

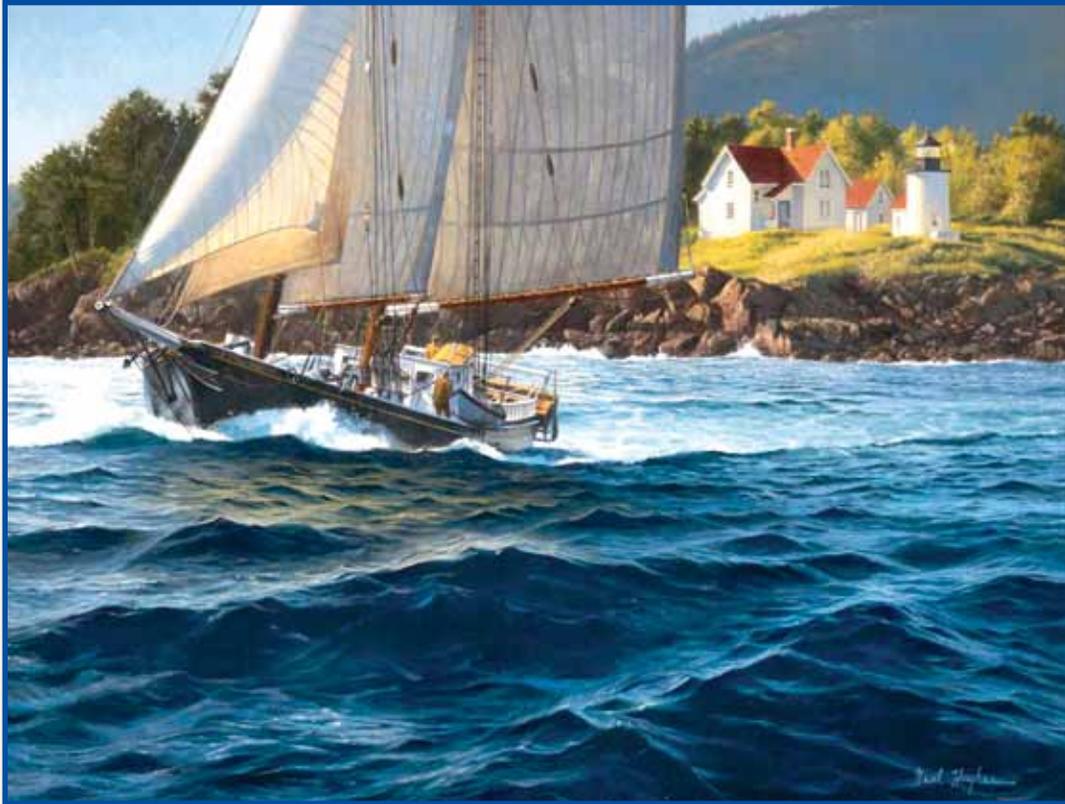


ASMA

NEWS AND JOURNAL

January 2009

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF AMERICAN MARINE ART AND THE FREE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS BETWEEN ARTISTS



"Stephen Taber" - Art by Neal Hughes, featured in Notes From Brush Hill - Page 10



THIS ISSUE OF THE
ASMA NEWS AND JOURNAL
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO

Nancy Stiles

1951 - 2008

NOTES FROM Brush Hill STUDIOS



by **Charles Raskob Robinson**
Brush Hill Studios, Washington, CT

This issue of our quarterly journal is dedicated to the memory of Nancy Stiles who for twenty years served the Society as Managing Director. Else-

where in this issue is a report on her beautiful memorial service in her home town, Ambler, PA. This was e-mailed to the Board and the Fellows at that time and subsequently I received the following e-mail from Fellow Don Demers. Since it speaks so well for all of us, I asked Don if I could quote it here. He said he would be honored.

"Nancy certainly was a friend to ASMA and to all of us personally. She always treated me wonderfully at every exchange, meeting or visit we ever had. It's interesting how a non-painting person like Nancy can influence a genre in art. Marine art wouldn't have the position it has in America today if it weren't for her consistent quiet efforts over those twenty years.

Thanks again. Don Demers"

Readers of this column know that it is designed to introduce members of the Society to each other, to discuss their professional and personal experiences as artists, to analyze their techniques and approaches to their art, etc. Since the Smithsonian Institution takes these articles and uses them as the basis to create Vertical Files for each of the artists interviewed (a total of well over sixty at this point) and makes the information available to the public and since the Library of Congress and now the Thomas J. Watson Library at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City collect the **ASMA News and Journal**, our potential audience has grown substantially. Our reach was extended even further when **Fine Art Connoisseur Magazine** decided to feature in their September/October issue the article I did in our July issue about Artist Member - now Fellow - Joseph McGurl. But however large our audience grows, hopefully these articles benefit readers and enhance their

appreciation of the rich heritage of marine art in the United States and how Society members have significantly and substantially contributed to it in recent generations.

