

ENTERTAINMENT / LONG ISLAND / MUSEUMS

Southampton gallery puts LI painters' art on display

MM Fine Art celebrates the East End's artistic heritage with works by de Kooning, Chase, Gwathmey and more.



William Merritt Chase's "Pulling for Shore" is one of the works on display at MM Fine Art in Southampton. Photo Credit: MM Fine Art

By Deidre S. Greben

Special to Newsday

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"It's like sacred ground," says Peter Marcelle. Whether because of its scenic landscape, radiant light or relaxed pace, the East End of Long Island has an embarrassment of riches when it comes to its artistic heritage.

Mining that legacy, longtime area art dealer Marcelle and his colleague Catherine McCormick have inaugurated their Southampton gallery, MM Fine Art, with a survey of painters lured to the Peconic Bay region from the 1890s to the present. The show runs through June 10.

The diversity and breadth of works on view prompted the gallery to also host a conversation about eclecticism, moderated by artist and author Bruce Helander, at 2 p.m. June 9, to mark the show's final weekend. Its theme — whether such variety presents "a tyranny of choice or abundance of possibility" — is a familiar quandary for the dealers, who plan to make the survey of artists connected to the area an annual event.

"I wish we had more walls," Marcelle says. "History has been good to the ones who settled here." The exhibition fittingly features a pastoral landscape by Thomas Moran, whose paintings inspired the creation of the National Park Service and whose East Hampton studio was the first in the region. Around the same time, American Impressionist William Merritt Chase, who is also represented with a work, founded Shinnecock Hills Summer School of Art, the nation's first plein-air painting school, in nearby Southampton.

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Choice picks from the mid- to late 20th century are also demonstrative of the locale's broad aesthetic pedigree. Social realist Robert Gwathmey, who retired to Amagansett, for instance, is represented with "The Gathering," one of his more ambitious portrayals of the Southern rural African-American community, while figurative painter Fairfield Porter has landscapes on paper and an oil portrait of close friend and poet James Schuyler on view.

Living and working in proximity, artists readily influenced each other, as evident in the compositional cadence of Larry Rivers' "Portrait of Birdie," a nude depiction of his ex-mother-in-law (an occasional model) and Abstract Expressionist Grace Hartigan's "Study for Montauk Highway." The vigorous, gestural strokes of Willem de Kooning, who took a studio in Springs after a visit with Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner in the South Fork hamlet, are here executed in ocean blue and bright yellow on newspaper, which, notes Marcelle, the artist initially used to mop up excess oil paint and then

decided to experiment on.



"American Renaissance" is by Jon Mulhern, a Long Island transplant preoccupied with the natural movement of wind, land, water and paint. Photo Credit: MM Fine Art

Some of the show's more recent works include "Ovals (Cool)," mixed media on wood with gemstones by Sag Harbor resident John Torreano, who is also a discussion panelist, and bold floral still lifes superimposed over pond views by local artist Darius Yektai. "American Renaissance" by Jon Mulhern, a Long Island transplant preoccupied with the natural movement of wind, land, water and paint, was dropped off at the gallery still wet, McCormick

says.

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To be sure, the exhibition confirms the East End's enduring appeal and why it remains, as Helen Harrison, director of the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center has called it,

"the art world's most popular permanent address."

WHEN | WHERE Through June 10, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursday-Monday (panel discussion to benefit Fighting Chance free cancer counseling in Sag Harbor 2 p.m. June 9), MM Fine Art, 4 N. Main St., Southampton

INFO Free (\$25 suggested donation for panel discussion); 631-259-2274, mmfineart.com

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