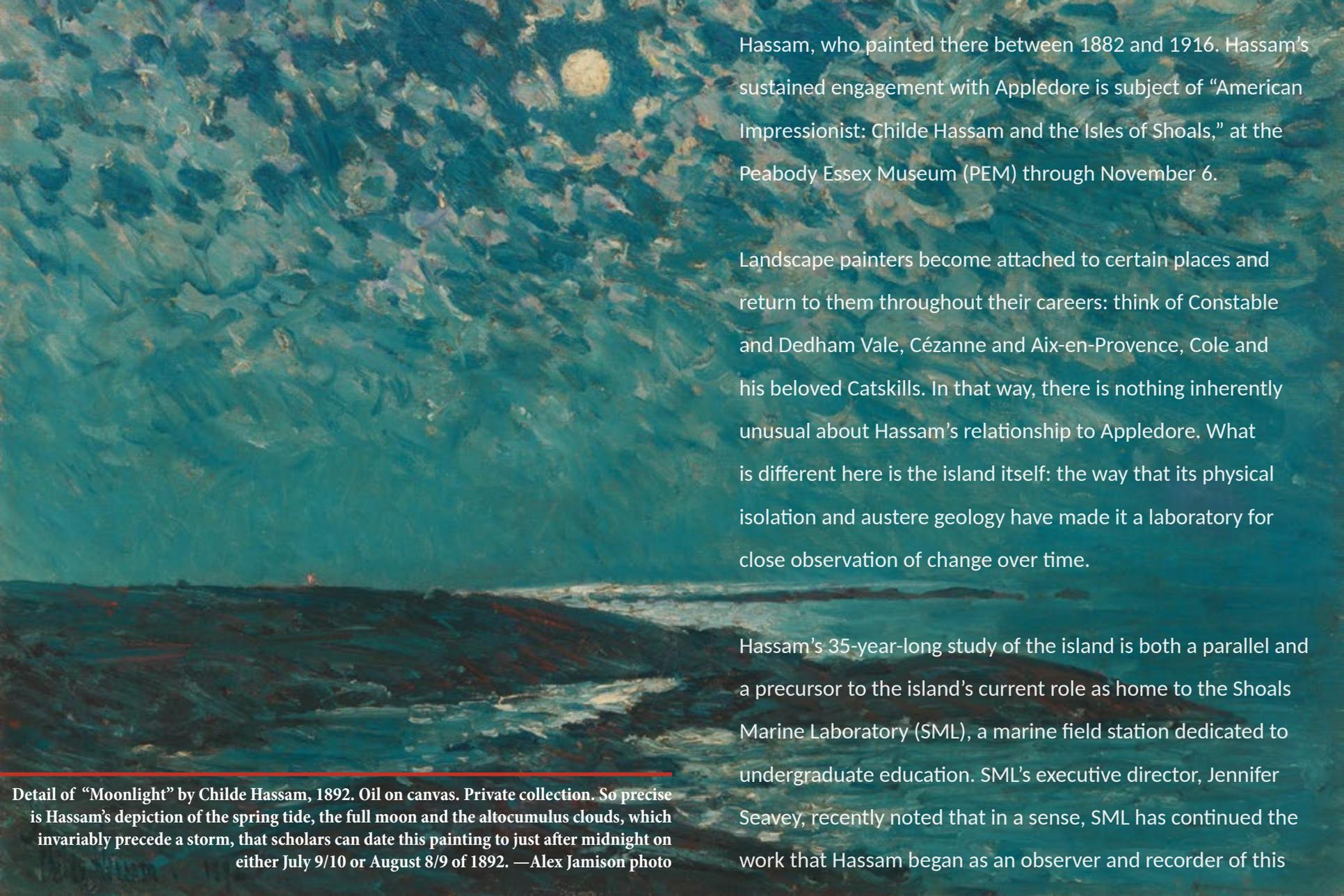
Detail of "Poppies, Isles of Shoals" by Childe Hassam, 1891. Oil on canvas.  
National Gallery of Art, Washington. Babb's Rock.

