

Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism
Historic Preservation and Museum Division/State Historic Preservation Office

CONNECTICUT STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating individual properties and districts to the Connecticut State Register of Historic Places (C.G.S. Chapter 184b, Sec. 10-409(2)). See instructions in *How to Complete the Connecticut State Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets. Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Kurzen, Aaron, House

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 35 Buena Vista Road

city or town Branford

☐ vicinity

county New Haven

zip code 06405

☐ not for publication

3. State Agency Certification

I hereby certify that this nomination ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the documentation standards and criteria for registering properties in the Connecticut Register of Historic Places. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

State Historic Preservation Officer

Date

4. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

☒ private

☐ public-local

☐ public-state

☐ public-federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

☒ building(s)

☐ district

☐ site

☐ structure

☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

Contributing

Non-Contributing

3

1

buildings

sites

structures

objects

4

Total

Property Owner

name Aaron Kurzen

address 35 Buena Vista Road

city Branford state code CT

zip code 06405 phone _____

Kurzen House

Name of Property

Branford

Municipality

5. Historic Preservation Council

Approval date

Comments

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural/Archaeological Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

MID 20th CENTURY

VERNACULAR: Quonset Hut

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE: Concrete Block

walls WOOD: Vertical Board Siding

roof METAL: Aluminum

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable Connecticut Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for State Register listing.)

☒ **1** That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to our history and lives of persons significant in our past; or

☒ **2** That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

☐ **3** That have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Levels of Significance (local, state)

State: Criterion 1

Local: Criterion 2

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ART

ARCHITECTURE

Significant Dates

1953: Dwelling built

1953-1996: Seasonal and weekend use of the property by Aaron Kurzen

1996-present: Year-round occupancy of property by Aaron Kurzen

Significant Person

Kurzen, Aaron

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion 3 is marked)

Architect/Builder

Kurzen, Aaron

Ribley, Deforest

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

Kurzen House

Name of Property

Branford

Municipality

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.93

Municipal Map, Block and Lot Number and UTM Coordinate (If possible)

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	K09	005	00012
	Map	Block	Lot
1			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

☐ See continuation sheet

Latitude & Longitude: 41.2655, -72.7475

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

The boundaries of the nominated property are the legal limits of Block 005, Lot 00012, Map K09 of the Town of Branford's assessment records (Parcel ID 11087).

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

The boundaries encompass the full extent of the intact historic resources on this property associated with Aaron Kurzen.

11. Form Prepared By

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organization Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

date May 2015

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state CT

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CONNECTICUT STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM – Continuation Form

Kurzen House

Name of Property

Branford

Municipality

7. Narrative Description

The Kurzen property is a mid-twentieth century residential resource associated with an influential individual who was engaged in art in Connecticut. This nomination was prepared as part of the Creative Places – Arts and Letters Project.

This house and the outbuildings sit on one acre, located on the south side of Buena Vista Road, and just to the north of the marsh. The house is sited in the center of the lot and is buffered from the road by trees. A gravel driveway extends to the south off the road, and leads to an attached carport and a parking area just north of the house. To the northeast of the house, located on the property, are two sheds and a studio. 35 Buena Vista Road was once part of the next property directly to the east, where a single-bedroom geodesic dome is sited. Toward the west of the property is the community of Stony Creek. The property is located close to the end of Buena Vista Road and the surrounding houses date from the early to mid-twentieth century.

Branford is a town in New Haven County, along the shoreline of Long Island Sound. The property is located in the Stony Creek area, which is found in the southeast section of Branford. Stony Creek is a coastal village that includes a public beach, boat tours of the Thimble Islands, small shops, restaurants, and many nineteenth century houses. The Guilford town line is approximately one mile to the east. To the southwest is Long Island Sound, and the center of Branford is approximately three miles to the southeast. There are many areas listed on the National Register of Historic Places in the town of Branford, not far from this property. In fact, this property is just to the east and outside of the boundary of the Stony Creek/Thimble Islands National Register Historic District, which includes Buena Vista Road.

