



Preserving art and atmosphere at Vareika Gallery

By Virginia Treherne-Thomas

July 26, 2007

You have to have passion to change the world, and Bill and Alison Vareika have it in spades. No couple in this community has worked harder than they have to keep the community on its artistic and ecological tippy-toes!

Last weekend they connected their passion for art with their passion for conservation at a fiercely engaging exhibition at their Bellevue Avenue gallery. A private reception for "A Precious Muse, Art of The Narragansett Bay: Then and Now," a sale of art inspired by the beauty of our region, was also a way to support the community by donating proceeds from the sale to the on-going efforts of Save The Bay. More than 350 people attended the opening including Senators Reed and Whitehouse and former governor Sundlun.

The Vareikas opened their Newport Gallery of American Art in 1987 with a large collection by William Trost Richards. The gallery has maintained a focus on important American artists like Johh LaFarge, John Kensett, and Martin Johnson Heade, who found inspiration in the unique society and exquisite natural environment of this area. "Allison and I had a dual mission in opening the gallery and that was not only to provide a viewing space for important, historic American art but also to support charitable causes." It has become a working office for their many fundraising projects.

Their current show is well worth the visit, with beautiful modern works by local artist Robert Manice and his friends David Dewey and Paul Rickert. Following in the tradition of their 19th century counterparts, these artists work from nature together, observing the landscape and learning from each other's efforts. In this tastefully presented show, you will see works by these artists depicting the same site, often painted at the same time. These works are often of widely differing sizes, but are hung together to emphasize their shared connections. "Peashooters" Manice told me, are what Vareika called his paintings, because they are dwarfed by the size of his friends' canvases.

Run, don't walk to this exciting exhibition. They remind us how lucky we are to be living here and how we must, more seriously than ever these days, look for ways that can help to protect our "precious muse."