In the last issue we met Charles Warren Mundy, an Artist Member who had the distinction of being the only one to have two paintings juried into the 14th National Exhibition (the 30th Anniversary Exhibition), and Pauline Davis Lorfano, a Regular Member whose talent the jury of Fellows recognized and selected her for the same Exhibition. This time we turn to Artist Member Neal Hughes and Artist Member Lisa Egeli.

CORNELIUS JOHN "NEAL" HUGHES, ARTIST MEMBER, MOORESTOWN, NJ

Website: www.nealhughes.com

Painting is more than a serious business for Neal Hughes. It is a way of life – a philosophy he lives by, a spirituality anchored deeply in faith.

It is driven by inspiration that is such an important and integral part of the process he prays for it. It is not a passive or happenstance event where inspiration descends upon him from time to time. Rather, Neal Hughes actively seeks inspiration and he does this in several ways. First, by always being ready to recognize and receive it should, in fact, it appear out of the blue. An example is the lighthouse in the fog that he saw while looking for other subject matter along the coast of Maine. He immediately recognized it for what it was and this resulted in the painting **Foggy Return**, the 18" x 24" oil that was juried into the Society's 30th Anniversary National Exhibition and appears on page 25 of that catalog.

As in the lighthouse instance, Hughes also goes out and actively looks for inspiration. And, should it not be found, he looks

for subject matter that could be used when inspiration does come. Thus, armed with a sketchpad and camera, he sets off for the windjammer races off the coast of Maine, for the beginning of the Newport to Bermuda races off Rhode Island or for other subjects and places from the New England coast to the Chesapeake Bay. Another important way he seeks inspiration is to visit paintings that move him. After identifying those works that do, he then asks himself what it is about the work that is inspirational. One might find it odd to analyze inspiration but what better way to understand it? He also does this with his own work when he feels it successfully inspires the viewer.

PHILOSOPHY

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork." Psalms 19: 1, the Bible

"My interest has always been in doing very 'traditional' art," Neal states, "and I believe we need to look to the past to learn and we need to build upon the past while at the same time produce work that is contemporary and innovative." Upon reflection, he continues, "I am a very spiritual person and I feel blessed to be an artist. I believe there is a relationship between nature and the Divine. Many of the Great Masters held the same and also looked for the Divine in nature and tried to understand this relationship. I believe this is why Michelangelo (1475 – 1564) was truly inspired. Even though many of the Great Masters focused on religious subjects and thus it might have been easier for them to be inspired – given an audience that already accepted the relationship between the Divine and the subject matter, I still believe even today one can find inspiration in secular subjects because they are part of nature and thereby part of the Divine. Many of the Great Masters sought to do God's will by doing their best work to declare the glory of God. I seek to do the same."

While Hughes appreciates the foundation of art the Old World offers and often turns to its Great Masters to get his bearings and inspiration, he is attracted to the rich heritage of his own New World and searches for its own Great Masters. Although he draws heavily from late 19th Century and 20th Century American artists, as we shall see, it is noteworthy how similar his philosophy is to that of the two men who were so important earlier in the 19th Century in determining the direction landscape and marine painting would take in America, namely, Thomas Cole (1801 – 1848) and Asher Brown Durand (1796 – 1886). Well after the founders of this approach to landscape painting had set its course, it



was named after the location where they painted, the Hudson River Valley in New York. And, interestingly, Cole and Durand set their course in a way strikingly similar to the one that Hughes, independently and perhaps unaware of these precedents, set for himself.

Cole established the philosophical parameters. To quote from Kevin Sharp in the



Breakwater

Introduction he wrote for the catalog, ***For Spacious Skies: Hudson River School Paintings from the Henry and Sharon Martin Collection***:

"From the moment Cole stepped out of the Catskills (in the Hudson Valley) with the revelation of his first scenic views, his collectors instantly wanted more of the same or at least the same fidelity attached to an equally attractive and interesting place. Robert Gilmor, an early supporter from Baltimore, was adamant that the scenery in Coles' paintings should be recognizably American: 'Truth in coloring as well as drawing the scenes of our own country is essential.'