A detailed oil painting of a rocky cliffside. The foreground and middle ground are dominated by rugged, light-colored rock formations with visible textures and shadows. Several tall, dark green evergreen trees are scattered across the cliffside. The background shows a bright blue sky with wispy white clouds. The overall style is impressionistic, with visible brushstrokes and a vibrant color palette.

SALEM, MASS. — Nestled in the curve of Portsmouth Harbor, hovering on the imaginary, watery line that divides Maine from New Hampshire, is the tiny island of Appledore. It is so small as to be all but invisible from the mainland — at least to the naked eye — but once there, visitors experience an indescribable sense of enormity. From the observation tower that perches on the island's highest point — just 60 feet above sea level — there is a 360-degree view of the Atlantic. Even so, you cannot take the entire island in at once. The crags and cliffs carved by the surf conceal coves and gullies that you have to clamber inside in order to see — that is, to see the astonishing views that they frame and reveal.

These hidden visual delights have inspired writers and artists for more than a century and a half. However, no other artist is more closely associated with Appledore than Childe

Detail of “The Laurel in The Ledges, Appledore” by Childe Hassam, 1905. Oil on canvas. North Carolina Museum of Art. The location is the “Devil’s Dance Floor,” so called because of the frenetic storm activity in this area and the wreckage and decay left in its wake. Hassam here has turned his view upward to the cliffs and vegetation that surround the narrow cove.



Hassam, who painted there between 1882 and 1916. Hassam's sustained engagement with Appledore is subject of "American Impressionist: Childe Hassam and the Isles of Shoals," at the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) through November 6.

Landscape painters become attached to certain places and return to them throughout their careers: think of Constable and Dedham Vale, Cézanne and Aix-en-Provence, Cole and his beloved Catskills. In that way, there is nothing inherently unusual about Hassam's relationship to Appledore. What is different here is the island itself: the way that its physical isolation and austere geology have made it a laboratory for close observation of change over time.

Hassam's 35-year-long study of the island is both a parallel and a precursor to the island's current role as home to the Shoals Marine Laboratory (SML), a marine field station dedicated to undergraduate education. SML's executive director, Jennifer Seavey, recently noted that in a sense, SML has continued the work that Hassam began as an observer and recorder of this