Data Table (C – contributing, NC – non-contributing)

House	1953	C
Shed I	c. 1953	C
Shed II	c. 1990	NC
Studio	c. 1990	C

House:

This is an approximately 50' x 25', 1-story Quonset hut that in 1953 was converted into a permanent residence. A Quonset hut is an arched structure made of sheets of metal and a wood frame. An approximately 15' x 20' addition has been added to the south elevation of the house, and a covered carport is attached to the north façade. In order to create more square footage/living space in the Quonset hut, the structure was propped on large wood posts and the floor was dropped down to allow for an extra four feet of ceiling to floor space. This extra height allowed Aaron Kurzen to build a loft where the bedroom and bathroom are located. The house is sheathed in metal panels and vertical board siding. It has a concrete block foundation and metal panels on the arched roof.

The building faces north, and the main entrance is centered on this side of the house. The main entrance is reached by a staircase, and is covered by the carport, which protrudes to the north. The fenestration consists of three-pane windows along this façade of the house. Centered on the west elevation is a doorway with a screen door, reached by a wooden ramp. A cylindrical chimney is also found on this side as well as single-pane and four-pane windows.

The addition is centered on the south elevation of the house, protruding to the south. It has a shed-roof and large single-pane windows on all sides of the addition. Large single-pane windows are found on the Quonset hut on this side, and a boardwalk runs along the west half of this elevation. On the east half of the south elevation is a boardwalk and deck. The boardwalk extends to the south and leads to a gazebo at the edge of the marsh. The windows of the house overlook the marshland, and allow for natural light to filter in. Large multi-paned windows are on the east elevation. The middle window appears to open to act as an entryway to and from the house.

The main entrance of the house enters into the kitchen. Toward the south, in the addition, is a living room. A sitting room and bedroom are to the east. To the west is another living room area. A staircase in the west leads to the second story where a bedroom and bathroom are found. The walls and ceiling are of wood panels, and large, heavy timbers help to stabilize the building. However, the walls of the addition, where one of the living rooms is located, are windows in order to see the views of the marsh behind (to the south) of the house. The interior of the house is decorated with Aaron Kurzen's artwork.

Shed I:

Shed I was built around the same time Kurzen purchased the property in the 1950s. It is a small structure measuring approximately 12.5' x 10.' It has metal siding on the east and north elevations. Windows line the west wall. And the south elevation has a wooden lath wall on the western half and the eastern half is open. The roof is also of metal.

Shed II:

Shed II was built in the 1990s. Kurzen built this structure as it appeared that Shed I had no more room for storage. This structure is a simple modern-style rectangular building with ribbon windows near the eaves of the roof. It has a shed-roof that is covered in asphalt and the building is sheathed in wood board siding. Double-doors are on both the east and west ends of the south elevation.

Studio:

The studio was built during the same time Shed II was built, in the 1990s, as Aaron Kurzen and his wife were getting ready to retire and move permanently to Branford. The purpose for building this structure was so Aaron Kurzen could create and produce his works of art. It has a shed-roof covered in asphalt shingles, and the structure is raised off the ground and sits upon concrete pillars. The building is sided in wood panels. The entry consists of double doors on the west elevation and is reached by a wooden staircase. Windows line both the south and north elevations. The east elevation of the building is blank.

8. Narrative Statement of Significance

Criterion 1

This property derives its primary significance for its association with artist Aaron Kurzen. Kurzen, a well-known artist amongst his peers, taught at the Dalton School in New York City for many years. This house is an example of the reuse of a Quonset hut as a residence. It was built c. 1953 using timbers from a historic house that was demolished in New Jersey.

Kurzen's Association with the Property:

(Information gathered from an interview with Aaron Kurzen on March 11, 2014 unless otherwise noted.)

In the early to mid-twentieth century, this property was owned by the Weil family, a well-known family in Stony Creek. Aaron Kurzen met the Weil family through Susan Weil, who was a student of his at Dalton High School in New York City. During the 1950s, Kurzen acquired land from the Weil family in order to build a summer/weekend home. Around this time, Kurzen purchased a disassembled Quonset hut in New York for \$300, and transported the parts to Connecticut. He then bought timbers from a demolished house in New Jersey to help lift and stabilize his home he was to build. With the help of a local builder, Deforest Ribley, Kurzen built his house in the span of about ten years using the Quonset hut and the timbers he

purchased from New Jersey. As noted by Randall Beach in an article written for the New Haven Register in December of 2013, Aaron Kurzen stated, “It’s an architectural novelty. I began building it around 1950; it took me at least ten years. It was very marshy. I had to work in the deep mud. And I didn’t have any money, really” (Beach 2013). This served as the summer/weekend home for Kurzen and his wife until 1996 when they moved permanently to Branford.