Cole disagreed and was bold enough to say so: 'If the imagination is shackled, and nothing is described but that we see, seldom will anything truly great be produced either in Painting or Poetry.' His ambition was not

to be a mere 'leaf painter,' but to instill moral character and intellectual meaning into his representation of natural settings."¹

Neal Hughes agrees. He states, "I try to create work that is inspired and goes beyond the mere recording of scenes. The best paintings, in my opinion, 'awaken an emotion in the viewer' – to use a phrase from the Hudson River School/Tonalist, George Innes (1825 – 1894). I try to portray each subject in a way that gets the viewer emotionally involved and to see the subject in a new way."

As with Cole, Hughes' philosophy about art is right in synch with the other co-founder of the Hudson River School. Cole died unexpectedly at an early age so his friend and fellow painter, Asher Brown Durand, assumed the *de facto* leadership of the movement. Much like Hughes' attitude about the relationship between the Divine and nature, Kevin Sharp quotes letters Durand wrote to ***The Crayon***² in the mid-1850's in which he "insisted that working directly from life was essential to capturing 'the beauty and grandeur as well as the authenticity of America's unique wilderness.' Durand believed that recognizing 'the varying phases of cloud and sunshine, time and season' was key to finding Divine meaning of the landscape and the larger sense of purpose . . ."³

TECHNIQUE – OR THE "EVOLUTION OF VOICE"

"I know not what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me." Isaac Newton⁴

"Although my first love was always painting," Hughes recounts, "I majored in Illustration at the Philadelphia College of Art (now the University of Arts⁵) so that I would have a way to produce income. Although the College had a strong Illustration Department⁶ – fortunately for me since it provided a solid foundation for much of my future professional life, the painting Department had gotten away from the Academic Tradition with all of its basics and discipline. Often I would sit in class and ask myself, 'Why weren't they teaching me what I really wanted to learn?' I think about the kids in art schools today who want to do advanced work in the Academic Tradition and wonder if their experience in this regard is any better."

Neal, as we shall see, became a commercial artist/illustrator after college so when he wanted to learn more about painting he had to do it on his own. Principal among the ways he did this was to study the artists he admired, especially Americans of the last two centuries. "I would look at the different artists and ask myself what I like and what I don't like about each of their work. This is why it is important for me to see the original works – not reproductions. I remember, for example, visiting the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art and seeing a Sargent. I was amazed at the fluid brushstrokes, the colors (especially the greens in the flesh tones) and the absolute control that Sargent had in expressing the form. It was an experience only original work can give – something not possible with reproductions."

Among Neal's "heroes" are: "Winslow Homer (1836 – 1910) whose marine works have an overall simplicity of composition and an overall feel/mood and draftsmanship I admire; Thomas Cowperthwait Eakins (1844 – 1916) whose draftsmanship is superb and whose treatment of the atmosphere – as in his 1872 ***Pair-Oared Shell*** – gives you the feeling that it just can't be done better; Edward Hopper (1882 – 1967) whose use of dark-light in composition

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(Footnotes)

¹ Kevin Sharp: ***For Spacious Skies: Hudson River School Paintings from the Henry and Sharon Martin Collection***, with an Introduction by John Wilmerding, Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT, 2005, p. 17 (Quoted in part from a December 1826 letter from Gilmor to Cole.

Cole's brief life – he died at 47 of a virulent pneumonia – was extraordinary both in terms of happenstance and extraordinary travel. Born in England in 1801, Cole emigrated with his parents to Philadelphia where his father set up a dry goods business. They moved again to Steubenville, Ohio on the Ohio River where he established a wallpaper factory. Thomas worked there with his father but met an itinerant portrait painter, named Stein, who introduced him to painting and color theory. That began his career which continued in Philadelphia and then New York City where a merchant, George W. Bruen, admired his work and bought him a steamboat ticket to explore the Catskill Mountains up the Hudson River. The resulting paintings were exhibited back in New York in a frame shop on Broadway and caught the eye of one of the most influential men in the arts of that time, Col. John Trumbull, President of the American

Academy of Fine Arts. Thanks to Trumbull, Cole's name spread and by 1826 – the year after his first trip to the Catskills, he became a founder of the National Academy of Design. In 1829 he sailed for Europe where he lived and painted in England, France and Italy for three years before returning to New York, marrying and settling in Catskill. He continued to travel – returning to Europe in 1841 – 1842, the Adirondacks in 1846 and Niagara Falls in the year before his death in 1848.

