

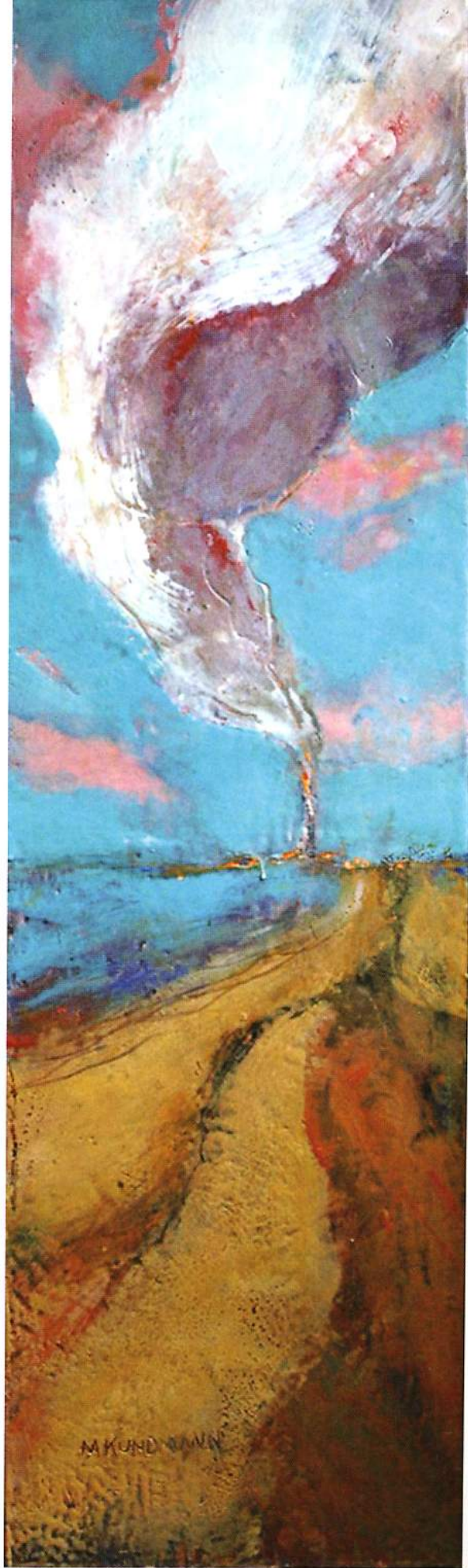
Out of this world

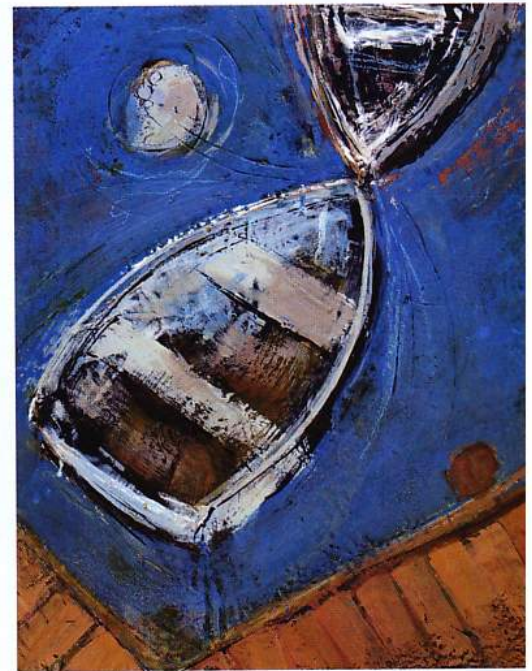
Truro artist aspires to transcend the real with his own sense of place

By Debbie Forman

Although Marc Kundmann's paintings capture an essence of Cape Cod – boats at a dock, a pier at sunset, a figure on the beach or a cluster of houses on a Provincetown street – he says his works are more about his own particular world, a world exclusive to the space of his composition.

"I'm responding more to shape and structure than I am necessarily to the content. In that way, my paintings are sort of abstract to me, because I'm not trying to make a boat exactly like a boat. ... I'm never trying to make something that's a real place," Kundmann says during a conversation at the Addison Art Gallery in Orleans, where he exhibits his work. "A painting only needs to make sense within the constraints of its own framework." It's





“The Exact Point of Connection”

The bows of two dinghies seem to touch gently in this painting, an encaustic, oil stick, charcoal and shellac on birch panel.

about finding the relationships between the shapes in the composition.

And, of course, there is his dramatic color, which, he says, has “the biggest emotional impact” for him as he works in the encaustic medium with melted beeswax and layers upon layers of pigment. His brilliant blues – shades of teal and cerulean – fiery orange, vibrant red and lustrous green immediately attract viewers. Then the multiple layers that allow the various colors to bleed through come into focus. The rugged textures he achieves with the encaustic medium are full of sheen, and when he carves into them with a palette knife, he adds a sculptural element.

A native of Chicago, Kundmann worked as a graphic designer for many years in Minneapolis before he took up painting a little more than 10 years ago, about a year after

“Facing Forward”

In this encaustic, oil stick, charcoal and shellac on maple, Kundmann uses two panels to depict both the image and atmosphere.



“View from an East End Garden”

In this painting, Kundmann employs bright color and varied textures to communicate the pleasing view of the town as seen from an enclosed garden.

he moved to Truro. “I was doing all this creative work for over 15 years for other people. I really wanted to do something for myself.”

