

Artist shares 'visual poetry' at Madelyn Jordon gallery

By DANIELLE RIVERA

Abstract painter Eugene Healy celebrated his 71st birthday May 14. Looking back on his start, "My attrition rate is a lot smaller," he said. "I paint a larger number of better paintings."

Impressive, considering his notable career. A Brooklyn native, Healy studied painting at the New York Institute of Technology, graduating with his B.F.A. in 1972. For more than five decades, he has exhibited in galleries and art museums throughout the U.S. He's worked as a curator, beginning in the 1970s, director of the National Artists' Alliance and exhibition director at the Yale Center for British Art. He counts Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric, among his collectors.

Healy's newest solo exhibition at Madelyn Jordon Fine Art, "Steady As She Goes," will open with a reception May 17, 6 to 8 p.m. The gallery will feature 15 of Healy's recent works on panel, canvas and paper, all inspired by the New England seascapes that have been the artist's muse for decades.

Healy, who is based in Stonington, Connecticut, works in oil, watercolor, encaustic, oil crayon, lacquers and colored pencil — often infusing several mediums at once. Occasionally, he adds more unorthodox media, such as beach sand, fabrics and swatches from window screens. Minimalist and often linear, his paintings play heavily with texture and color, invoking ocean scenes with baby blues, creams and charcoals.

While abstract, Healy said his works draw from reality, moments he's spent standing along the shoreline in Nantucket and Sag Harbor.

He likened abstraction to music, an inex-

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"Hurricane Light" by Eugene Healy

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pliable, but completely visceral experience that conveys feeling. Think of a piano composition by Johann Sebastian Bach, he said. "It's hard to put it into words, so I put it into a painting... It's visual poetry."

Healy works in a small, well-lit studio, a short way from Stonington Point, where the main road opens up into "this fabulous vista," just where the Long Island Sound ends, the Montauk Lighthouse visible across the water. Drinking that scene in, "It's goose-bump time," Healy said. "It's like time stops."

Despite the leisurely pace of life in Stonington, Healy is rigorous about his work. He paints seven days a week, mostly laying his canvas flat on a table or on the floor and standing it erect to make highlights and revisions.

He's never had a taste for the business of art, he said, but knows it's part of the gig. "Art is 10 percent inspiration, 90 percent grunt," he said. "It's the way I make my living, but it's [also] my fun."

In that vein, Healy said he doesn't let anything kill his creative buzz. Whether he's in the mood or not, he's learned discipline is key. "Sometimes I'll be depressed or in a bad mood, and I say to myself, 'I don't want to do this,' and I go in and make the best painting I've ever made in my life,"

he said. "Then you leave your studio and you say, 'Man I can't believe I just did that. How did I do that?'"

Inspired by painters such as Matisse, Vermeer, Richard Diebenkorn and Hans Hoffman, Healy said he first picked up a stencil as a toddler. He credits his teachers at the New York Institute of Technology for pushing him to pursue his passion.

After a few years out of college selling real estate, a teacher told Healy he was wasting his life. "It shook me up," he said. "These people were tough with me, and very critical of what I did, but very encouraging... Those teachers changed my whole life."

Madelyn Jordon gallery is located at 37 Popham Road. "Steady As She Goes" will be on display through June 29.

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"Stonington" by Eugene Healy