Significance of Aaron Kurzen:

(Information gathered from an interview with Aaron Kurzen on March 11, 2014 unless otherwise noted.)

Aaron Kurzen was born in 1920 in Minnesota, and grew up in the Minneapolis and Saint Paul area. His father, Harry Kurzen, was born in Lithuania in 1890 and arrived in the United States in 1904. Aaron Kurzen’s mother, Katherine (Pastornak) Kurzen was born in Russia in 1892 and arrived in the United States in 1908 (Ancestry.com 2002). Harry Kurzen worked for a wholesale manufacturing company in clothing. He was an artist in his own right as he would design clothing. Aaron and his sister, Estelle, grew up in a creative household. Estelle Kurzen would go on to write poetry and become an experienced violinist, while Aaron grew up and pursued a career in art and teaching.

After graduating from high school in 1938, Kurzen received a scholarship to study at the Art Students League in New York City. He studied under Vaclav Vytlacil, Cameron Booth, and Hans Hoffman. Kurzen served three years in the war during World War II, and toured Italy and Africa. While living for months at a time in caves with his unit, Kurzen would draw portraits of his fellow soldiers. The soldiers would then send these portraits back home to their families. It is for this reason that Kurzen believes he survived the war. He believes the soldiers in his troop helped to keep him alive in order for him to continue drawing portraits of them.

After the war, in 1947, Kurzen began teaching art at Dalton High School in New York City. He married Lenore “Saja” Laren, and they resided in New York City until the mid-1990s. After his retirement from Dalton High School, Kurzen and his wife moved to Branford full-time. Although Kurzen rarely showcased his artwork throughout his life, now in his 90s, he is more frequently exhibiting his work locally (Beach 2013).

Although he is not nationally well-known, Aaron Kurzen’s contributions to the art field have made him significant among his colleagues. As a teacher in New York City, he taught many students who would go on to become well-known artists such as Susan Weil. He also started the life drawing class at Dalton which included the use of real models, sometimes nude. Classes such as this are rarely found in middle and high school levels. Throughout his long career as a teacher, Kurzen and his wife lived full-time in New York City until his retirement in the mid-1990s. He was drawn to the Stony Creek area of Branford because of his association with Susan Weil and her family. Kurzen and his wife often returned to their Quonset hut residence on the weekends and throughout the summer before moving there permanently.

Kurzen exhibited little throughout his life and sometimes it was with the group “The Printmakers” which included (William) Ross Abrams, Seong Moy, William Rose, Peter Kahn, Rubin Reif, Jim Forsberg, Dorothy Morton, Wolf Kahn, and Hildegard Haas (The Annex Galleries 2015). During the 1950s and ‘60s, he exhibited in the Branford Library, and during the 1980s, he exhibited at the Museum of Holography in New York City. Now in his later years, Kurzen has been exhibiting locally in Branford and Guilford more frequently. Kurzen’s artwork is modern in style and he would categorize it as surrealism if he had to choose a name for it. He practices in different mediums such as painting, some of which are abstract in style, 3-D art made of everyday objects, and holograms.

Criterion 2

This house is an example of the reuse of a Quonset hut as a residential dwelling. Built c. 1953, it continues to remain a residence. The timbers from a historic house in New Jersey help to support the building, which is situated near a marsh. Along with this residential reuse of a Quonset hut, there are two other Quonset hut homes located in Stony Creek, to the north of this property.

