

Images & Immortality

Paul Schulenburg
Captures the
Provincetown
Art Legacy



The artist at his easel

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF ADDISON ART GALLERY

For more than a century, Provincetown has been a colony for writers, artists, and actors. Once a quaint fishing village, it became an escape for people seeking sedate summer activities in the late 1800s. It quickly attracted well-known artists, who appreciated the beauty of the ocean and the dunes, as well as its remoteness. Many bought houses and decided to call Provincetown home. From that point on, the town's future as a tolerant haven for artists was assured.

BY ANDREW CUNNINGHAM

However, some of that is changing. As land and homes skyrocket in price and the town becomes a major tourist destination, the new generation of artists can no longer afford to live there.

"I'm afraid that might be coming to an end," says artist Paul Schulenburg, who lives in Eastham with his wife, Pharr, also an artist. "Provincetown used to be a cheap outpost for an artist to live in, but it's hard now when the least expensive thing you can buy is a condo the size of a motel room for \$400,000. It's hard to be an artist in a small condo," adds Schulenburg.

A few years ago Schulenburg got involved with a group of artists in Provincetown who had represented the famous art community in its heyday. Many were getting on in years and some had developed health problems. Others talked about moving away. One of the group, Paul Bowen, has since left. "Paul Bowen told me that if he stayed here, he'd never own a home," Schulenburg says, "so he moved to Vermont. A lot of the others have talked about pulling up stakes and moving away."

As a tribute to the artists and to the history of Provincetown, Schulenburg "thought it would be fun," he says, to paint the portraits of some of these distinguished artists. He was helped by a grant from Boston's Copley Society, the country's oldest nonprofit art organization, which gave him a one-month residency at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. Founded in 1968, the FAWC's mission is "to give young artists and writers the chance to live on their own and work . . . bringing new blood into the community and encouraging artists

to settle here," says the center's executive director, Hunter O'Hanian. Its founders include Robert Motherwell, Myron Stout, Jack Tworkov, Alan Dugan, and Stanley Kunitz.

Schulenburg, who has always been interested in art, went to Boston University and majored in Fine Art and Painting. "It's good training," he says, "but they didn't teach the practical side of how to market your work." As a freelance commercial illustrator for 20 years, Schulenburg did well. He won awards for his art, and his long list of impressive clients includes Digital Equipment Corporation, Fidelity Investments, IBM, *TIME*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Freelancing allowed him to work at home while raising his daughter—his first wife died of leukemia shortly after their daughter was born. When his daughter graduated from high school Schulenburg decided to apply his major and try to make a living from Fine Art. By this time he had remarried. Today he and Pharr share a large outbuilding on their property in Eastham as their studio.

Schulenburg's "fun" project became a huge undertaking. He limited it to the visual artists he knew, and even then he was only able to get some of them involved. "I wish there were more women, but some of the women I talked to I just couldn't get together with," says Schulenburg.

As it is, the artists he chose for the project are some of the finest in the area, including Bowen, Arthur Cohen, Michael Davis, Salvatore Del Deo, Robert Henry, Jack Kearney, Cynthia Packard, Romanos Rizk, and Selina Trief. He approached each artist and tried to explain the project. The artists were generous with their time. "I got to go to each person's stu-



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Portraits on View

The Addison Art Gallery displayed Schulenburg's project at the WOMR studio space in Provincetown in November 2005, and also at the Cape Cod Museum of Art in January and February of this year. Currently, the project is again on display at Addison Art Gallery, where a reception will be held for the artist and these works from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 6. 43 Route 28, Orleans, 508-255-6200; www.addisonart.com.

dio and visit with them for awhile and get to know them better. It was very meaningful for me," he says. "I'd listen to their stories and learn a little bit of the history of the town. One artist recalled that he bought his house for \$4,000. He could have had a house with water view, but that was \$7,000 and too expensive."

Schulenburg used pictures and memory from which to work. "I would take about 50 digital shots of each artist," he explains. "Then I would print some of the photos and ring my room with them. From that, I would paint the subject and hope that I captured their spirit the way I intended."

Most of the work for the project was done during his month's residency, after which he knew that he had to return to his "normal" life, and get back to his regular painting. This includes landscapes, seascapes, street scenes, cafe settings, and also portraits and scenes of dockworkers and fishermen—paintings that involve "the human element," according to Schulenburg.

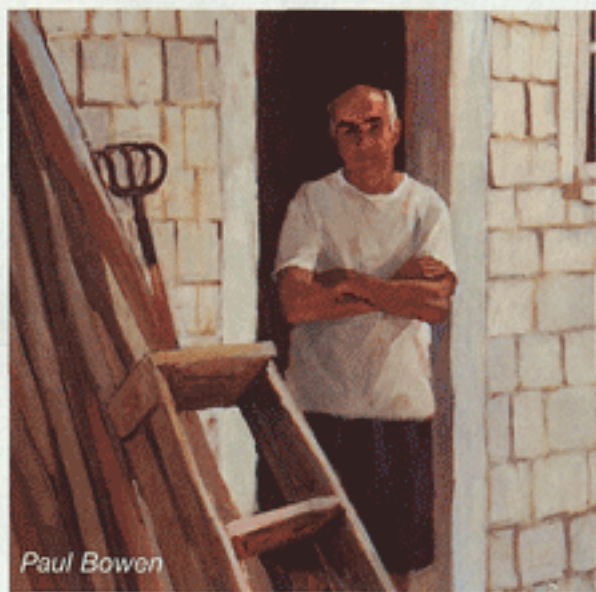
"When I got back to my oil painting, after my years in commercial art," explains Schulenburg, "it was the spring, and I was intrigued by the fishermen. I looked at the activity, the colors they were wearing, the light and the shadows on the pier, and the light on the water."

Schulenburg sees the history of Provincetown as important culturally. "A couple of years ago I was invited to an artists' club that was started sometime around 1916. They have a lot of portraits hanging there that tell the story of the early days of Provincetown," he says. He hopes that someday his paintings will reflect a part of the town's history.

The artists in town can sense the change that is taking place, observes Schulenburg. "The joke among artists is that people flock to this area for its quaintness. Then they tear down the cottages, build a million-dollar home, and buy a painting of a quaint cottage to hang in their home," he says with a smile. Yet Schulenburg also realizes that this influx of discretionary income means people can buy original art and, hence, support the artists.

Schulenburg sees his project as ongoing. He'd like to capture more artists on canvas. "Hopefully, these paintings will be around a hundred years from now," he says. "It would be great to see a painting by a particular artist and then see a painting of the artist next to it." ■

Andrew Cunningham is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to Cape Cod Life Publications who lives in Falmouth.



Paul Bowen

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