

# Artists of Newport

*William Vareika Fine Arts celebrates 25 years in Newport with a summer anniversary exhibition*

**July 13-September 30**

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*by Julie Carlson Wildfeuer*

Important American artists who were attracted to the area around Newport, Rhode Island, in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are highlighted in this comprehensive

exhibition on view from July 13 to September 30, at William Vareika Fine Arts. Approximately 75 paintings, watercolors, drawings, prints and sculpture will be shown and the listing of artists is a “Who’s Who” of American history. Two artists inextricably linked to the region, John La Farge and William Trost Richards, are well-represented along with such seminal painters as Martin Johnson Heade, John Henry Twachtman, John Frederick Kensett, William Guy Wall, and colonial portraitist Joseph Blackburn, among others.

Over three centuries, Newport

developed as an artist’s destination for several reasons. Art dealer William Vareika explains that the beauty of the bay’s rocky and sandy beaches, bluffs, cliffs, salt marshes, and islands, and the quality of the natural light, is a large draw. In addition, beginning with the Triangle Trade of the colonial commercial shipping period, continuing through the 19<sup>th</sup> century as Newport became a popular “watering hole” of the wealthy class, and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century as she earned the title “Queen of Resorts,” the region attracted a patron class eager to acquire painted likenesses of their



John Frederick Kensett (1816-1872), *Spouting Rock, Newport, Rhode Island*, ca. 1865. Oil on canvas, 14 x 24 in.



William Trost Richards (1833–1905), *A Rhode Island Farmhouse*, 1882. Watercolor on paper, 9¼ x 14½ in., signed and dated lower left.



William Guy Wall (1792–1864), *A View of Fort Dumpling at the Newport Entrance to Narragansett Bay*, Oil on canvas, 30 x 46 in.



Martin Johnson Heade (1819-1904), *Coast of Newport*, 1874. Oil on canvas, 51 x 72 in., signed and dated lower left.



William Trost Richards (1833-1905), *Gray Cliff, Conanicut Island, Rhode Island* (site of the artist's home). Oil on panel, 8 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 16 in., signed lower right.



John La Farge (1835-1910), *Windmill (Newport, Windmill, Near Easton's Pond. Early Spring, Southeast Wind)*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 12 x 10 in.

friends, family and heroes, and artistic landscape and seascape tokens of remembrance of their leisure and sport time in Newport to adorn homes in other parts of the country. Lastly, artists in Newport have always enjoyed a progressive and intellectual climate that inspires the sharing of ideas, according to Vareika.

In 1936, on the occasion of the tercentenary of the founding of Rhode Island, the Art Association of Newport (now called the Newport

Art Museum) mounted an important exhibition that reflected this artistic heritage: *Retrospective Exhibition of The Work of Artists Identified with Newport*. In 1974, Vareika bought a copy of the catalog to this exhibition in an antiques store in Newport and it influenced his interest in the subject, culminating with the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary exhibition that opens in the gallery on July 13.

At least one of the actual artworks included in the 1936 museum

exhibition, a John La Farge seascape, will be shown in the Vareika exhibit along with Colonial and early Federal period portraits, still lifes, landscapes, seascapes, city views and other subjects by a range of Newport-associated artists.

Known for his exquisite flower and landscape paintings, New York City-born La Farge (1835-1910) was perhaps one of the most versatile artists of his generation. His large body of work encompassed murals, stained glass, watercolors and oils. Early on, his work showed the influence of Japanese art, anticipating the style of the French impressionists.

It was a work by La Farge that first inspired Vareika, then a pre-law student, to change his career direction. He abandoned law school plans and an anticipated career in public service law in order to volunteer to direct a six-year legal battle to save an endangered Newport church building that was decorated by La Farge. While fighting to save the historic La Farge church and working at the Newport Art Association, Vareika also began his art dealing career as a "picker." Since 1987 his gallery space on Bellevue Avenue has specialized in fine examples of the rich artistic heritage of the Newport and Narragansett Bay region.

During their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary summer, the Vareika gallery also will present an exhibition of more than 100 paintings, watercolors and drawings by William Trost Richards. This will complement the summer exhibition at the Newport Art Museum, *From Pennsylvania to Paradise: William Trost Richards, Harrison Morris and the Art Association of Newport*, for which William Vareika Fine Arts is the corporate sponsor. ■