

William Welch's impressionism returns downtown

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Walking through artist William Welch's quaint gallery on Easy Street is akin to taking a tour of the most beautiful parts of Nantucket. His paintings lead visitors through the quiet streets of town and Sconset, and embrace the natural light and atmosphere for which the island is famous.

"I specialize in the romantic Nantucket, but it's more than just souvenir painting," Welch said. "It's just the way I see it, and the vision of a pristine, beautiful, quiet space that steps back in time a little bit."

Island Arts Scene

Welch, who had a gallery in Sconset for several years, is returning to his downtown roots after a nearly 10-year absence. His newly-opened Easy Street gallery is, ironically, located just down the street from the former Lobster Pot Gallery. That building, in which he spent 18 years, has since been knocked down. It was the end of an era, he said.

He first set foot on the island in the 1960s when he was still in art school, and worked in restaurants to make



Photo by Nicole Hamishfeger

William Welch in the doorway of his Easy Street gallery. After several years in Sconset, Welch has returned downtown.

money for his education. He started coming back on painting vacations, and in 1982, moved here.

"I've spent some time year-round here after 34 years of almost being here, but I go to Florida in the winter, and I have a studio in France and I go there in the spring and the fall," Welch said.

"Recently, I had a one-man show in a gallery there, in Monet's home town."

The impressionist style is what Welch has always loved.

"I follow the path of the impressionists. I've studied them, I've studied the palette, worked in almost the same colors. I teach (classes at the Artists Association of Nantucket) with the same pastel colors that Monet used," he said.

Welch received his art education at Ohio University and continued his studies at the Philadelphia College of Art and in Europe. A native of Cleveland, Ohio, he received further instruction from well-known East Coast watercolorists and oil painters, including Christopher Shenk and Joseph McGurl. And, oddly enough, Nantucket sculptor David Hostetler, who has a gallery just around the corner on Centre Street, was Welch's sculpture professor in college.

Despite living in other places, Welch said that Nantucket is where he intends to stay. He finds himself returning to Sconset and to the historic downtown



Photo by Nicole Harnishfeger

Several of William Welch's impressionist paintings in his Easy Street gallery.

streets, painting en plein air with the former whaling houses, gardens and arbors scattered about.

He reminisced recently about coming off the boat and running to see the late artist Roy Bailey's latest work, or that of Andrew Shunney, who died in 1978. A past president and board member of the Artists Association of Nantucket, Welch also used to be on the Nantucket Arts Council board and was

on the steering committee at the former Nantucket AIDS Network, now access nantucket.

"Artists should really give back what they can in their talent and time," Welch said. "We might not have much treasure, but we can give back some of our work to help other people raise some treasure."

Welch is entranced by the island's physical beauty, the way the light and

color play off the shingled buildings and the gardens that their owners meticulously maintain.

"Everything is a treasure here. It's almost too pretty," he said.

With such a history in the art world on Nantucket, Welch has seen some changes over the years, specifically the shift from in-gallery buying to online.

"I sold my first painting on the Internet about six years ago and it freaked me out," he said. "It freaked me out because I thought it was so impersonal. I'm selling more on the Internet, and I think most artists are selling a good deal more on the Internet and they're networking and we're keeping better tabs with our clients."

Welch has shown in galleries with other artists in the past, including the Brigham Galleries with Sara Boyce and at the Sailor's Valentine Gallery with Lynn Walsh, but said he has always preferred the solo setting.

"It seems like the best thing and the only thing that really works for me is I want to be with the public," he said. "I like painting in the street and giving my work to galleries, but I prefer meeting with the public and having my own space. I can paint outside, I can paint inside."

The William Welch Gallery is located at 5 Easy St. For more information, visit www.williamwelchgallery.com