



THE WAKE OF THE WHALE B3 A TRIBUTE TO THE EAGLES B3



The Sag Harbor Express
INSIDE & OUTSIDE

GHOSTS OF DYING CITIES B7 BREWERS' CRAFT B5



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2018



"Untitled Mailing (The Rolling Stones, 1971)" by Ray Johnson.

ART
DISCOVERING THREE VISIONS

The public gets to learn something new in Solomon, Johnson and Kriendler

BY MICHELLE TRAURING

At Guild Hall this fall, each gallery represents discovery. For Mike Solomon, it is looking at his father, and his work, through a new lens in "Syd Solomon: Concealed and Revealed." For curator Jess Frost, it was stumbling across an entire body of work in the Permanent Collection, which now lives as "Please Send To: Ray Johnson." And for artist Sara Mejia Kriendler, it was exploring her heritage in a country that was closed off to her for decades.

Starting Saturday, October 20, all three will open to the public simultaneously — an East Hampton haven of innovation, breakthroughs and meaning.

'Syd Solomon: Concealed and Revealed'

Nearly 80 years ago, abstract expressionism was having a moment in Manhattan. And Syd Solomon missed it. In 1940, the burgeoning artist enlisted in the Engineer Aviation Regiment, First Camouflage Battalion of the military, and was later moved to the Royal Engineer Camouflage Corps in London. There, he designed camouflage to be used against the Germans in World War II during the Battle of the Bulge, earning him five bronze stars among other commendations.

But what his son, Mike Solomon, never realized was that it was

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'There are things they cannot unsee.'

THOMAS SCHIAVONI JR.
ON SOLDIERS' EXPERIENCE IN WAR

Thomas Schiavoni as Henry Fleming in "The Red Badge of Courage."
mary godfrey photo

THEATER

LESSONS from WAR

Pierson's Thomas Schiavoni Jr. immerses himself in "Red Badge of Courage," and what it means to be a prisoner

BY FRANK S. COSTANZA

Thomas Schiavoni Jr. has taken an unusual approach in preparing for his first lead role in boots on the ground theater's upcoming production of *The Red Badge of Courage*.

Rather than read the realistic Civil War novel penned by Stephen Crane and first published in 1895, or watch the 1951 film adaptation directed by John Huston, the 14-year-old Pierson High School freshman spent roughly two hours visiting inmates at the Suffolk County Jail in Yaphank.

He said he recently sat down with roughly 30 inmates, all military veterans and most of whom had served in either Iraq or Afghanistan, to learn why they had trouble assimilating back to civilian life after completing their tours.

"My mom suggested it to me, and I thought it would be a good idea," said Thomas, referring to his mother, Southampton Town Justice Andrea Schiavoni, who also serves as the East End Veterans' Court Judge.

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Ben Fenske paints the scene the last night of Murf's Tavern.
courtesy the grenning gallery

ART

CONNECTING EN PLEIN AIR

Russian and American 'plain air' artists find their differences fade when they communicate in the same language of painting

BY MICHELLE TRAURING

To Ben Fenske, it all felt familiar. He was standing outside with an easel and his paints, surrounded by fellow painters with similar working methods and ideas. Except he wasn't in Sag Harbor, or Italy — the place he has studied art, on and off, for 15 years.

He was in Plyos, Russia — hometown of Isaac Ilyich Levitan, arguably the nation's most famous 19th-century landscape painter — on a sponsored cultural exchange program that aims to connect plein air painting traditions around the world by inviting artists from different countries.

And in 2013, for Fenske, it worked. "We all had a familiar painting language," he said. "It was really easy to make friends with all of them, because we were doing all the same thing and had

the same experiences. It was pretty easy, even though there was a language barrier and some cultural barriers — but not as many as I thought there would be."

Three years later, Fenske would return the favor and invited the Russian artists to the United States for two weeks of painting in Maine, followed by two weeks in Sag Harbor, Fenske's home away from home since 2006.