Quonset Huts were developed during World War II, and were based off the Nissen Hut which the British used during World War I. The Quonset Hut got its name from the location it was created, Quonset Point in Rhode Island. The Navy anticipated

the need for a flexible, portable structure that was easy to assemble to be used as housing for troops. The Quonset Hut was designed and created by Peter Dejongh and Otto Brandenberger of the George A. Fuller Company (Seabee Museum and Memorial Park 2015). They were produced by Anderson Sheet Metal Company of Providence who had developed a way to manufacture bent corrugated sheets into a useable form for easy assembly. During assembly of the Quonset huts, the sheets were attached by nuts and bolts. The first shipment of Quonset Huts were sent overseas in 1941 (Carley 2010, 89). The first model was called the “T-Rib,” and it was an arched structure that measured 16’ wide by 36’ long made of thick and heavy “T” shaped steel with angle iron arches that were covered in corrugated metal. Throughout the course of World War II, the Quonset Hut went through numerous re-designs, each design with a slight difference. In the end, it proved to be a useful structure that required less shipping space than tents with wood floors and frames. Because of their durability, easy assembly, and their adaptability, the Quonset Hut was sold to civilians for various uses after the war was over (Carley 2010, 89).

The appeal of Quonset huts as residential dwellings were much of the same reasons the military liked them. They were quick and easy to assemble, durable, and adaptable for many different uses. Most commonly they were used for homes following World War II. The Quonset hut appealed to Kurzen because of its low cost, pre-fabricated nature. It was a structure he could erect mainly on his own with just a little help and could easily be used as a weekend/summer home. It was also easy to transport to the lot of land he had just acquired from the Weil family. With Kurzen’s creative and artistic mind, he was able to add modernist features such as large windows that allow the building to be open to the landscape. Because of this, the Quonset hut has the outdoor/indoor feel that “glass” houses tend to have. The idea that the outdoor landscape is inside the building. Another modernist feature of the house is the open floor plan. There are very few doors separating rooms inside the structure, one of the only ones being the door to the bathroom.

The residential Quonset Hut located at 35 Buena Vista Road in Branford is one of three that still survive in the Stony Creek area. This house stands out on Buena Vista Road as it is a distinct building type which is surrounded by typical dwellings of the early to mid-twentieth century. It was moved and re-constructed on this location in the 1950s and hasn’t moved since. The area surrounding the property has remained the same and will continue to do so in the future as it is protected marshland.

9. Bibliography

Photographs, field notes, and site visit by Kristen Nietering - 3/11/2014.

Interview with Aaron Kurzen - 3/11/2014, 35 Buena Vista Road, Branford.

Map resources:

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Parcel ID: K09/000 005/ 00012

