

New York artist finds beauty in Whale Cove

By Francesca Crowther

Imagine driving down picturesque Digby Neck, past Sandy Cove and Little River. Turn right at Whale Cove and follow a descending dirt road to the bluffs of Whale Cove. A panoramic view presents itself: a jagged rocky coast outlines a vast expanse of blue sea, dotted by Cape Island boats and dinghies. Perched on the cliff, Stephen Kuzma paints the scene below.

Stephen Kuzma, a New York artist, spends his summers in Whale Cove, painting and "collecting images." He trained at the American Academy of Art in Chicago, the Art Students' League, N.Y.C. and the National Academy of Art, N.Y.C.

His "representational, figurative" paintings, as he describes them, have been exhibited in the Boston Museum, the Stamford Museum in Connecticut, the Berkeley Center at Yale University, The Artists' Choice in Soho, N.Y.C., various loft shows in N.Y.C. and the Market House Gallery in Annapolis Royal. He makes his living exclusively through the sale of his paintings, which he also sells privately from his home in Whale Cove. In Nova Scotia, he paints Whale Cove, the sea, the sky, the boats, the people, the weather. In N.Y.C., his paintings are "interior explorations."

Mr. Kuzma describes the importance of dividing his time between N.Y.C. and N.S. The contrast of living in each place is like light and dark he says, "one nourishes the other."

"My studio in Soho, N.Y.C. permits me to do my large serious work and the city is the marketplace of the world. However, coming to my home in Whale Cove

is necessary for restoring my visual senses and refreshes my repertoire of color, images and texture.

"In Nova Scotia, I also have the opportunity to be alone and experience living with myself. My work is autobiographical, dealing with my interaction and response to the world I'm part of. Here I reflect on life so that I may learn something new to put into my work."

Mr. Kuzma reflects on the community of Whale Cove which he depicts so well in his paintings. He recently spent 18 hours on a local fish dragger, giving him an opportunity to observe and sketch the fishermen as they worked.

"I saw them as heroes, watching the type of work these people do, the incredible energy, hard work, effort and hardship. I have a tremendous respect for this trade which is no less important than any other."

Mr. Kuzma executed a series of large paintings of this experience, "capturing the beauty of the movements," as he puts it. "In my admiration for these people, it made me see that human beings are the essence of my Whale Cove experience."

Whale Cove is an almost perfect setting for the artist, but certain drawbacks concern Mr. Kuzma. "I love my old house and its setting in mid-cove. It's no wonder that artists and tourists are drawn to Whale Cove. But there are two drawbacks. The road itself, which is like a washboard, was left out while just about every other road was being paved. My neighbors are the finest and they deserve better in Whale Cove.

"The other problem is the dump-

ing of garbage over the bank which also encourages others to dump. The natural beauty is marred and it's offensive from a sanitary and aesthetic point of view. You have to pretend it's not there when you paint or take pictures. The garbage is flammable and last year it caught fire, killing the nearby trees.

"One thing that strikes me about Whale Cove and Nova Scotia is the vastness of everything. I try to find my place in this vastness, feeling both connected and detached.

"When I feel the weather, I try to make the viewer of my paintings feel the same thing - putting them right into the painting. It's like the experience of looking through binoculars. I want the viewer to experience the picture, not just look at it." Mr. Kuzma first discovered this experience in Nova Scotia and applies it to his New York art.

Mr. Kuzma keeps an ongoing journal with sketches, illustrations, thoughts and notations. He calls this "gathering visual images."

"Something I see triggers off another feeling. I like to take familiar things, which are often taken for granted and try to make it significant." For example, when he paints a rock, he expresses what he has felt. "The picture stirs some basic feeling for the rock, something beyond instinct. I make the stone look threatening, as though a lot of pressure is coming from within."

"It occurs to me that I've been pulling and stretching reality to reach a truth indirectly. In some cases, this meant making an image of minute size and seeming unimportance, examining it and revealing its world, expanded on a scale for all to see."



STEVE KUZMA PAINTS - Steve Kuzma of New York City spends summer and fall in Whale Cove where he enjoys painting the scenes around him. Here, he is painting a picture of the cove with oil paints on the porch of his home. Photo: Francesca Crowther

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