

*By Debbie Forman*

# *Drawn*



Pharr Schulenburg takes pleasure in shaping the curves in both her figure paintings and still lifes.

Photo by Matt Suess

**PHARR AND PAUL SCHULENBURG, WHO HAVE A BOND IN MARRIAGE AND IN ART, COLOR THEIR WORLD IN DIFFERENT SHADES AS THEY WORK TOGETHER IN THEIR BREWSTER HOME.**

# Together



Paul Schulenburg often focuses on the geometric structure that is the foundation for his paintings of fishermen.

Photo by Matt Sues

There's an oversized bathtub in Paul Schulenburg's studio, converted from a bedroom on the second floor of his Brewster home. Around the tiled edge of the tub, which is outside the adjacent bathroom, he's arranged his nudes, strong paintings of figures that distinctly capture a reflective mood. They are not seductive or erotic, but more about the shape and structure of the figure, as are his stalwart paintings of fishermen, which he often paints looking down on them to emphasize the geometry of a scene with the hard edges and angles of a pier or a boat and its rigging.

Down a short hallway, Paul's wife, Pharr, is also painting nudes. She has the smaller of the two studios, but she points to the snow-covered deck, which will be a real plus in spring.

Pharr's stroke is vigorous, demanding. Her figures are

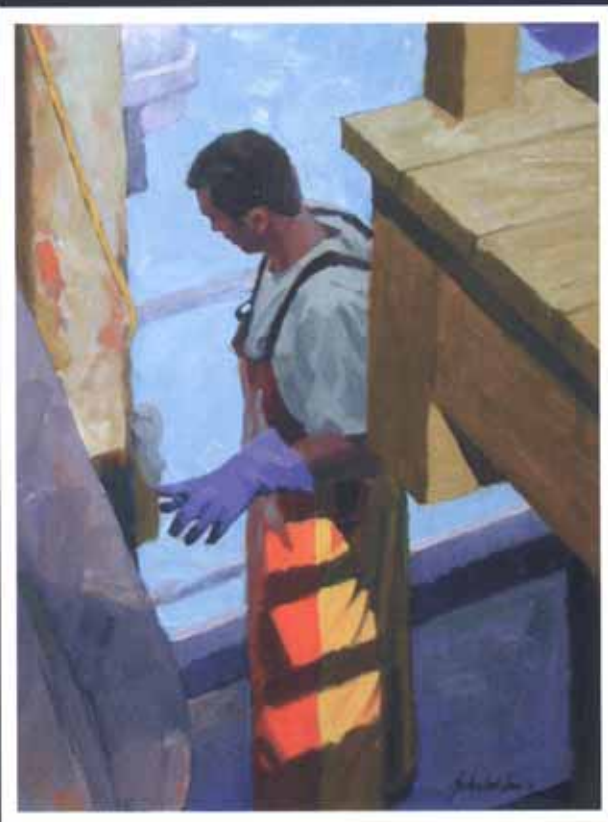
less about form and more about dramatic color – rich, juicy slabs of cadmium orange, lemon yellow, sap green, and, very important are alizarin crimson and ultramarine blue, which, she says, when mixed together make a luscious purple. "I like paint. I sure like paint, globs of paint," she says, her voice matching the excitement in her work. She often uses a palette knife "to put paint on or scrape it off."

Pharr's still lifes of peaches, pears and plums have the same boldness. She loves the curves of a pear, like a woman's figure, she says.

Paul's work is "more detail-oriented," he notes. It's more composed and quieter than Pharr's. That's odd in a way, Pharr says, because, outside of art, Paul is less orderly than she is and more outgoing. "He's much more social than I am. He's the social director. You are amaz-



A sense of loneliness pervades Paul's "First Coffee."



Paul flattens the spaces by using a view from above, as in "Work in Shadows."

ing," she says, smiling at him. "You keep in touch with core friends."

Being an artist can be lonely and, Paul says, "I don't like to be alone." Pharr doesn't seem to mind that as much. Born in suburban Chicago, she moved around a lot as a child. "I was very shy. It takes me a long time to make connections."

But she seems to be breaking out with her painting. "As a designer, I was neat and precise. Now, I'm messy - wilder," she says, looking mischievously at her free-wheeling splashes of color.

Pharr's figure paintings are emboldened by an audacious spontaneity. Faces are smeared; forms are thick flashes of paint. Paul's are subtle with a sensitive play of light, which acts as



"Crimson Plate" is a boldly painted still life by Pharr.

an abstract element within the realism. His figures are placed in an environment: on a pier or beach, on a bed or chair, against a window. Pharr's are set against bursts of color, which only hint at bedcovers or a doorway or a dash of light.

Although the Schulenburgs' approaches to art are different, when they sit down to talk about their work at the kitchen table in their cozy Brewster home, they seem very much in tune.

"Art is our life," Paul says. And, Pharr adds, there's a sensibility that they share. It makes communica-



"Resplendent" shows a softer side of her work.



