



## Society of Marine Artists show reveals the irresistible, savage beauty of the sea

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By **Thomas B. Harrison, Press-Register**

We are drawn to the savage beauty of the sea, awed by its roiling intensity and entranced by its azure serenity. We glimpse the face of God in its fiery sunsets and hear tranquil music in waves breaking on shore. There is a soothing quality in the hissing foam that glides across the sand.

The sea is both giver of life and widow-maker. For the fisherman, it provides a livelihood; for the sportsman, a limitless paradise for sailing and recreation; for the artist, an unending and ever-changing world of color and image. By turns calm, angry and mysterious, the earth's oceans — and its lakes and rivers — offer endless possibilities for artists, musicians, poets and novel writers.

Thus, it is well nigh impossible to resist a room full of paintings, sculptures and other media that depict the drama and glory of marine life, from sandy shores and sea oats to red skies over blue water; from the triangular white sails of a regatta to the majestic masts of tall ships and whaling vessels. From sea birds to harbor lights and tranquil beaches, it's all there in the 15th annual American Society of Marine Artists National Exhibition, on view through April 4 in the second-floor gallery at the Mobile Museum of Art. The show is enormous with 125 artworks in a variety of media, mostly oils and watercolors, selected from work submitted by Society members. (See information box.)

The Society is the pre-eminent organization of artists who practice the time-honored tradition of maritime art. The organization's national exhibitions occur approximately every three years.



Chinese Boat, a watercolor by Robert Gantt Steele, one of 125 artworks on view in the 15th National Exhibition of the American Society of Marine Artists on view at the Mobile Museum of Art. (Courtesy of Mobile Museum of Art)

*MOBILE MUSEUM of ART*

**WHAT:** American Society of Marine Artists 15th National Exhibition

**WHEN:** through April 4

**WHERE:** Mobile Museum of Art, Langan Park, Mobile, Alabama

**NOTE:** 125 works of art, selected from work submitted by the Society's membership.

**ALSO:** "Facing South: Portraits of Southern Artists," photographs by Jerry Siegel

**NOTE:** Siegel traces regional Southern artistic talent back to its creators, whom he captures in portraits as emotionally affecting as they are visually striking. One hundred portraits have been assembled by the Jule Collins Smith Museum for this exhibition, which runs until April 1.

**HOURS:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday; 1-5 p.m. Sunday

**ADMISSION:** \$10 adults; \$6 students

**INFO:** 251-208-5200 or [www.mobilemuseumofart.com](http://www.mobilemuseumofart.com)

"The national exhibition of oils, watercolors, acrylics, bronzes and more showing the beauty of the marine world were juried from several hundred entries submitted by ASMA members," says ASMA president Russ Kramer in a news release.

"The vision, talent and skill on display are not to be missed by anyone with an interest in the sea and maritime art. These works are from artists in just about every state (plus a few other nations as well) and are brought together in one place for a short time only."

Works on display, from depictions of ships and seascapes to marine life and coastal scenes, “represent the very best new works juried from the more than 500 members of the Society,” he says, “demonstrating that the centuries-old art form of representational depictions inspired by the sea and seafaring is as vibrant as ever.”

“Vibrant” is a fitting way to describe the colors and the use of light in paintings such as Steve H.C. Henderson’s “Opalescent Sea,” which quite nearly allows the viewer to taste the salty spray as he listens to the rumble of waves. Robert T. Akers’ “Big Sur Rocks” shows the violence and relentless power of surf along the northern California coastline.

Equally dazzling is “Sunrise at Sea: Symphony in Four Movements” by Charles Raskob Robinson, a four-paneled oil on linen inspired by Dvorak’s “From the New World” symphony, which plays on a soundtrack as you study the artwork. The first movement (Adagio) suggests the power of the sea; the second (Largo), transcendental sublimity; the third (Molto Vivace), transformative awe; and the fourth (Allegro con Fuoco), prevailing majesty.

Donald Demers’ “Storm’s Wake” depicts an angry, swollen sea in the aftermath of a storm along the Northeastern coast. The whitecaps suggest an ocean baring its teeth. Sydney Zentall’s “Liquid Emotion” reveals the startling wildness of a coastal storm.

Calmer images are among the finest in this collection, such as Bill Farnsworth’s painting of a fisherman perched on a rock at Montauk Point; and Peter Taylor Quidley’s “Adrift,” the prosaic image of a pretty girl in a white dress, seated at the stern of a lapstrake wood skiff, playing the piccolo.



“In Cod We Trust, an acrylic and mixed-media work by Ed Parker, who humorously depicts the reverence New Englanders have for their generations-old legacy of cod fishing. (Courtesy of Mobile Museum of Art)

A more bucolic view of life on water is depicted in “Early Snow, Vinalhaven” by Jerry F. Smith,” a breathtaking view of November’s late afternoon sun over a harbor in Maine.

There is humor as well. Ed Parker pays tongue-in-cheek homage to New England’s proud (and sacred?) history of cod fishing. “In Cod We Trust” shows four unsmiling fishermen standing in a boat. They are holding a fish the size of a john-boat. Think “American Gothic” with a Yankee gestalt.

This show isn’t entirely made up of oils and watercolors, although it seems that way. The collection includes a couple of marvelous scrimshaw pieces: David W. Smith’s “Dory Mates,” which depicts Gloucester fishing schooners; Several bronze sculptures of fish, and one of a Hawaiian wave, offer a three-dimensional interpretation of marine life; and Jane Tukarski’s

"Tools of the Trade," a piece of woolly mammoth ivory, which shows the archetypal bearded man of the sea.



Steve H.C. Opalescent Sea." (Courtesy of Mobile Museum of Art)

If there is a common theme here, it is probably seagoing vessels: dinghies, skiffs, schooners, ocean liners, tankers, brigs and battleships abound. Joan Holt Cooper's "Blowing in the Wind" celebrates the "glory of the spinnaker" blown by stiff breezes; while Willard Bond's "Shallow Waters" expresses the peril of rolling swells in a regatta.

Some of the finest work in this ASMA exhibit depicts boats in dry dock, adrift on open water, in repose during high tide. The artists here reveal much about the cycles and rhythms of the sea and those who earn their living or seek comfort in the splendid isolation of life on the water.

*Among the noteworthy paintings are: Mary Louise O'Sullivan's "Rowboat at Villajoyosa," which lovingly captures the early morning light on a boat with peeling paint, reflected in the rippling water; Al Barnes' "Hole Inspector," which shows a small boat, loaded with conch shells (and a curious egret), seemingly suspended over the blue-green Caribbean waters; **Mike Mazer's "Tied Up," a study in tone, shape and color;** and Del-Bourree Bach's "Anchored In" features a trip of Rockport skiffs stranded at low tide, elegant in sunlight and shadow.*

Marine life is abundant in this exhibit, and one of the most satisfying examples is Paula Waterman's scratchboard piece titled "She," the portrait of an Ahinga diving bird spotted along the Florida Gulf Coast. The artist clearly spent a lot of time with the details of the piece, which underscores the fact that fine art cannot be rushed.

Neither should the visitor who visits this extraordinary exhibit. Take your time; enjoy the view.

Related topics: [15th annual American Society of Marine Artists National Exhibition, Mobile Museum of Art, oil on canvas, watercolor](#)