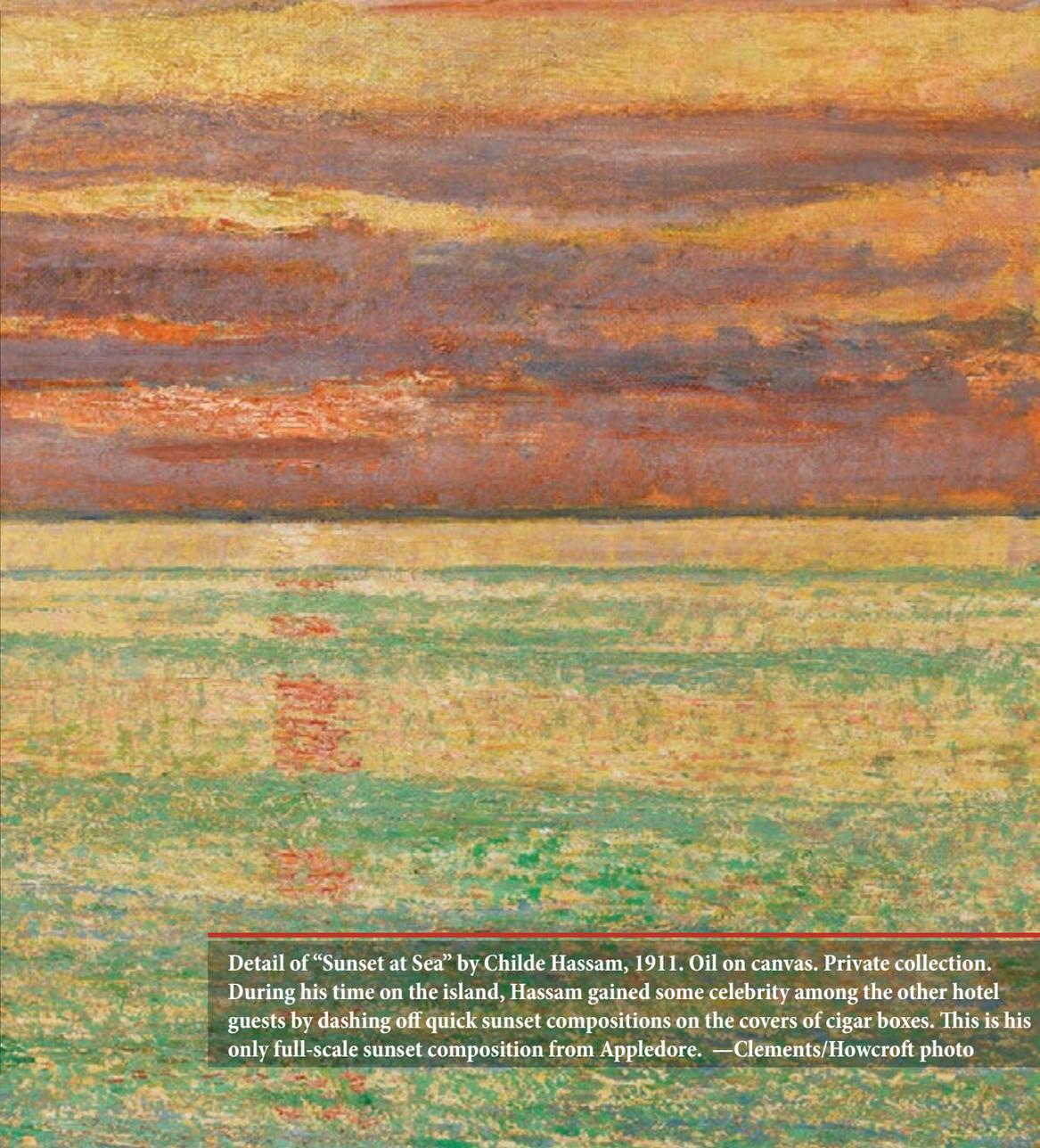
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Detail of "Moonlight" by Childe Hassam, 1892. Oil on canvas. Private collection. So precise is Hassam's depiction of the spring tide, the full moon and the altocumulus clouds, which invariably precede a storm, that scholars can date this painting to just after midnight on either July 9/10 or August 8/9 of 1892. —Alex Jamison photo