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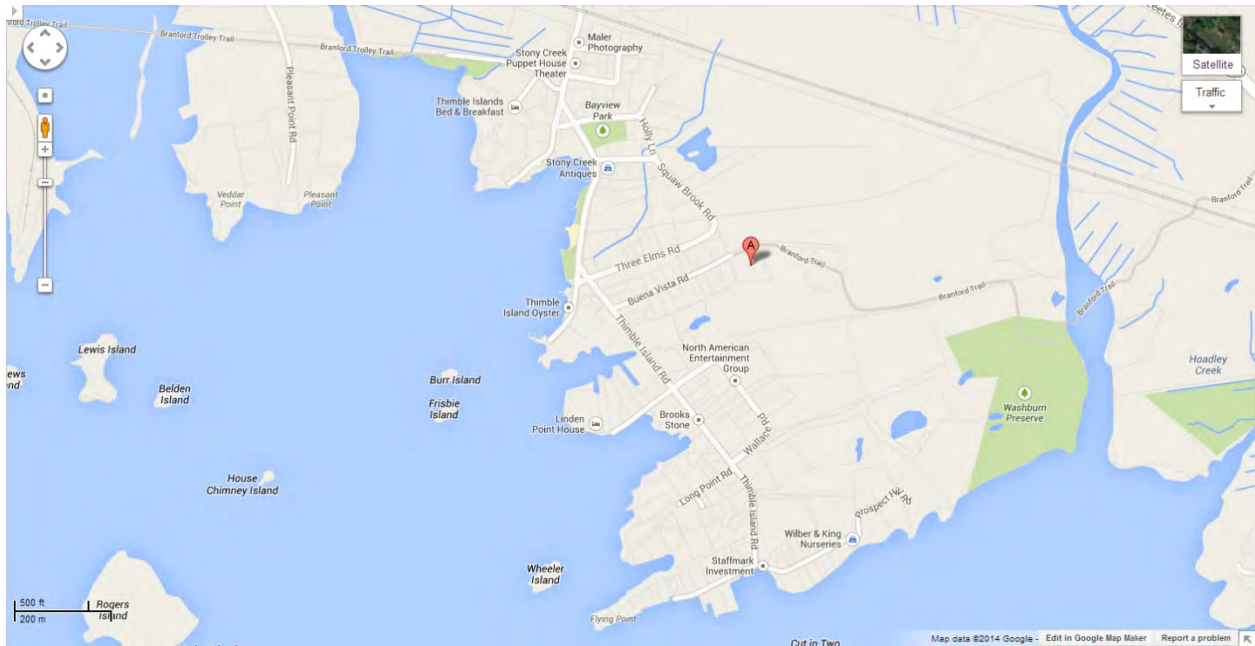
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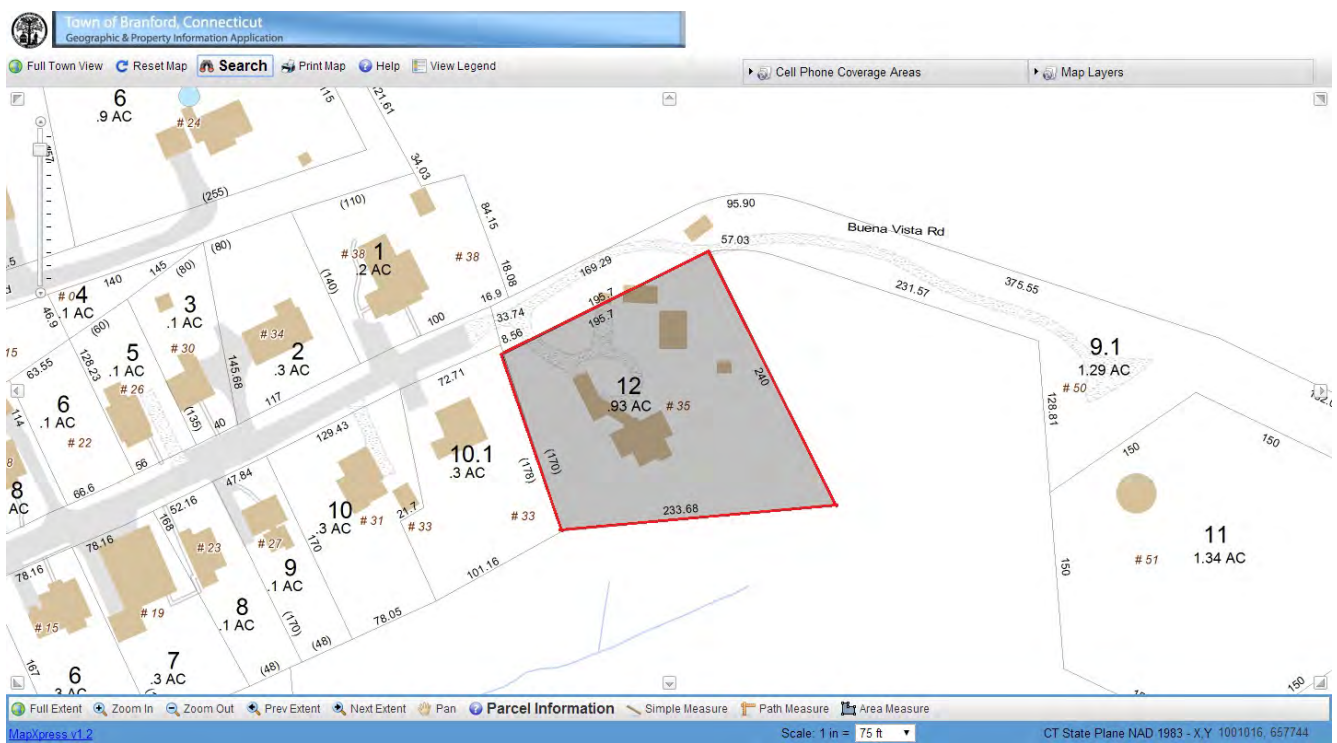
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The Annex Galleries. 2015. "Hildegard Haas Biography." Accessed September 28. <http://www.annexgalleries.com/artists/biography/910/Haas/Hildegard>.



