

Going It Alone: The Artist's Studio/Gallery

Three artists—Robert Roark, Matthew Schulz and Anne Boucher—
have chosen to display their work in their own studio/gallery.

Robert Roark Studio/Gallery

766 Route 6A, Dennis

FOR ROBERT ROARK, “the whole idea of this new studio/gallery is simplicity, a paring down, a different lifestyle.” Roark, a native of Mississippi, is a tall, rangy man with a shock of grey hair and an easy, friendly manner. Previously, at the art gallery in Dennis that he used to run with his wife, photographer Anita Winstanley, they represented more than 35 artists. “It was a lot of work,” says Roark, “and I found I didn’t have enough time to paint. Now, people can come in here and see me at work. It engages the public and they really enjoy that.” He points out that people come into his studio/gallery and tell him they have been in other galleries where they were ignored or spoken to condescendingly when they asked a question. “It’s more personal in here, more friendly,” he says. “It gives people a chance to relax and learn something about the work. Sometimes visitors talk to me, sometimes they just sit and watch me work. And that makes me feel like I’m back in P’town doing portraits . . .”

Roark ended up in Provincetown by way of New York and a chance meeting with legendary art teacher Henry Hensche. Roark was studying at the Art Students League in New York in the 1960s with William Draper, a protegee of Hensche. One day Hensche came to the school and told Roark that he should come to Provincetown to study with him. “And so I did,” says Roark. That was 1965. His first summer, he worked on a fruit stand with Sam Barber, Steve Temple and Clay Buchanan. The next year, he started doing portraits at Malcolm Newman’s Starving Artist Studio, becoming friendly with Lois Griffel and Simie Maryles, who were also portrait artists at that time. “We were all at the Art Students League in New York together,” he recounts. “I also ran the Collector’s Item with Lois Griffel, a small shop in the back of Whaler’s Wharf. Provincetown shut down in the wintertime in those days, so I’d go back to New York in the fall where I had a studio.”

“Henry Hensche and I were friends all of his life,” says Roark. “I learned a lot from him but I never really embraced his ideas about color theory. He would tell us, in essence, these are the colors to use and this is how you paint. But I went my own way. It was a fun time up there. Everyone knew everybody else. I used to tease Henry and tell him my favorite color was black! Of course, he never let us use black in our palette.”

During Roark’s time in New York, he became a personal friend of Andy



Robert Roark, “Race Point Light,” oil on panel

Warhol. “He was a lot of fun, it was a party scene. He was having a good time, he knew what he was getting away with, while the critics were doing what they do best, criticizing. He and I agreed that art is anything you can get away with,” Roark says wryly, “And he wasn’t being cynical, it was a reality, he recognized the fact.”

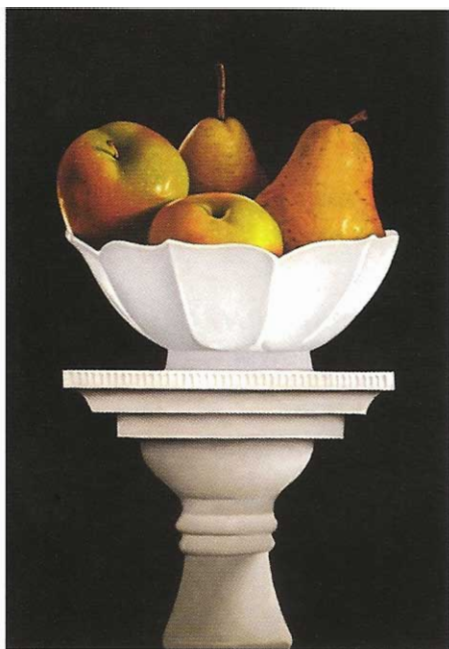
So what then makes good art? “Everyone is entitled to their own views,” he says, “but I believe it’s when someone responds to the work—it can be modern, abstract, classical, or whatever, it doesn’t matter—but the piece must ‘speak’ to the viewer, say something to them.”

Now that Roark has his own studio/gallery, he feels he has the opportunity to do whatever work he wants. “I have a lot of ideas for fantasy art and I now I’m going to have the time to pursue them. It’s fun!” But he is still inspired by the local landscape. “After 45 years, I still love to paint the Cape Cod landscape. I go out exploring and I still find places I didn’t know existed. It’s an explorer’s

paradise. I’ve never had any problems with access to a location. Many of my customers will invite me to their homes and I see vistas I could only see from



Robert Roark, “Silver Reflections,” oil on panel



Robert Roark, "Pears on a Pedestal," oil on panel

private property. And that combined with exploring gives me limitless opportunities! I like to start a painting on location and take some photos as well and then finish it in the studio. The way I work is very time-consuming so I can take my time in the studio and get the finish I want and not worry about the wind and flies and sand getting on the painting!" He paints outside in the early morning and later in the day when the colors are at their peak.

Content in his new space, he says with some amazement, "People come in with their kids and tell me I did their portrait when they were their kid's age!" He still paints portraits for commissions, and also teaches private classes in his studio and painting workshops at the Cape Cod Museum of Art in Dennis. He works with beginners as well as with advanced students. "My classes always sell out, I think it's because everyone has such a good time!" he says with a laugh. "I let the students do what they want to do and then I work with everyone individually—they aren't trying to please the teacher like they did in fifth grade."

Robert Roark's paintings have won numerous awards, including first prize at the National Arts Club and the Salamagundi Club. Among his many accomplishments, he has received a Ford Foundation Scholarship, juried shows at the Copley Society, had a retrospective exhibition of his work at the Cape Cod Museum of Art, and been accepted as a member of the International Guild of Realism. — GILLIAN DRAKE

The gallery/studio is open
Monday – Saturday:
11 am to 5 pm,
or by appointment.

www.masterfulart.com

RIGHT:
Robert Roark,
"Genesis," oil on panel

