

Art Dealer William Vareika Mounts Anniversary Show - Inside Art with Michael Rose

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Michael Rose, Art Contributor

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Many notable artists have found inspiration in Rhode Island. For local gallery owner William Vareika, the work of these artists has led to a storied career buying and selling historic artworks. Vareika's eponymous gallery, located in the heart of Newport, is celebrating thirty-six years in business with a special exhibition that shows off impressive highlights from its holdings. The show boasts a stunning array of paintings, drawings, and other pieces that chart the history of American art as well as Vareika's impeccable connoisseurship.

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Vareika is a staple of the Newport community and of the art scene in general. He first arrived in the city as a student in 1974 to research the artist John La Farge and eventually came to stay. What started as a small business operating out of his car blossomed into one of the nation's most respected galleries dealing in historic American art. Today, Vareika runs the gallery alongside his wife and business partner Alison and gallery manager Molly Richard. Located at 212 Bellevue Avenue, William Vareika Fine Art features elegant and well appointed exhibition spaces. There visitors will find meandering rooms filled with important paintings by well-known artists as well as stacks of well-thumbed art books.

Vareika's current show features over 300 works dating from 1775 - 1980, and he describes it in part by saying, "Scholarly wall labeling accompanies all of the artworks on display, with full descriptions, artist biographies, and relevant exhibition, provenance and publication records. Many of the major American artistic figures of the past are represented in the exhibition, with the importance of some artworks rivaling those found in the finest museums in the country."

An experienced advisor to major patrons, Vareika has guided work into important spaces. Asked what advice he would give to burgeoning art collectors, Vareika says, "Education about art history and exposure to original artworks is the key to collecting historical American art. I advise beginning collectors to read art history monographs and to view as many artworks in-person as possible to begin to try to develop an 'eye' or personal aesthetic sensibility and 'taste.' Establishing a relationship with a professional, knowledgeable, and seasoned art dealer or art consultant can help to advise collectors about such important and complicated issues as authenticity, condition, and pricing." He goes on to note that his landmark gallery space offers artworks priced from under one thousand dollars to over a million.

With a career spanning decades and a vast wealth of experience in the ever-changing art market, Vareika has many stories to tell and he has a remarkable memory for objects and artists. Asked about his proudest achievement as an art dealer, he eschews traditional commercial gallery successes like major transactions in favor of stories that highlight his love for preserving artworks. For Vareika, the perennial value of art is the driving force behind his extraordinary career. He says, "A well-known quote by John La Farge's friend William James has served as an inspiration to me many times in my life: 'The great use of life is to spend it for something that outlasts it.'"

Vareika goes on to recall with excitement a number of his major projects to save works by John La Farge, including an initiative that involved shepherding an important set of stained glass windows from a church in Amherst, Massachusetts to Boston College's McMullen Museum of Art.



PHOTO: Michael Rose



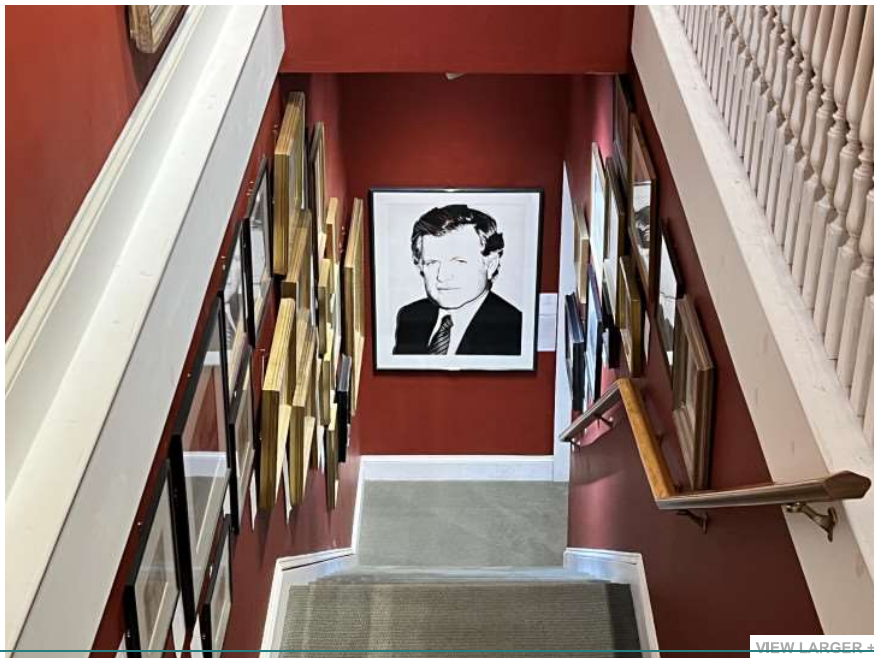
PHOTO: Michael Rose

He recounts, "That sale would have involved following the auction house advice to alter the artworks by splitting up the triptych to sell them at an advantage individually and by removing the original stained glass scriptural citations at the top and the stained glass memorial citations at the bottom to make them more appealing to a wider bidding audience. I was contacted by several church members who rightfully considered this a desecration of the artworks and of La Farge's original concept and were looking to me for help, knowing of my earlier La Farge preservation efforts. My wife and I made an offer to purchase the windows outright to gift to the art museum at my alma mater, where I had originally discovered John La Farge."

In the gallery's anniversary exhibition, viewers will find a number of artworks by La Farge, alongside exquisite paintings by luminaries of the nineteenth-century art world like John Singer Sargent and Winslow Homer.

Although his anniversary exhibition is a testament to his unparalleled longevity, Vareika has no plans to slow down. He says, "Over my four-decade career, I have been fortunate to work with art dealers and art collectors who remained active well into their 80s and even 90s. I believe that being surrounded by fine art helps keep one youthful in spirit."

Learn more about William Vareika Fine Arts and plan your visit at www.vareikafinearts.com.



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PHOTO: Michael Rose

Michael Rose is a multi-talented fine art professional based in Southern New England. Since 2014 he has served as the gallery manager at the historic Providence Art Club, one of the nation's oldest arts organizations. Through his current freelance work he advises collectors and artists, provides appraisal services, teaches, and completes curatorial projects. [LEARN MORE HERE](#)



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