1. Location map of 35 Buena Vista Road, Branford, CT – from <http://www.maps.google.com> – accessed 5/15/2015.



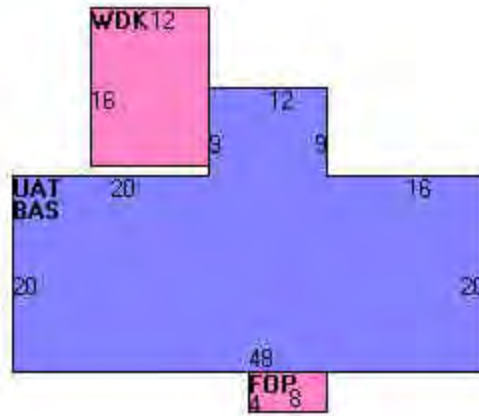
2. Parcel map of 35 Buena Vista Road, Branford, CT – from http://www.branfordgis.com/ags_map/ - accessed 5/15/2015.



3. South aerial “bird’s eye” view of 35 Buena Vista Road, Branford, CT – from <http://www.bing.com/maps> – accessed 5/15/2015.



4. Site map of 35 Buena Vista Road, Branford, CT – from <http://www.bing.com/maps> – accessed 5/15/2015.



5. Floor plan of 35 Buena Vista Road, Branford, CT – from <http://gis.vgsi.com/branfordct/Parcel.aspx?Pid=11087> – accessed 5/15/2015.



6. Northwest context view of the studio (on the left), shed I (in the middle), and the house (on the right). Camera facing southeast.



7. Northwest context view of shed I (on the left) and the house (on the right). Camera facing southeast.



8. Southwest context view of shed II (on the left) and the studio (on the right). Camera facing northeast.



9. West context view of the studio (on the left) and shed I (on the right). Camera facing east.



10. South view of shed II. Camera facing north.



11. Southwest view of the studio. Camera facing northeast.



12. Northwest view of shed I. Camera facing southeast.



13. North view of the house. Camera facing south.



14. West view of the house. Camera facing east.



15. South view of the house. Camera facing north.



16. East view of the house. Camera facing west.



17. Interior view of the southwest corner of the house. Camera facing southwest.



18. An example of the heavy timbers that were used to construct the house.



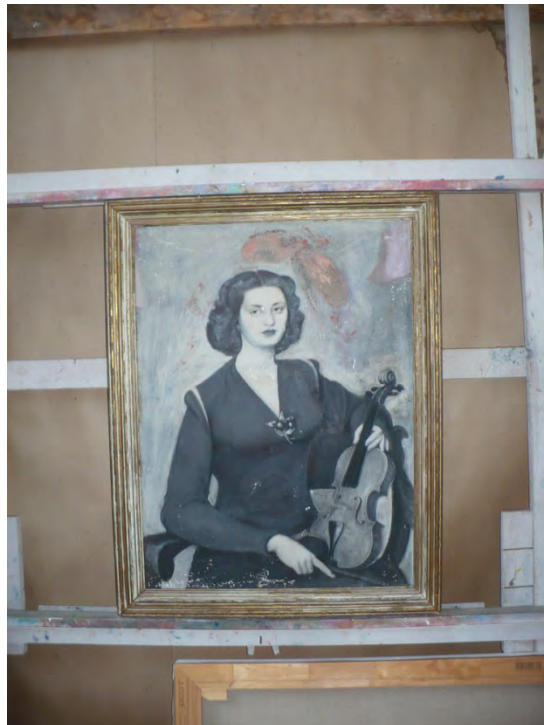
19. Example of Aaron Kurzen's 3-D artwork.



20. Another example of Kurzen's 3-D artwork. This one is made from a shoe.



21. An example of Aaron Kurzen's painting.



22. Another example of Aaron Kurzen's painting. This is a portrait of his sister, Estelle.