

A&E LIGHTHOUSE

A BEACON FOR ENTERTAINMENT ON CAPE COD

Landscapes devoid of man but full of inspiration

Rick Fleury makes his subject matter in CCMA show

By Britt Beedenbender
arts@barnstablepatriot.com



FAITH, HOPE AND HAPPINESS – Rick Fleury's triptych depicts an artistic journey reflected in other works at his Cape Museum of Art exhibition.

"There are days which occur in this climate at almost any season of the year, wherein the world reaches its perfection, when the air, the heavenly bodies and the earth, make a harmony."

Those lines, taken from Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* (1844), were how Provincetown artist Rick Fleury greeted a small group of visitors with whom he shared his passion for landscape and the search for truth through his art. The gallery talk last week at the Cape Cod Museum of Art in Dennis was presented in conjunction with the exhibition, "Coastal Views," a selection of oil paintings that Fleury created over the past six months.

A self-taught artist who came to painting only 10 years ago, Fleury attributes his "search for the facts" to his previous career as a journalist. To "capture the essence of the moment," he visits the same place "time and time again...to know the exact time that I want to be there." He chooses as his subjects the coastal and marsh areas of Wellfleet, Truro and Provincetown, focusing primarily on that "moment of astonishment" when sky and water meet. Within these subjects he reveals such ephemeral moments as the sun piercing a cloud, its rays illuminating a stretch of sand, or the instant a rolling fog bank touches the marsh, its moisture softening the edges of the blades of grass.

Fleury's compositions are devoid of man's intrusions, and in most instances, he removes any evidence of his existence. In search of "the absolute purity of the landscape," his style borders on abstraction as he reduces nature to its elemental forms and employs a broad and fluid brushstroke. He is a tremendous colorist,

able to capture the nuances of nature's subtle changes. Fleury loads the brush with paint and he credits his ability to blend and pull colors from the layers of paint on the canvas to Edward Hopper who, after years of experimentation, discovered that "thickened linseed oil was where it was at."

This series of tidal marsh scenes began with "Grey Skies," a depiction of Fox Island, where Fleury lives in Wellfleet. "I realized that if I could try to capture a precise moment in nature, I would be getting onto something new and different." This series "represents where I was spiritually, mentally and physically."

Beginning with numerous photographs taken in the fall of 2005 Fleury began painting in early January, and with a boyish grin he noted that "Some (of the paintings) came to the museum a little bit wet."

The most compelling work in the exhibition is a triptych titled "Faith, Hope and Happiness." In the most subtle fashion the panels progress from borderline representational to complete abstraction and in the process serve as a metaphor for one's journey towards spiritual wholeness.

Also intriguing, is a selection of Fleury's oil paintings on copper, which he began in 2002 in an attempt to rediscover a lost technique from the 16th century. In these intimately scaled landscapes the copper is at times allowed to peek through the paint layers. As the copper will develop a patina over time, the works have the quality of a "living canvas."

Fleury's works speak of intent, deliberateness, confidence and honesty. One gallery visitor remarked, "You give us a gift of peace," to which Fleury replied, "Some of my most calming paintings were done when I felt the most anxious...I am my most peaceful when I am painting."

There is nothing quaint or charming about Fleury's work. His paintings are serious forays into the discovery of the landscape and the artist's physical and spiritual understanding of it after months and years of dedicated study.

Now that "Faith, Hope and Happiness" has been completed Fleury is not quite sure what is next, although he is eagerly anticipating opening his own gallery "In the Heart of NoCo" in Provincetown on June 30. In the meantime, you can catch a glimpse of things to come in this exhibition, which will be on view until June 25.

The Barnstable Patriot
Hyannis, Massachusetts
Friday, June 9, 2006
www.barnstablepatriot.com