

## Emotional narratives unfold on a Del Deo canvas

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**By Douglas Karlson**

A visitor to “Salvatore Del Deo: A Storied History,” the current exhibit at the Cape Cod Museum of Art, can’t help but be drawn in to the emotional narrative expressed in the series of three paintings, “Homage to the Patricia Marie,” that memorializes the sinking, in 1976, of the scallop boat of that name off Eastham. Seven men were lost.

In the first of three paintings, a fisherman hunches over a newspaper, intensely reading the news as his companions - one a child, perhaps an orphan - listen. An image of the sinking vessel is depicted in the newspaper.

The faces subtly capture the reaction of the fishermen in a way that perhaps only a painting can: shock, sadness, loss, resignation.

One man in the painting has a vacant stare as he listens. He sharpens his knife, going on with the motions of his livelihood.

Despite the tragedy, the painting captures the inner strength of the fishermen and their families. It is a strong, moving work, representative of the style of the artist, whom CCMA Director Edith (Deede) Tonelli describes as an abstract realist who also follows the muralist tradition.

The show is in honor of Del Deo as this year’s recipient of the Muse Award. Every year, the museum honors one artist and one benefactor with Muse Awards. Roger Ludwig was tapped as well.

“Del Deo was one of the first artists along with Henry Holl to support the museum, so there were a lot of reasons to choose him,” said Tonelli.

Del Deo, the son of Italian immigrants, arrived in Provincetown in 1945 where he studied under Henry Hensche. He has been active in the local community ever since, painting and working as a restaurateur. His art has been shown throughout the

country, and is in collections at the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution, Harvard University, and the Provincetown Art Association and Museum. He is represented at Berta Walker Gallery in Provincetown.

For the show at CCMoA, Tonelli explained they wanted a diverse collection. “Not just portraits but landscapes, things people hadn’t seen.”

She worked with the artist to help curate the show, and spent hours in his studio looking at his art.

“We sort of pulled things out,” she recalled, describing the artists’ longtime Provincetown studio as a “rich, diverse place where you can look in every corner and find treasures.”

It was a friendly, family environment where the artist was very open to talking about art and life, she recalled. Tonelli noticed an Italian urn in the studio, and realized it was the subject of one the artist’s paintings. She included it in the show.

Tonelli said she was drawn to his storytelling, and his allegorical murals. “He creates a universe even in his smaller paintings,” she said. “I feel like his whole life is in these paintings.”

Some of the works in the exhibit are Provincetown landscapes. Tonelli said that although Del Deo is a plein air painter, he prefers to take his canvases back to the studio to finish them.

Other works are large murals composed of objects, people and animals, or still lifes.

“I enjoy the layers beyond the surface of a painting,” said Tonelli, and Del Deo’s compositions are certainly packed with meaningful subject matter, such as the still life “Homage to Romolo, My Father.” The painting, which uses bold colors and a strong composition, is a still life of objects in the studio. Tonelli described it as “a narrative of what it’s like to be an artist, the universe of his studio.”

Not everyone has the chance to visit the artist’s studio, but a visit to his exhibit at the Cape Cod Museum of Art is the next best thing.

If You Go

What: ‘Salvatore Del Deo: A Storied History’ Where: Cape Cod Museum of Art, 60 Hope Lane, Dennis When: Tuesday to Sunday through Oct. 22

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