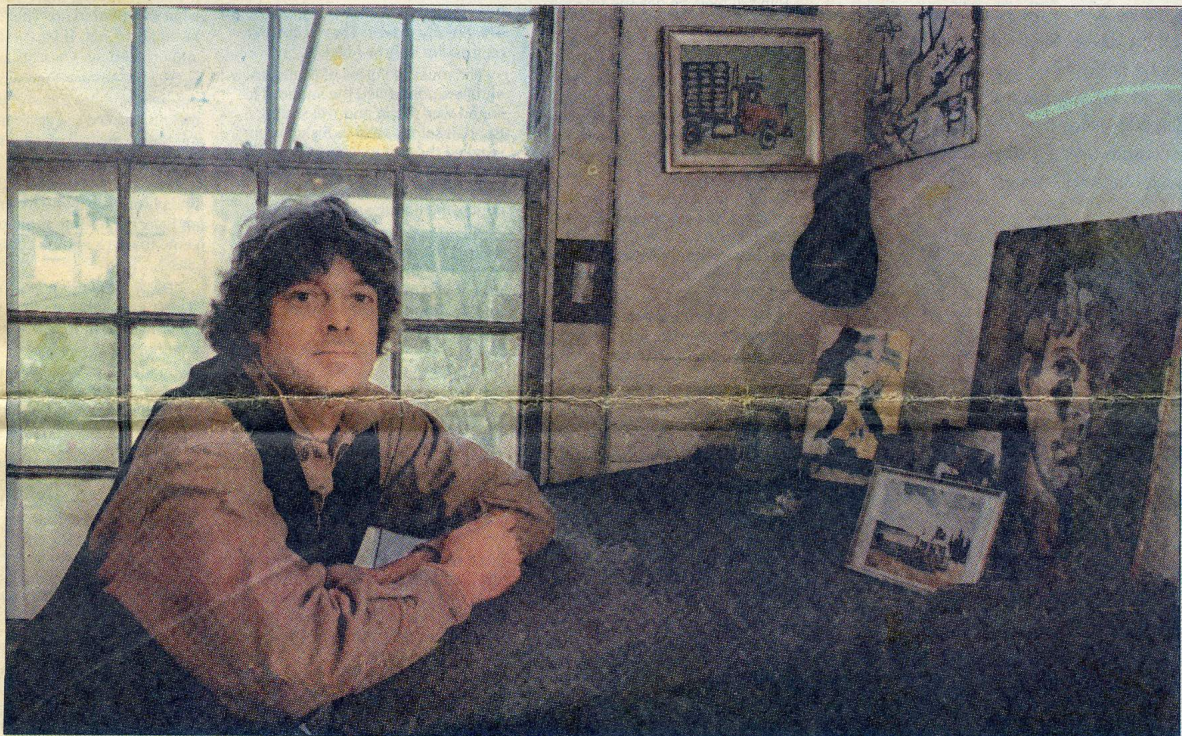
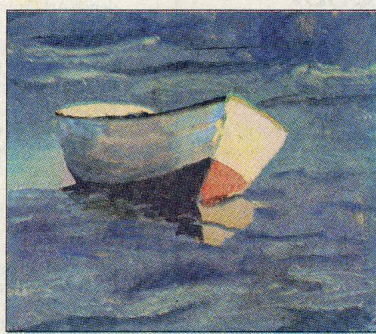


'For years, I told myself that my work wasn't good. Looking at Winslow Homer, I'd say, "I'm a bad wave painter." Well, who cares? They're my waves.'

— LUKE RANDALL, artist



Journal photo/FRIEDA SQUIRES

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST: Luke Randall in his North Kingstown studio. Two examples of his work — “The Dinghy,” and below, “Apple Abstraction.”

Art, from the inside out

■ A change of focus — to process from final product — is drawing artist Luke Randall to the broad strokes of an impressionist from the precision of a realist.

By JERRY O'BRIEN
Journal Staff Writer

NORTH KINGSTOWN

LUKE Randall called the experience an epiphany, one of those rare moments when a new understanding arrives with sudden, unexpected clarity.

Randall was painting a sailing vessel as it plied its way up Narragansett Bay. It began to rain. The boat moved out of view. He was dissatisfied with his work.

“Then I had a realization,” Randall said. “I stumbled upon the freedom of letting go, of letting go of whether this was a good or a bad painting. I didn’t have to accept failure.”

Now, Randall said in describing his approach to his work, he is oriented toward process and not product. Along the way, he



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IDEAS

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EAST BAY

Artist

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has learned to look at himself in a different way: "to stop putting myself in the role of an artist but to be myself."

The map of that journey appears in the changing images on Randall's canvases. Known regionally as a realist with a penchant for rural landscapes, Randall is rediscovering the original impulses that led him to painting.

His technique is becoming more impressionistic, with broader

sweeps of color. At times, his brush work suggests the spiky, sudden movement of pen and ink.

Where these changes in attitude and artistry will take him, he does not know. But the journey is more pleasant now, he said, more in tune with his nature.

Tall and handsome, dressed in khakis and flannel on a chilly day, Randall, 35, looks like he stepped from the pages of an outdoor clothing catalog. He has hurricane hair and semaphore arms.

Of the four walls in his spacious studio, three are lined with windows. The view of the surrounding

pond and woodland at the Shady Lea Artists Mill Complex on Shady Lea Road is intoxicating. Sometimes, he said, he can stare out the window for an hour or two.

