

By Deborah Minsky

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The art of seafaring: A Provincetown gallery's 25th anniversary exhibition

The first show in the Berta Walker Gallery's 25th season, "Going Fishing: A Tribute to Our Industry," honors the symbiotic relationship of fishing and art that has shaped Provincetown since the turn of the 20th century. The show opens with a reception from 7 to 9 p.m. Friday, May 23.

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Owner Berta Walker and her gallery director, the artist Sky Power, "selected 100 paintings, drawings, watercolors, photographs and sculpture created within the past century that represent and celebrate fish, fishing and our fishing environment while paying homage to the generations of fishermen and artists who represent the backbone of Provincetown," Walker says.

The show also reflects the gallery's inaugural 1990 exhibition, "Gone Fishing," which benefitted Provincetown's Blessing of the Fleet celebrations that year. Twenty-five years later, proceeds from this show benefit the soon-to-be-installed fisherman's memorial sculpture by Romolo del Deo.

"I was brought up in Provincetown over 70 summers," Walker says, "and I was lucky to be invited on dozens of early morning commercial weir boat trips and even spent three days on the Michael Ann. The commercial fishing industry is in my blood. Not that I physically pulled in the nets, but I hung out on the boats throughout my teens and 20s. The excitement of celebrating the art and fishing industries also comes from my growing up with art and artists in Provincetown, starting with my parents, artist Ione Walker and art patron and entrepreneur Hudson Walker, and going back to my grandparents Harvey & Harriet Gaul who started coming to Provincetown in 1915 as writers and musicians."

Installing this show demanded two weeks of intensive effort. Walker confessed much of the process was exhausting. "At first I felt like I was swimming with the sharks and the barracudas," she says, "and then the gentler schools of fish came in."

Now that all but the finishing touches for the show are complete, Walker says, "I'm in love with this show and so will the public be."

Entering the gallery, visitors are greeted by Power's vibrant abstraction, "Feeding," the most recently created piece in the show, which shares a wall with Nancy Craig's "Saving Liberty," from Craig's tribute to 9/11 series. A dynamic bronze squid by Jack Kearney resides on the reception desk, balanced by an exquisite and rare sculpture, "Wrack Lines," by the late Martha Malicoat Dunigan.

Moving on, visitors find vintage paintings by Provincetown artists Ross Moffett, Karl Knaths, Vollian Burr Rann, Charles Heinz, Byron Browne, Abraham Walkowitz and Blanche Lazzell, juxtaposed with more recent works by Nancy Whorf, Herman Maril, George Yater, Paul Resika, Peter Watts, Varujan Boghosian, Elspeth Halvoren and Salvatore Del Deo. Yater's watercolor "Boats in Bay" shows off his sublime gift as a watercolorist. The view across Provincetown Harbor towards Long Point in this work, from back in the day when there still was a Coast Guard station on the point, in turn shows off the beauty of the old fishing weirs — a perfect emblem of the practical and the aesthetic combined into one functional image. This motif is reinterpreted in a totally different manner through the abstract string composition "The Weirs," by the late Sue Fuller.

A perusal of the show's contemporary pieces reveals that Walker possesses a finely calibrated eye for the unusual. Take as an example Boghosian's collage constructions. His incisive humor is never far from the surface of his images but neither is his sense of design, composition and color. And through her thought-provoking assemblages, Halvorsen demands that viewers stop, look and think carefully about a world-view that is at once gorgeous and somber, moody and penetrating.

To this fine collection of paintings and mixed media Walker adds an arresting cross-section of photographs by Harriet Heron, Dana McCannel, Blair Resika and relative newcomer Susumu Kishihara, whose mystifying, free-flowing water views make the literal seem abstract. His technical expertise with the complexities of art photography will stun viewers with the clear depth of his images.

Finally, Del Deo's emblematic oil "Homage to the Patricia Marie," at the center of the show and displayed in dramatic balance with Moffett's "The Cod Fisherman," underscores the ongoing collaboration of the Walker Gallery with the Provincetown Fishermen's Memorial Committee. A percentage of sales from the show are to be dedicated to help fund the memorial project in which a group of local fishermen and their families and friends have commissioned sculptor Romolo Del Deo to create a major public tribute and memorial to Provincetown fishermen, which will be installed at the foot of MacMillan Pier.

Walker reminds us that her gallery's motto has always been "Presenting the history of American art as seen through the eyes of Provincetown." Following this season opener, five new shows are to be presented through October for the 25th anniversary season. For details, go to www.bertawalkergallery.com.



PHOTO/ PHOTO COURTESY BERTA WALKER GALLERY

A Provincetown Harbor scene in gouache on paper by Abraham Walkowitz.

Just the facts

What: "Going Fishing: A Tribute to Our Industry" Where: Berta Walker Gallery, 208 Bradford St., Provincetown When: 7-9 p.m. Friday, May 23 (opening), through June 15

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