² ***The Crayon*** was one of the first and, during its brief six-year existence from 1855 – 1861, the most important art publication in the United States. Its founder was none other than John Durand, son of Asher Brown Durand.

³ Sharp: *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴ Charles Van Doren: ***A History of Knowledge, Past and Present and Future***, Ballantine Books, New York, 1991, p. 209.

⁵ The University of the Arts in Philadelphia has grown out of mergers and recombinations of art organizations and institutions over the last 130 years. Well into the history of this institutional evolution, in 1964, one of these important organizations, the Philadelphia Museum College of Art, separated from another, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and

became the Philadelphia College of Art. In 1987 Pennsylvania authorities granted it university status and it took the name University of the Arts. It boasts of being the first university in the United States solely dedicated to educating creative individuals in the visual, performing and communication arts. Its 2,300 students and 500 faculty members are located on an urban campus in the city and found three colleges: College of Art and Design; College of Performing Arts; and College of Media and Communication.

⁶ "Some outstanding members of the Illustration Faculty," Neal cites with gratitude and appreciation, "included Ben Eisenstat who taught me basic illustration but whose many exhibitions in the Philadelphia area influenced my appreciation of fine art as well. Al Gold, a contemporary of Ben, was a character who loved drawing and helped me appreciate the discipline. Peter Schauman (a young fellow, not much older than I) was an illustrator who did phenomenal detailed work using many techniques. Phyllis Purvis-Smith was a painter who taught the importance of figure utilization – putting the figure into its environment."

Notes From Brush Hill - Continued from Page 11

goes back to awakening an emotion in the viewer; William Merritt Chase (1849-1916) whose beautiful work blended the old Traditionalists with the new Impressionists so successfully; Daniel Garber (1880-1958) whose subtle color sense I really appreci-



View of Monhegan Island

ate; and, John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) whose fluid brush strokes make painting look so easy.

But perhaps most admired by Neal are members of the Wyeth family. "N.C. (Newell Convers) Wyeth (1882 -1945), the great American illustrator, has a technique, style, and overall sense of design I have long admired. His son, Andy (Andrew Newell) Wyeth (b. 1917) is, for me the greatest living American artist and is a great draftsman." Neal is not alone in this belief for in 2007, when Andy Wyeth was 91, Congress on behalf of the people of the United States awarded him the highest honor conferred to an individual artist, the National Medal of Arts.

"Although I have found it helpful to study the work of other artists I admire, there can be no substitute for developing one's own 'voice' in how one expresses one's own art. To develop and evolve a rich and versatile 'voice' it is necessary to build one's vocabulary and this is done by experimenting repeatedly. The more the experiments, the greater the pool of experience – the greater the vocabulary – one has available to draw on. By its nature, experimenting involves making mistakes. One should not be afraid to make them but, to the contrary, should be willing to make errors for this is how one learns." Although this idea is not part of conventional wisdom, it has been around for a long time. Indeed, the English philosopher, author and catalyst of the Scientific Revolution, Sir Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626),

championed observation and experimentation, stating "Truth will sooner come out of error (mistakes) than from confusion." "I've tried anything and everything," Neal boasts, "and I am not afraid of trying yet other different approaches. If ever I find I am doing something over and over in the same fashion, I'll quit. For me an important part of the excitement of being an artist is experimenting with new and different techniques."

All of this is confirmed when one looks at the specifics of how he paints. He has no hard and fast rules. Given his preference, he would be outdoors painting directly from nature. But more often than not he finds himself in his studio since his major works often take a month or more to complete and there are disadvantages of outdoor painting such

as the weather, rapidly changing light, etc. He is flexible in how he composes his paintings – sometimes using thumbnail sketches or sometimes a series of sketches or detailed drawings done on toned or untoned canvas. Other times he composes the design on the canvas by simply using his brushes. In all aspects - composition, design, drawing, paint application, etc. - he is flexible and open to anything he thinks will work best.

But like Sir Francis Bacon and Sir Isaac Newton, Neal's wide-ranging experimentation – his "finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell" – has a focused purpose: to get closer to the truth. In this he shares Newton's humility in recognizing that the "great ocean of truth lays all undiscovered before (him)."