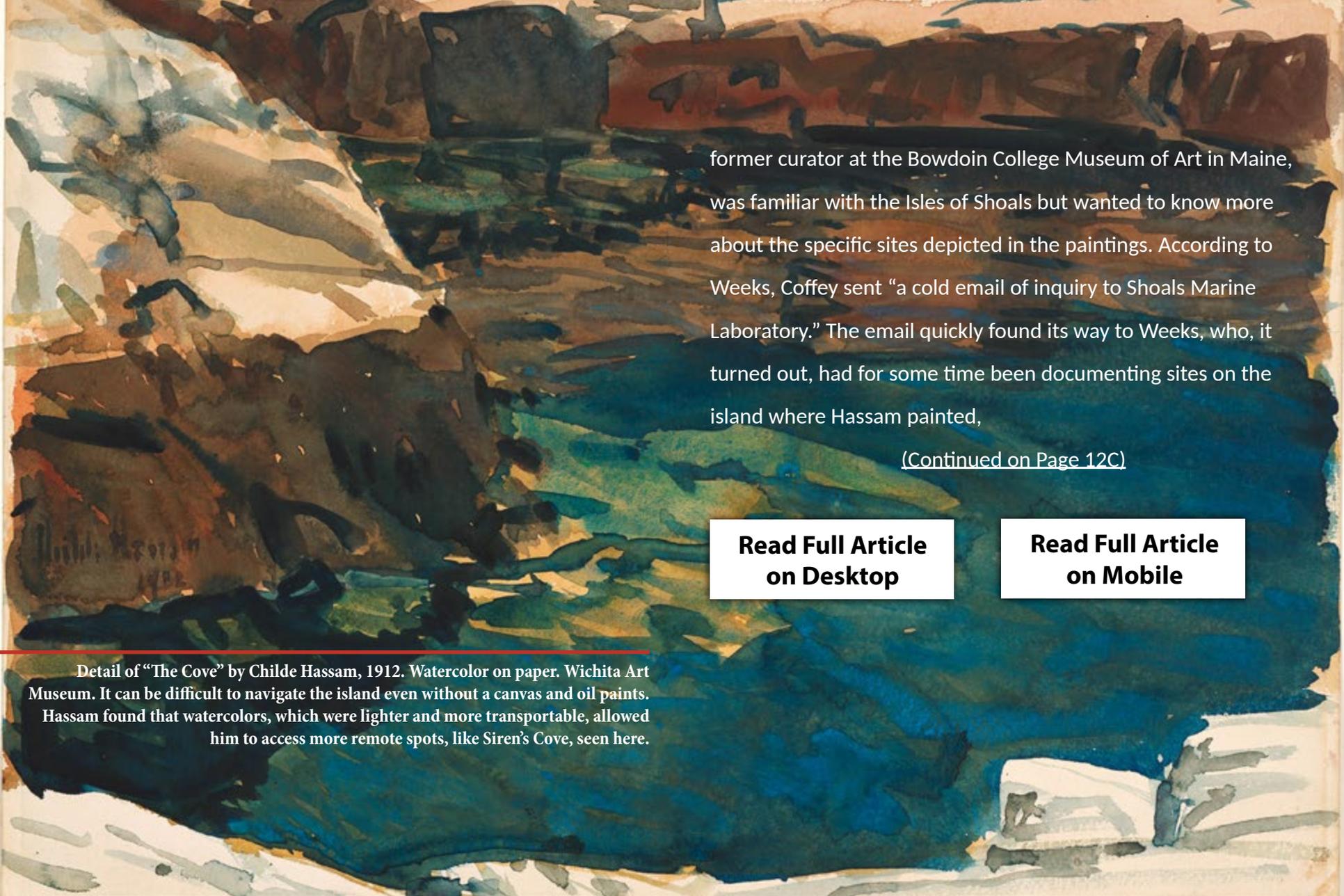
unique, enclosed environment. Indeed, what is special about the island and Hassam's paintings of it, as well as this particular exhibition, is the blend of art and science and the enthusiastic collaboration of people who practice both of those disciplines in various ways.

Exhibition co-curator Hal Weeks — a predecessor of Seavey's at SML — notes that "clearly both groups, artists and scientists, are keen observers of nature and natural forms." The very idea for the show began with questions that arose from close observation, sparked a conversation between an art museum curator and a scientist, and, like the island itself, revealed something both larger and more complex than at first it seemed.

Back in 2010, at the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, curator of American art John Coffey was researching three Appledore paintings by Hassam that a donor had promised to the museum. Coffey, a



Detail of "Sunset at Sea" by Childe Hassam, 1911. Oil on canvas. Private collection. During his time on the island, Hassam gained some celebrity among the other hotel guests by dashing off quick sunset compositions on the covers of cigar boxes. This is his only full-scale sunset composition from Appledore. —Clements/Howcroft photo

A watercolor painting on paper, showing a rocky coastline with a cove. The colors are vibrant and layered, with dark blues and greens in the water, and earthy browns and greys on the rocks. The style is expressive and somewhat abstract, characteristic of Hassam's work.

former curator at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art in Maine, was familiar with the Isles of Shoals but wanted to know more about the specific sites depicted in the paintings. According to Weeks, Coffey sent “a cold email of inquiry to Shoals Marine Laboratory.” The email quickly found its way to Weeks, who, it turned out, had for some time been documenting sites on the island where Hassam painted,

[\(Continued on Page 12C\)](#)

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Detail of “The Cove” by Childe Hassam, 1912. Watercolor on paper. Wichita Art Museum. It can be difficult to navigate the island even without a canvas and oil paints. Hassam found that watercolors, which were lighter and more transportable, allowed him to access more remote spots, like Siren’s Cove, seen here.

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