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PAAM shows retrospective of Paul Resika's career

We caught up with one of Cape Cod's most prized artists, Paul Resika.

During Paul Resika's distinguished and nearly seven-decade career in art, he has moved through a variety of styles and approaches. A retrospective of his work is the exhibition "Paul Resika: Paintings, 1947-2014" at Provincetown Art Association and Museum through Aug. 30.

During Paul Resika's distinguished and nearly seven-decade career in art, he has moved through a variety of styles and approaches. Yet when the interview begins, he is hesitant to discuss them. "You shouldn't talk about yourself. It's bad form," he says.

As a way of explaining, he quotes Simonides de Ceos, a Greek poet: "Painting is silent poetry, and poetry is painting that speaks." The quotation appears in the catalog for the exhibition "Paul Resika: Paintings, 1947-2014" at Provincetown Art Association and Museum, which runs through Aug. 30.

With some coaxing and friendly interchanges, though, we do end up talking about his art and art in general.

Born in 1928 in New York City, Resika began studying art as a child. He places great importance on his teacher Sol Wilson, and his studies in the mid- to late-1940s with Hans Hofmann in New York and Provincetown.

The exhibition at PAAM shows a range of work, beginning with the abstractions he was painting when he was still a teenager and studying with Hofmann. Resika had a one-person show in a New York gallery when he was 19.

However, change with Resika seems inevitable. "I began to change when I left Hofmann," he says. "I became dissatisfied with modern painting," despite its rise in importance in the 1950s when abstract expressionism grabbed hold of the American art scene.

When Resika went to Europe in 1950, he became enamored with traditional European painting. "Even impressionist painting was too modern for me," he notes. In Paris, he studied at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, and then moved to Italy. He spent two years in Venice. "I was educated in Venice. I went nuts over Venetian painting." After a year in Rome, Resika returned to America in 1953, and change again occurred. He began painting outdoors and saw the light. Abstract expressionism was in full swing and pop would soon take over, but Resika persisted in doing his own thing, mostly subtly shaded and fluid landscapes, which show the influence of 19th-century painters like Corot. In the 1970s, his colors brightened and in the 1980s, he began to simplify his forms, flattening the space and using ever bolder colors.

"I can't explain why I was paring them down and becoming more abstract," Resika says. Years later, he says, "I realized Hofmann was the teacher who taught me the most important things."

Resika's work is in collections of major museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C.

On the Cape, Resika and his wife, Blair, live in a century-old stucco home in Truro. The house with its red roof feels more like Tuscany or Provence until you take in the view of Pilgrim Lake, the cottages across the highway and the Provincetown Monument. This is where the couple has spent summers since the



PHOTO/ COURTESY OF PAUL RESIKA

Paul Resika's oil-on-canvas painting "Moon, Triangles" from the last decade is featuring in the Provincetown Art Association and Museum retrospective.

1980s when they're not in Manhattan. The Cape is where Resika is inspired to paint his familiar iconic images of the area: piers, boats, cottages and lighthouses, which float in a sea of sparkling color.

Donald Beal, co-curator of the exhibition, talks of Resika's "highly keyed colors." When he began to simplify his forms, Beal says, Resika achieved "animated, gyrating rhythms." With the flattening of the picture plane, Beal continues, the spaces interlock and fit "like a key in a lock." He thinks of Resika as "a guy taking a lot of risks. He does what he's compelled to do. He's not worried about what the rest of the world thinks." Beal adds: "He's never been afraid of doing what he's not expected to do."

Although recognized for the buoyancy of his palette, Resika also claims the importance of the basic shapes of his subjects, which he pares down to the simplest geometric forms – those neat little houses in profile and those swishes of color that define his boats and piers. His brushwork is animated and adventurous, gently picking up some of the gestures of the abstract expressionists. The forms are made up of a shorthand of strokes. If he eliminates the horizon, the objects glide in a sea of color, which catches fire and blazes across the painting. His paintings are just a suggestion of a scene, but it is enough to spark a memory, evoke a mood or illuminate a dream.

The PAAM exhibition takes visitors on a journey through the various changes in Resika's art over nearly seven decades. As Resika once told me: "Does it matter what you paint? ... You do what you can do to get you to work – to find the form. Is it a feeling for space? Or is it that you painted it as a child? It's what's out there, when you find the spot you can do something with."

In conjunction with the PAAM exhibit, the Berta Walker Gallery in Provincetown is showing "Trio of Friends: Varujan Boghosian, Paul Resika, Sidney Simon" from July 17 through Aug. 9.