FAITH PAYS OFF

**"Bid, then, the tender light of faith to shine
By which alone the mortal heart is led
Unto the thinking of the thought
Divine."**

George Santayana (1863 – 1952)

The most recent chapter in the evolution of Neal's artistic career began when he took the plunge and became a full-time fine artist. This was not a cold turkey experience but the realization of a dream he faithfully held from the beginning of his commercial art career. Actually, he had painted professionally all through his career as an illustrator – principally as a portrait painter – and he had produced award-winning work well before he made his career change. He had, for example, won the Yachting Award in 2005 and the Award of Excellence in 2007 at the *International Maritime Art Exhibition*. In 2004 he had a one man show *Visions of Maine* at the Art of the Sea Gallery in South Thomaston, ME and in that year and in 2005 participated in the *Gathering of Marine Masters* at the same gallery. The same year he exhibited at the Penobscot Maritime Museum, ME and at the Save the Bay Foundation Exhibition at the Gallery on Merchants Square in Williamsburg, VA.

There are no artists in Neal's immediate family – although it is said that there was an ancestor three or four generations back in Ireland (from which both his parental lines came) who was a mural painter. Nor does one find any of his siblings in the arts – although talent abounds in the family. Neal's recently deceased father, Charles Hughes,



Pemaquid Harbor

and mother, Constance, led a most interesting life at the cutting edge of technology after WWII. He worked for Martin Marietta and was one of the "Three Wise Men" of its subsidiary and the aerospace leader of the time, RCA. Mathematically gifted, he was involved in both the Atlas Missile and Aegis Guided Missile Defense Systems and spent some years testing them in the Marshall Islands in the Pacific. His career success was matched by the size of his family: eleven children – six girls and five boys. Neal was the third, arriving on October 3, 1952 in

Moorestown, NJ. Interestingly, given Neal's eventual interest in the sea, his father always had a sailboat and was an active sailor in class regattas – especially the Thistle class one-design boat. Frequently enlisted as crew, Neal, like his brothers, sailed extensively on the East Coast.⁷

Neal's parents encouraged his interest in art from an early age when the talent first surfaced. "I can remember when I was a kid my father brought home a print of a boat and I was fascinated that you could do this with paints! I was in fourth grade when I had my first art lessons and, fortunately, had good art teachers in grade school and high school. I remember, in particular, a mechanical drawing class in high school and the world that opened for me."

Following graduation from Moorestown High School in 1972, Neal continued his interest in art – painting and taking lessons – but he was concerned about the economic viability of a career as an artist. So he worked in the construction trade, even forming his own company. But his life took off February 15, 1975 when he married Mary Elizabeth "Betsy" Looney, whom he knew in high school. With her support in the belief that he should work at what he loved, he entered the Philadelphia College of Art, majored in Illustration and graduated in 1981, soon after the arrival of the first of their four children (Cornelius John "Neal" Jr. in 1980; Kevin in 1982; Colleen in 1984; and Brigid in 1987).

Neal's career began as a commercial illustrator for RCA (where he met and worked with another ASMA Artist Member, Vince Piecyk⁸) and where he was able to employ his talents in portrait painting to celebrate RCA retirees, etc. After four or five years he began to freelance with the assistance of agents in Philadelphia and New York⁹. Over his career the list of his clients reads like a cross-section of corporate America¹⁰. "It was tough when the kids were young – juggling jobs and meeting deadlines. Later in order to keep ahead of the curve, I took a job as

a graphic designer with Metro Commercial Real Estate in Mount Laurel, NJ where I performed a whole variety of design functions – from corporate reports, brochures, direct mailing, in-house magazines, etc. During the seven years I was with them I began to develop my own market presence as a fine artist and this was sufficiently successful that I was able to set out on my own in 2006." Since then Neal has continued to maintain an active presence at Mystic exhibitions and other, mostly East Coast, galleries¹¹.

Now a full-time fine artist, Neal's faith in the belief he could achieve his life-long aspiration has been rewarded but he says, "It has been a struggle even with Betsy working in the medical profession. I just keep plugging away and continue to try to balance family with my professional life. Doing this and engaging in the creative work of an artist takes a lot of faith!" And, quoting from Santayana, "Thinking the thought Devine."

ELIZABETH LOIS "LISA" EGELI, ARTIST MEMBER, CHRUCHTON, MD.