For most of them, it marked their first visit to the United States — and the first of many. "The Russian | American Painting Alliance" had officially been born, and the newest body of work to come from it will be on view starting Thursday, October 18, at the Grenning Gallery in Sag Harbor.

"There have now been four organized painting trips, two in America and two in Russia," Fenske said. "Paint-

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Alliance

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ing is often very solitary and these group trips have been a way to share ideas, learn and socialize with people who have so much in common.

In 2013, artist Viktor Butko was anxiously awaiting the arrival of the students from the Florence Academy of Art in Italy — where Sag Harbor gallery owner Laura Grenning is a trustee — along the riverbanks of the Volga River in the Ivanovo region, in a reclusive city that was a favorite summer painting location for Levitan.

When they arrived, Butko was shocked.

“It actually was all Italians. Most Italians was Americans,” he said, with a laugh, during a telephone interview from his home in Boston. “Only two was real Italians. That way I met Ben Fenske, Tim McGuire and Leo Mancini-Hresko. So we became friends, good friends.”

They would reunite in Sag Harbor in 2016, which Butko immediately recognized as a “very paintable” village, he said, and would spend his days either looking for views or painting them — from Long Wharf and Murf’s Tavern to the East Hampton Airport and Montauk Harbor.

The same was true of his most recent visit in September, he said, where he painted alongside his wife, Kelly Carmody, whom he met in Maine through the cultural exchange.

“I like the creative atmosphere and I’m glad to paint with my American friends and, a little bit, compete in a good way,” Butko said. “We’re learning from each other, of course. That’s the most important thing about plein air. That’s why they are so popular because people are learning from each other.”

Born in Moscow into a long line of painters, much of Butko’s childhood revolved around art studios, he said. His parents and grandfather shared a space, each with his or her easel, and he would watch them after school.

“Of course I go and observe and see from the ceiling point all the studio, like seeing from a plane,” he said. “It was a long corridor. I looked around, back and forth. But it bothered artists and they said, ‘Viktor, stop doing that.’”

Little did Butko know, they were artists that Minnesota native Fenske idolized ever since visiting The Museum of Russian Art in Minneapolis as a child.

“By chance, the group of Russian



Viktor Butko, above, paints on Long Wharf, while Kelly Carmody, below right, paints en plein air in front of the Sag Harbor Garden Center. Both are members of the Russian | American Painting Alliance, which will show at The Grenning Gallery in Sag Harbor. Below left, artists Viktor Butko, Ben Fenske and friend Anna Healy with gallery owner Laura Grenning (second from right) and Jay Hamel (right), owner of Murf’s Tavern on the tavern’s final night. *courtesy of the grenning gallery*

painters that I met in Plyos on the first trip in 2013 not only knew about the artists I had seen and admired at The Museum of Russian Art, but they were closely connected with them,” Fenske said. “Irina Rybakova grew up next to, and studied with, and posed for Sergei and Aleksei Tkatchev, my favorite Soviet painters. Viktor also grew up near them and his parents are both artists and his grandfather, Nicholai Chulavich, was a well-known painter.”

But that artistic era in Russia is over, Butko explained.

“It’s not so steady like at my parents’ time, because now, of course, government doesn’t provide artists, doesn’t support artists,” he said. “At that time, art was a part of propaganda, so lots of portraits should be painted, like general secretary of communist party, in each chairman’s room, everywhere. Now, it’s better to printing it. It’s cheaper and looks okay. And art-



ists now try to find something to do, and some commissions. You know, it’s not so steady. “Of course I will be homesick. We think we will be living back and forth,” he added. “We think maybe next summer we came to Russia again.”



“The Russian | American Painting Alliance” will open with a reception on Saturday, October 20, from 5:30 to 7 p.m. at Grenning Gallery, located at 17 Washington Street in Sag Harbor. The show will remain on view through November 18. For more information, call (631) 725-8469 or visit grenninggallery.com.

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