



CAPE COD TIMES

Artist Del Deo honored with award, exhibit

By Debbie Forman / Contributing Writer

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A selection of Salvatore Del Deo's works will be exhibited starting Aug. 24 at the Cape Cod Museum of Art in Dennis, which will honor the artist Saturday at its annual gala.

Life is good for Salvatore Del Deo. At 89, he gardens, makes wine, and, of course, paints – almost always the land and seaside, the fishing community, his neighbors, all part of his beloved Provincetown.

Sitting in his studio in a wooded area not far from the center of town where he's lived for more than 60 years, we talk about not only his art of Provincetown, but of his earlier paintings of Italy and a 7-foot-by-12-foot allegorical triptych. They are all new to me and rarely shown, although I've met and written about him a number of times.

A selection of these works will be exhibited at the Cape Cod Museum of Art. **“Salvatore Del Deo: A Storied History”** will be on view at the museum Aug. 24 through Oct. 22, with a reception from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Aug. 31. The museum will also honor Del Deo for his devotion to art and the Cape with its 2017 Muse Artist Award, to be presented Saturday at the museum's annual gala and art auction.

Del Deo is a robust man with vigorous opinions, which he couches in sensitive considerations. His bright eyes sparkle out of a ruddy face fringed with a halo of snow-white hair and a neat white beard. His zest is captivating. He sparkles as he talks, not only about his paintings but the work of other artists who influenced him.

If you go

What: “Salvatore Del Deo: A Storied History”

Where: Cape Cod Museum of Art, 60 Hope Lane, Dennis

When: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and noon to 5 p.m. Sundays Aug. 24 through Oct. 22, with a free reception 5:30 to 7 p.m. Aug. 31

Museum admission: \$9; seniors, \$7; ages 13-18, \$5; students (age 19 or older), \$7; members and children 12 and under admitted free; reception is free

Information: ccmoa.org, 508-385-4477

“We just love and breathe (Ross) Moffett, (Karl) Knaths and (Edwin) Dickinson,” he says, crediting the artists who have had a long connection to the Provincetown art colony. And he mentions the representational artist Raphael Soyer, whom he greatly admired. “He had wonderful big ideas. He was so in love with life.”

The conversation reflects the artist’s generosity of spirit: It is not all about him.

Yet it is his paintings that I see all around, propped against the walls and stacked in racks. Nearby is one of his series of paintings of fishermen, “Homage to Patricia Marie.” (In 1976, the Patricia Marie, its captain and six crew were lost at sea and the town mourned.) Del Deo remembers and has a reverence for the fishing community. In his pictures of fishermen, you can see the struggle in their faces.

Del Deo knows about their hard life. “I fished for two winters,” he says.

These pictures have a sober aspect, showing the difficulty of the job, not unlike Moffett’s darker paintings of the subject. Yet Del Deo’s colors are bright, which give the works an uplifting quality at the same time they evoke the drama of that life.

His Italian paintings add another dimension to his work. “I was fascinated by the windows in Italy. They opened in all different ways,” he exclaims. These works approach abstraction with their strong geometric shapes.

“I was reinterpreting the culture of Italy in contemporary terms,” he adds, remembering the times he spent in Italy with his wife, Josephine (who died last year) in the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s. “They are impressions of Naples, Rome and Florence.” And also the island of Ischia.

But, he notes, even with his other work, “Every time, my concepts start with abstraction and a kernel of an idea. I’m stimulated by what I see. I take that sensation and bring it

into the studio.” Abstract concepts “come in with the shapes” and become a foundation for his representational works.

“I’m known as a colorist,” he says. But color is only one aspect of a painting. “Color enhances.” But “composition and an emotional sense” are vital.

Del Deo grew up in Providence, Rhode Island, and attended Rhode Island School of Design, Vesper George School of Art in Boston, and Art Students League in New York, where he studied with Dickinson.

He first came to Provincetown in 1946 to study with Henry Hensche. He saw “this wonderful spit of land” and he knew he was going to live there one day.

In 1953, Del Deo and his wife, Josephine, settled in Provincetown. And he’s been there ever since, operating restaurants, fishing, working as a carpenter, and all the time painting.

It is the paintings that have become his life, and most of them are of the town he loves. “In order to do a valid painting of a place you have to be there for a while. (The work) comes from staying in a place, living there, making a commitment.”

Del Deo expresses his devotion to Provincetown, where he has been a vital part of the art colony for most of his life, in his landscapes and views of the town. Some are quiet, even somber; others are light-filled; you can always see his love of the town in them. When his colors sparkle, you have a sense of the glories of this place.

Locally, Del Deo exhibits his work at the Berta Walker Gallery in Provincetown and Wellfleet. His paintings are in several public collections, including the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.; Harvard University in Cambridge; Provincetown Art Association and Museum; Williams College Museum of Art in Williamstown; and Cape Cod Museum of Art.

Del Deo is looking forward to his exhibit at the Dennis museum, but in addition to the paintings we’ve been looking at, he says, there is one more thing he wants me to see. We walk along the narrow, shell-lined walk from his studio to his wine cellar below his home. He wants to show me one of his other passions. He hands me a bottle of his wine with a label of one of his paintings, and it is those images that stay with me when I leave.