"Provincetown Woman" is another of Paul's paintings on the fishing scene.

tion easy. They see the world in the same way. They can be driving along a city street in a not particularly pretty place and both simultaneously be fascinated with the way "an angle of sun hits a dumpy building," she says.

Their paintings aren't literal views, but an "interpretation" of reality, Paul says. He refers to his approach as "painterly realism." He mentions artists Edward Hopper, George Bellows, Robert Henri and Charles Sheeler as having an influence. Also Rockwell Kent, N. C. Wyeth, John Singer Sargent and Winslow Homer. And then Degas and Cezanne, Caravaggio and Vermeer.

From that list, you can tell Paul is centered on representing his version of the real world. "I really like to draw; I like to paint.

"I don't do installation art."

Paul spent summers on the Cape when he was a child, vacationing here from Schenectady, New York. But the Cape always felt like home to him. He was living in Brookline, a widower with a child, when he met Pharr. He introduced her to

the Cape and they lived here after they were married 12 years ago.

Paul was working as a commercial artist, doing illustrations for magazines, books and corporate publications. Pharr was a graphic designer. But they wanted to devote full-time to their fine art. In 1999, when Paul was 42 and his daughter was graduating from high school, he decided to make the break. He gave up his day job and set out to make a living in fine art. If he was ever going to do it, that was the time. He thinks of Hopper, Homer, Kent and Wyeth, also illustrators who made that transition.

Then two years later, when Pharr was 40, she took that giant step.

"It was scary," Paul says. Pharr nods and smiles. "It turned out to be a lot scarier than we thought." They sold a B&B they had in Orleans, made a nice profit and had a little nest egg. They decided to rent a house until they could buy one. But the real estate boom on the Cape and skyrocketing prices soon put them in a precarious situation.

Maine, they figured, would be less expensive. After all, it was Wyeth country and an artist's haven. For under \$200,000, they bought 10 acres with a house

Pharr captures the dramatic in "Warm Light."



# Drawn Together

and a barn in Tenants Harbor. They were close to the ocean and nearby was the ferry to Mohegan Island, a place that has attracted many artists.

It was very beautiful there, Pharr says, "a little step back in time." But they found Maine isolating, Paul says. "Our whole lives were tied up on the Cape. Our hearts were here." And so was his daughter, who had married and settled in Centerville.

So last Thanksgiving, after a year in Maine, they moved back and settled in Brewster. And, Paul says, "Our careers have taken off in the last year." They exhibit at the Addison Art Gallery in Orleans and are also at several off-Cape galleries.

"People really respond to Pharr's texture and color palette," says Domonic Boreffi, manager of the Addison gallery. Those who follow her work "are surprised and blown away by her new work," he says, because her colors are more vibrant. At the same time, he adds, "There's something very calming about her still lifes and nudes."

Paul, Boreffi says, is known for his paintings of fishermen; art buyers are fascinated by the "architectural" aspects of these figures. And, he adds, people are impressed by "his wide range of subjects (landscapes, nudes and those fishermen) and his use of light."

The Schulenburgs paint every day, down the hall from one another. Although they relish their distinct styles, they do admit to some influence each has on the other's work. And when they have something to say, they are respectful.

"You have to be careful," Pharr says. "We try to be gentle. It's important to wait to be asked. Sometimes I'm not ready for criticism. I may be loving what I'm doing and don't want to hear anything different."

Paul nods. "Artists can be very sensitive."

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"Neither of us has the personality to be brash," Pharr adds.

"We know how hard it is to make a painting," Pharr says. "We had to learn boundaries."

Although the two talk about their differences in art and life (he is tall and dark, she is medium height and blonde), it seems they share certain perspectives. Most of the figures they paint are solitary. A painting by Paul that hangs in their living room has a Hopperesque quality. A woman sits alone at a table in a restaurant in front of a glass window that looks out on a row of buildings. There's a sadness, a sense of isolation. It's Belfast, Maine, Paul says. "I was down and feeling lonely." It was only months before they moved to Maine. "We were considering changing our life drastically." And they weren't exactly happy about it.

Many of Paul's paintings are contemplative: his solitary fishermen, quiet nudes, serene landscapes. There's a suggestion of a story, like in the Maine painting. You wonder about the woman, what she's thinking, why she seems so alone. Although Pharr's work has a mood and drama, it doesn't have the narrative quality Paul's has; her work is more about color and shape.

So they paint their separate ways in their separate spaces. After spending the morning in their studios, their dog, Sienna, a Lab mix, nudges Pharr, indicating it's time to eat. "I'm the lunch lady," Pharr says.

Dinner is another story. "We both paint until seven and then we realize we haven't thought about dinner," Paul says.

"We both know neither one of us wants to make dinner," Pharr says.

So meals are quick: stir-fry, eggs, sandwiches, salads. Not many frozen dinners because they want to eat healthfully, Pharr says.

But Paul is clear. "Art is more important than food." ♦