Painting has real permanence compared to the ephemeral graphic design work done on a computer with “those little pixels,” he says. “The websites that I would design would be here today, and a year later they would be all redesigned.”

Unlike so many artists who fall in love with the Cape at first sight, Kundmann

found Truro “scrubby” when he first came here in the early ’90s. But the second time around – in July 1997 – “the beauty of the place started resonating with me,” he says.

Kundmann is intrigued by Provincetown because of its remoteness. It’s a place of escape, “where people go for refuge,” he says with a wistful tone in his voice. “It’s not just a perfect fantasy land. Even though people think of it that way, it’s really not. The sea is harsh. It’s a pretty harsh place to live, partic-

ularly in the winter.” But he adds: “I love that whole mix of this place that is both incredibly free and a place of sanctuary for people. I also love that it’s a place of challenge.”

“Happily Towards Twilight”

Imagining these two dinghies as lovers looking at a sunset, Kundmann lends a romantic element to the scene.





"Inward Journey" Kundmann's connection to water is often revealed in his work, as in this encaustic, charcoal, oil pastel and shellac on birch, in which the small boats seem to be guarding the solitude of the larger one.

And for an artist, there are many opportunities to learn from the painters and schools there. Working at Provincetown's Fine Arts Work Center, where he does graphic design, Kundmann has plenty of chances to connect with artists.

Although Kundmann's encaustics are representational, he says he doesn't have a preconceived idea when he begins. He starts drawing on birch panels with charcoal, "waiting for a composition to emerge."

The water around the Cape is often found in his work because, he says, he has

a deep connection to it. He thinks of it as a "cradling" element. "Water has always been an escape for me. I'm a swimmer. ... The water is a place of comfort for me." In his paintings, the sea could be "cradling" his boats or just a line between two houses.

Kundmann likes to assign anthropomorphic feelings to his boats and houses. His boat paintings are about "actual connections." A painting of boats all in a row, touching each other, he sees "as almost playful. I see them almost like children. ... They're waiting for people to come take

them out to the big boats, almost like the kids waiting at the bus stop. They seem to be more about family to me ... about connection to people."

You can see something of that personal relationship in "Exact Point of Connection," in which two dinghies touching point to point look like they're kissing. In "Waiting On Placid Waters," three boats, all pointing to one another, appear to be having a conversation.

Kundmann surveys his paintings on the wall in the gallery and singles out "Happily

Towards Twilight,” of two boats side by side looking out at a pier, the water and a fiery sunset. He sees those dinghies as a couple who has “been together for a while and they’re sort of hanging out at the beach.”

“Inward Journey,” of one dinghy circled by a half dozen others, all in a sea of creamy green, is about “looking inward. To me it’s really about one boat and this idea of focusing inward,” says Kundmann.

His house and figure paintings are “a little

ers have varying impressions of his work.

When he depicts a cluster of houses on a Provincetown street, he sees them as “shutting out the rest of the world.” But others may “see the togetherness of (the scene) and have a feeling of intimacy.” Some viewers may approach one of his house paintings and feel that “this is a place where I want to be alone and embrace being alone and they resonate with it that way.”

The connections Kundmann finds in

dry powdered pigments—into the melted wax, which is then brushed onto the panel. He may also draw on top of the wax with oil sticks or oil pastels. Using a blowtorch or hot-air gun, the oil sticks melt into the surface. He sometimes paints shellac on top, and by melting it or setting it on fire, small hills and valleys are formed. Kundmann likes cutting into the surface with a palette knife, which adds another dimension to his work. The finished piece, with the layers of wax-filled color, has



“Red House on the Water” Some of the artist’s paintings vividly capture the essence of Outer Cape harbors.

about trying to understand,” he hesitates a moment, “or just about exploring how things can be close and yet separate.”

“I think a lot of my paintings are about the desire for togetherness and closeness,” he continues. “It has something to do with the inhibitions ... trying to get to know people.” He pauses, thinks a moment and then, “And again this is just my pop psychology about what they’re about. I just paint what I feel. Mostly I just want to make beautiful things, beautiful surfaces. I do love it if they have a complexity, an emotion.” And he hopes view-

his work can also be seen in the forms, particularly the triangular shapes of the dinghies and the same one in the roofs of his houses. He finds this repetition of shapes contributes to the balance and dynamics of the composition.

Although his charcoal lines on a birch panel are the initial layer in the process, they often bleed through the wax to the surface. So their presence under the many layers is strong. After he sketches his image, he applies a clear encaustic medium, and then he begins mixing color—oil paint, bits of oil sticks or

Although Kundmann’s encaustics are representational, he says he doesn’t have a preconceived idea when he begins.

a rich luster. His bold colors are evocative, and the surface erupts in robust textures. You want to reach out and touch his paintings, and he doesn’t mind if you do.

In just about all of Kundmann’s work, you will probably notice, beyond the sea or through a cluster of houses, is a faint vertical object. It’s either one of two landmarks on the Cape — Provincetown’s Pilgrim Monument or a lighthouse. Although these structures are tiny, almost lost in the dramatic colors and vibrant shapes, almost an afterthought, Kundmann says, they “seem monumental to me.”

Monumental it may be because these towers are a connection to Provincetown, which has been an inspiration for Marc Kundmann to paint since he came here.

Considering this place he has grown to love, he muses: “Something I find fascinating about Provincetown is that it is this place where people go to feel connected to people, but also at the same time they go there to escape and be by themselves. And so there’s this full spectrum of emotion and experience.”

And that certainly is what propels this artist in his work. ♦