

from PHYSICIAN to ARTIST

MIKE MAZER



MIKE MAZER'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH ART began when he was a small child during the Great Depression, but it wasn't until much later—50 years in fact—that the career physician finally gave in to his passion. Remarkably, without any formal art training, Mazer is now considered a top contemporary maritime watercolorist. He has had over 400 of his maritime works juried into national and international exhibitions and has received more than 90 awards. His work has been in solo exhibitions at the New Bedford Museum of Art and is on view during Cape

BY RORY T. MARCUS



*New Bedford Driggers, watercolor,
18" x 24"*



*Marion Inflatables,
watercolor, 18"x24"*

Cod Maritime Days at the Cape Cod Museum of Art through May 10. CCMA is exhibiting about 35 paintings—some early figurative studies, marine watercolors, and oil paintings.

"This is where I get my inspiration," says the artist, gazing out from his Mattapoisett home on Buzzards Bay. From his deck, he can watch boat races and people digging for clams. Aucoot Cove and Sippican Harbor are nearby. "I can always find a peaceful cove with a dinghy tied to a dock. Or for busy marine activity, it's a short ride to the New Bedford Harbor," says Mazer, who, with a full head of black, curly hair, looks at least a decade younger than his 72 years. "I'm intrigued by trawlers, scallopers, fishing fleets, and fishermen." The artist chooses to work in watercolor "for its immediacy, fluidity, free-flowing transparency, and spontaneity." The medium challenges him, he says, "to maintain some control, but allow it to do its own thing."



Weekend Clammers, watercolor, 22" x 30"

Mazer's life today is a far cry from when he was a young boy helping to deliver eggs from his family's farm in West Roxbury. He always carried a pad and pencil with him so that he could pass the time drawing, and friendly neighbors would buy him art supplies and feed him cookies and milk while he drew for them. But at home, his father, a business skills teacher with a practical eye on Mike's future, encouraged him to learn shorthand and typing. Instead, Mike made it his mission to follow in the footsteps of his uncle, who had served as a physician in World War II.

Even during the years his medical studies consumed him, Mazer never entirely abandoned his art. In class, he took notes, of course, but instead of doodling in the margins, he sketched. Later he visited museums and galleries and collected art that he loved. He scoured used-book stores for anything he could find on art history and artistic techniques.

During the Vietnam era Mazer served as a Navy physician, and then went on to enjoy a 36-year career at several greater-Boston hospitals, notably in the positions of Chief of Cardiology and Chief of Nephrology. On a whim in 1993, he took some art lessons from Roy Doyle, a Boston Copley Society artist with whom he shared an interest in hockey. Keeping long hours as a practicing physician, Mazer would come home late and go straight to his studio to paint. "It was psychologically relaxing to wind down after handling critically ill people all day," he says.

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When severe back injuries forced him to retire in 1998, Mazer was ready to go full-steam ahead with his art and challenged himself to improve every day. He would set goals to participate in juried art shows. "I wanted to see if my peers would accept my work," he says. "If they didn't, I saw that as a challenge to evolve to a higher level."

Just as he had applied himself to becoming a doctor, constantly reading up on the latest research, Mazer applied himself to becoming an artist. These days his bookshelves are filled with tomes on art.

Mazer has been in more than 300 shows in ten years. He credits his wife, Marilyn, for handling all the time-consuming business of being an artist: keeping up the Web site, creating the images of the paintings, packaging, and mailing. "She's also my muse," he says, appreciatively.

Many of Mazer's recent paintings are strong depictions of boats moored in still waters, from simple dinghys to complex fishing boats, all in a light-filled atmosphere. His boats are sturdy, hard-working, and have great dignity. But it's not the subject itself that Mazer wants to capture, but rather the emotional response it elicits.

"It's important to me to have a good design made up of different shapes that create interest," he explains. "I'm looking for the excitement I feel when the light strikes a subject, that area where I see the contrasts of light and dark. It's all about light."

Mazer chooses his colors boldly, not intending to reproduce the natu-



*At The Crossroads,
oil on canvas, 14" X 11"*

ral landscape in front of him, but to be led by his emotions that day. "I intuitively select colors not related to the scene," he says. "As long as the values are there, it will look good." Currently, Mazer is studying with John Stobart, a preeminent American marine artist who is encouraging his pupil to work in oils.

Asked about his future goals, Mazer says they are to "enjoy life, his family, and stay active painting," which, he adds, "anyone can do if they give it a try." 📍

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