A warren of studios for painters, photographers, sculptors and glass blowers, the mill has provided Randall with the studio of his dreams. There is plenty of light, plenty of wall space and plenty of good air — perfect acoustics for listening to music while working.

Randall has recently discovered jazz. From visits to the Salvation Army, he has picked up recordings by jazz musicians Gerry Mulligan,

Paul Desmond, Sonny Rollins, Bill Evans and Bud Powell. He feels that a whole new world of music is opening up to him. Randall has been ears, too. A devoted audiophile, he favors vinyl over compact discs, feeling a warmth that can't be contained by digital sampling.

"Maybe I'm romanticizing the past, but there seems to be more loneliness in the world," he said, as Mulligan and Desmond braided a lush, relaxing melody.

"I like to have that sense of community, and in the mill we have it. We all like watching each other and knowing that someone else is 'doing it.'"

A Middletown native who now lives in North Kingstown, Randall graduated from Middletown High School in 1983 and graduated from the University of Rhode Island with an English degree in 1989. He had a studio on Broadway in Newport for many years, until moving to the mill in the fall of 1997.

His work has appeared in shows at Island Arts, Theodore Tihansky Fine Art, the DeBlois Gallery, the Spring Bull Gallery and the Candida Simmons Gallery, all in Newport, and in juried shows at the Providence Art Club and the Newport Art Museum.

"I haven't given up realism," he said. "But now I'm doing stuff that's inside me. This new work I call my kid paintings."

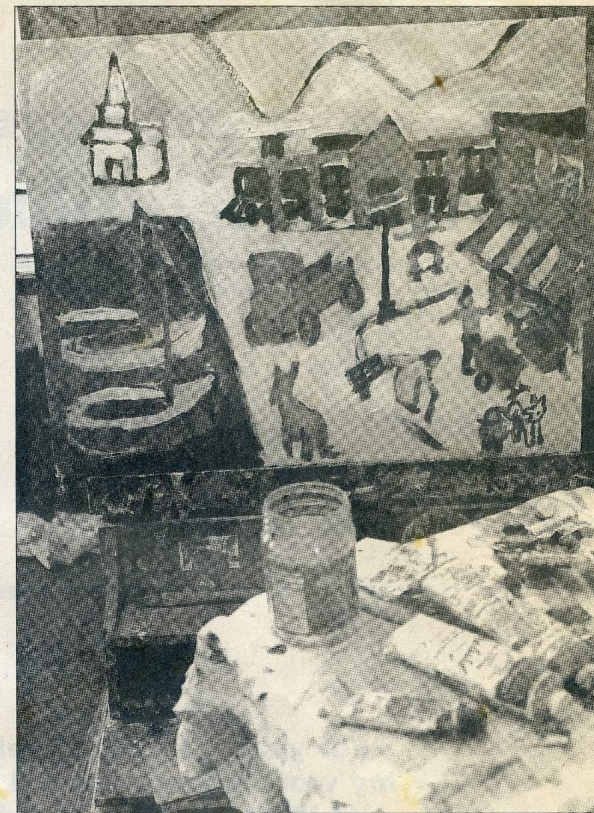
The realistic landscapes, bridges and sunsets sold well. Whether gallery owners will welcome his new approach — more lighthearted, colorful and active — remains to be seen.

"The market wants local area beauty," Randall said. "Now I'm getting into the same scene" — a place in the woods, for example — "but the painting is the experience of the spot, not what I'm looking at."

Randall feels he has the freedom to follow this path because he makes his living as a decorative painter. He does interior murals and restorations, faux finishes such as wood grain and marbledizing, and work for interior designers. He also does exterior restoration, including the gold-leaf work on the fence at Marble House.

"I don't want to stand in front of the canvas and think I need a thousand dollars, that I've got a mortgage to pay," Randall said. "I'm so grateful. It gives me an incredible freedom of work."

"I've accepted my decorative painting as valuable, and the decorative work has had an influence on my own work. I'm fluent with color, and I work with color on a daily basis. It all has an effect on my soul,



Journal photo/FRIEDA SQUIRES

A WORK IN PROGRESS: In Luke Randall's studio, in the Shady Lea Artists Mill Complex, in North Kingstown, "Salt Lake City" represents another area of expression that Randall calls his "kid paintings."

my character.

"For years, I told myself that my work wasn't good. Looking at Winslow Homer, I'd say, 'I'm a bad wave painter.' Well, who cares? They're my waves. They're an expression of how I feel."

The musical voices of Mulligan and Desmond filled the studio. The sound was warm and welcoming. Randall sat forward in his chair and recalled the two teachers at Middletown High School who played crucial roles in developing his confidence, technique and sensibility.

"I had two fantastic teachers there. I tell the kids now, when I teach, that this is such a formative time if you make the decision to get into it," Randall said, bringing his hands together and focusing his gaze.

"Marie Vincent and Rosemary Day were wonderful teachers. Mrs. Day taught me to enjoy the process

and not rush to the illusion of product that you have in your mind.

"From Mrs. Vincent I learned that it was my choice, that I could do what I wanted to do. That's what I loved about her. If you want to sit and do nothing, you can.

"But she showed me what commitment and discipline could do for me. She placed the responsibility in my hands instead of saying, 'If you don't do this, you'll get an F.'"

Now, many years later, Randall finds himself playing out in his life and work the same principles he came to savor in high school art class.

"Be process-oriented," he said. "Don't keep working on a painting thinking that more work will make it better.

"I taught at the Newport Art Museum, and I tell adults the same thing that Mrs. Vincent taught me."

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