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When Charlie Hewitt rattles Manhattan’s (and Portland’s) cages, art lovers are riveted in the moment. But if you stalk him to his studio to see where the creator of Urban Rattle lives, he surprises with a sense of ‘here and now’ in not one but three places: Lewiston, Portland, and New York.

For his deepest and darkest beginnings, it’s Lewiston, where he was born in 1946. Like Marsden Hartley, he channels the river for creative energy.

More recently, Hewitt’s creative work gets done in Portland. The quintessential artist turbine, Hewitt sizzles in his 2,000-square-foot space studio space in the former Calderwood Bakery building on Pleasant Street.
“When I am starting a new body of work,” as he did for the Rattle sculpture series, two of which are in Maine—one in Lewiston, the other, Portland—“I begin with doodles. I have hundreds of pages of doodles.” He holds up a wild page of them from this month alone.

“I believe in coming at ideas inadvertently, through the back door. This doodling isn’t high art, but I love this low way of thinking, scratching around, allowing things to pop up from my subconscious. That’s where my best ideas lie.”

Hewitt once told a friend he considered his work a bit silly. But it’s silly like a fox, part “idiot,” part “sophisticate.”

In December, Portland Rattle rose in the middle of Portland’s Arts District, at 511 Congress Street. The sculptures are a cluster of hollow aluminum abstract shapes, each seven to nine feet high, set atop 20-foot aluminum light poles. The shapes, “doodle-like” and painted in glorious color contrasted with black to “bring it all into balance,” are open to interpretation.

IT ALL BEGINS IN LEWISTON

Another sophisticate success came for Charlie in 2015 in a collaboration with director Gary Robinov, producing the moving
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there was always somebody to go see."

**THE MARSDEN HARTLEY SPARK**

This leads to talk of his next project, illustrating *Androscoggin*, a book of Marsden Hartley poems, in collaboration with David Wolfe. "This would never happen if Wolfe and I were in New York. He’d be somewhere in East Red Hook—we might get together a time or two, then it gets to be a hassle, so why not just use Kinko’s?"

We walk into Wolfe’s intriguing space and find the Hartley work that so excites them. *Androscoggin* was published in 1940, three years prior to Hartley’s death.

“I discovered this book by accident when I was 22,” says Hewitt. While visiting a friend on Cape Cod he spotted it on a shelf and said, “Hey, I grew up on that river!” Opening it, he discovered the book was by Marsden Hartley and was astonished to learn that this artist, whom he greatly admired, was born in Lewiston. “They never told us that when we were kids!”

He adds, “The book became something of a reference to me, like the river to Hartley, a reference to youth and the dark and oceans. It’s part of my Lewiston heritage.”

The three of us return to Charlie’s studio, as Wolfe also wants to see Hewitt’s drawings in progress for the project. Thumbing through a pad full of doodles dedicated to the book, Hewitt reads from the poem “Lewiston is a Pleasant Place.” He begins: “The harsh grinding of the mills rang in my ears for years…""

Just that “is enough for me to see smoke stacks and wheel things being churned out,” he says, “and then we come to the log drives and jams above the falls…setting into jack-straw patterns…”

“Aha! I’ve got this great image here. I like this one. Just piles of logs. A stack, a crazy stack of logs.”

**THE RIVER OF TIME**

Hewitt first arrived in New York in the mid-1960s, settling in Soho to work as an artist. He studied at the New York Studio School but thinks of his education and inspiration as being a lot like his mentor, Herman Melville. Hewitt owns more than 250 copies of *Moby-Dick* in many languages.

“When I read this book at 23, I thought it was written by an old man. Now that I’m an old man, I realize it was written by a boy. That’s a phenomenon I like to bridge back and forth. For Melville, the book came pouring out of his subconscious. Nobody taught this young man how to write; he learned how to live, and the writing came after. I appreciate that his education was in work, not in the university. Similarly, I’ve done a lot of living and am very secure in that, so my work is secure because of that struggle.”

Hewitt’s creations can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum, Brooklyn Museum, Fogg Art Museum, and in Maine at the Portland Museum of Art, Farnsworth Art Museum, and the museums at Bowdoin and Colby colleges.

Hewitt’s next *Rattle* is slated for Dallas. Beyond that, Charlie hopes for one in Eastport. “What fun to see the sun rising over it and the Canadians looking down, saying, “What the heck are they doing over there?”