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Three decades and a year ago, Charles Lundgren, the founder of the American Society of Marine Artists, sat in his basement studio in his pre-Revolutionary home in northwestern Connecticut with a dozen fellow artists gathered around a two-plank table for the first formal meeting of the Society. I can remember three things very clearly about that meeting: First, there was the setting – a windowless basement cell with Charlie's easel and drafting table in one corner, walls lined with research books and ship models and a Franklin stove in another corner gasping for what little oxygen



was left in air so thick with blue pipe, cigar and cigarette smoke you could hardly see from one end of the poorly lit room to the other. Second, there were the hours of talk – talk about the need for a marine artist society, talk about how it should be organized and talk about all of the wondrous things the new Society would accomplish. Mostly, it was about the latter and I was increasingly amazed at the scope of the ambition expressed. At the time, I was a banker by day and very conscious of the "bottom line" and by night, a fledging artist so I knew I was way out of my league in this company. Lest I be discovered and evicted, I had remained silent throughout the meeting but after four hours of talk that evidenced no "bottom line" reality, I finally spoke. "How do you gentlemen plan to pay for all of this?" I asked. The resulting silence was finally broken by Charlie Lundgren, who took the hallmark corn cob pipe from his mouth and said, "Gentlemen, we have found our Treasurer!" (It took me twenty years to shed that honor and I have been cautious about speaking in the Society ever since.)

But it was the third remembrance that has been most substantive over the following years as I watched the Society struggle to find its way and fulfill its goals. Again, it was Charlie. He reminded us at the end of the meeting – by way of bringing us all back to Earth and leaving us with a simple but basic mission statement for the Society, "Gentlemen, remember we are doing this for the kids." The "kids" he had in mind were the young professional artists who had chosen to pursue art and, within that world, marine subjects. At the time I was in my late thirties and did not think of myself as a "kid" but have come to realize that from Charlie's vantage point, anyone under forty was a "kid."

Two decades and a year ago "Lisa" – as Elizabeth Lois Egeli is known personally and professionally – graduated from art school and, as a "kid," set out to discover her new career in a practical but varied and

Continued on Page 14

(Footnotes)

⁷ Although Neal's sisters were not active Thistle crew members, they couldn't help but meet men who were and a couple of them met their husbands in this way. Popular in the United States, the Thistle is a high performance racer, also used for day sailing. Designed by Gordon K. "Sandy" Douglass (whose Scots heritage he celebrated with the name for the class), Thistles number over 4,000 since first introduced in 1945. Although built for a crew of three – especially in heavy weather, two can handle the main, jib and spinnaker in fair weather conditions. The seventeen-foot, centerboard boat is exciting to sail – fast in light breezes while planing in twenty five-knot winds.

⁸ See my "Notes from Brush Hill" in the October, 2006 issue of the ASMA News for a biographical article on Vince Piecyk.

⁹ Although his focus had changed to fine art, Neal is still represented by Frank and Jeff Lavaty & Associates of New York City.

¹⁰ An alphabetical list of some would include: American College of Physicians, Bantam Books, BBD&O Advertising,

Bell Atlantic (Verizon), Dell Books, The Franklin Mint, Henry Hold and Company, National Civil War Museum, NFL Films, Random House, Opera Company of Philadelphia, Penguin Books, Pennsylvania Department of Tourism, Philadelphia 76ers Basketball Team, Scholastic Publishing, Smith Kline Beecham, and TV Guide. He also did work for most of the major design firms and advertising agencies in the Philadelphia area and throughout the country.

¹¹ Chronologically these include:

2006 "Artists in Winter" at the Maritime Gallery at Mystic Seaport, Mystic, CT

2006 "Sea Fever - An Exhibition of Maritime Artwork," From the American Society of Marine Artists and the Cold Spring Harbor Whaling Museum, Hosted by the Art League of Long Island, Deer Park, NY, April 2 through May 14, 2006

2007 "Modern Marine Masters," Maritime Gallery at Mystic Seaport, Mystic, CT

2007 "Great Lakes Regional Maritime Exhibition" of the American Society of Marine Artists at the Krasl Art Center

in St. Joseph, MI.

2007 "Two Man Exhibition at the Art of the Sea Gallery," South Thomaston, ME

2007 "International Marine Art Exhibition," Maritime Gallery at Mystic Seaport, Mystic, CT

2007 "Small Works," at the Greenwich Workshop Gallery, Fairfield, CT

2008 "To the Beaches," at the Gallery on Chase Hill, Kennebunkport, ME

2008 "International Marine Art Exhibition," Maritime Gallery at Mystic Seaport, Mystic, CT

2008 – 2009 "Thirtieth Anniversary National Exhibition for the American Society of Marine Artists," exhibited at:

Chase Center on the Riverfront, Wilmington, DE
Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, St. Michaels, MD
Noyes Art Museum, Oceanville, NJ
Spartanburg Art Museum, Spartanburg, SC
New Bedford Art Museum, New Bedford, MA