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Photo Captions:

Frederick Bosley, 1881-1942, *Elizabeth in Red, or The Red Kimono,* 1928. Oil on canvas; 38 x 46 in. Private Collection. (Photo, Jeremy Fogg)

Don Gorvett, *Life Boat, Merchant’s Row*, 2018. Reduction woodcut; 29 x 24 in. (Photo, courtesy of the artist)

# “Twilight of American Impressionism” & “Working Waterfronts” at Portsmouth Historical Society

Sublime Impressionist paintings and powerful expressionist woodcuts are featured in two exhibitions of very different styles of art, both produced by artists with roots in the area. On display at Portsmouth Historical Society’s galleries through September 12, "Twilight of American Impressionism" showcases two extraordinary New England painters who were masters of Impressionism during their lifetimes, but who are today largely forgotten: Alice Ruggles Sohier and Frederick A. Bosley. Concurrently in the upstairs gallery, the exhibition “Don Gorvett: Working Waterfronts" will present over sixty works by this famed contemporary Seacoast printmaker.

“Everybody loves Impressionist art, and those of us in the Portsmouth area are especially fond of Gorvett’s atmospheric woodcuts,” observed Historical Society director Brian LeMay. “These two exhibitions are significant for what they tell us about the changing history of art and the culture of the Seacoast area, but the real reason people will love these shows is that the art in them is just heartbreakingly beautiful and powerful, but in very different ways.”

Sohier and Bosley both worked in the style of Impressionism, popularized by French painters like Monet and Renoir in the last quarter of the 19th century. Bosley and Sohier, however, did not reach artistic maturity until the early 20th century, when representational art was falling out of favor, and abstract art was coming into vogue. Although the two artists were acknowledged as supremely talented painters during their lifetimes, neither became a major star, and their works have been rarely seen in public since they were first painted, remaining largely in the private collections of their families. Guest Curator William Brewster Jr., a descendant of both Sohier and Bosley, brings his unparalleled knowledge of the two artists to the project.

Later in the 20th century, artist Don Gorvett studied art at the same School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where Bosley and Sohier trained, and where Bosley himself became a teacher. This connection also ties the three artists to Edmund Tarbell and Gertrude Fiske, who were the subjects of two earlier exhibitions organized by the Historical Society. “These exhibitions form bookends for our shows on the Boston School,” remarked LeMay, “telling the story of how artistic styles germinate in particular times and places, gradually gain currency, and then retrospectively become part of a longer tradition in the history of art.”

Unlike his predecessors, Don Gorvett was attracted by the sights and sounds of the New England waterfronts, painting seascapes and boat portraits throughout his career. Although he too could capture a sense of the serene and picturesque, Gorvett often celebrated the mechanical and gritty, rather than fashionable drawing rooms and peaceful sunsets. Gorvett is today renowned for his distinctive work with the reduction woodcut technique, whereby the artist personally prints multiple, superimposed impressions from the same block, each of which is subtly different from preceding layers, produced as parts of the block are gradually cut away. The results are final works of remarkable complexity and beauty.

Both exhibitions are presented with the generous support of Martha Fuller Clark and Geoffrey E. Clark, Pauline C. Metcalf/The Felicia Fund, Inc., William & Arlene Brewster, Joseph MacDonald Family, New Hampshire State Council on the Arts, Anthony Moore Painting Conservation, Jameson & Priscilla French, Piscataqua Savings Bank, and Cambridge Trust. Full-color catalogues of the exhibitions, produced by Portsmouth Marine Society Press, are available on the Society’s website (www.PortsmouthHistory.org), and are for sale in the Discover Portsmouth Museum Shop.

“Twilight of American Impressionism” and “Don Gorvett: Working Waterfronts” are on view from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, every day from April 2 to September 12. The Society’s galleries are located adjacent to the Discover Portsmouth Welcome Center and Museum Shop at 10 Middle Street in downtown Portsmouth. Admission is $7.50 for adults, free for children under 18, seniors 70 and older, Society members, and active and retired military. Admission is free for everybody on the first Friday of every month. Social distancing is mandated, masks are required and available for free, along with abundant hand-sanitizer.

Walking tour tickets, Society memberships, and information on the latest events and virtual lectures are all available at: www.portsmouthhistory.org or by calling 603-436-8433.

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