



“Fabulous Fish” by John Rist Jr.

August 10, 2013

by Julia Boudreau

From the oceans of South America to the waters lapping the South of France, fish view a world of diversity as they travel the water. Fish sculptures suspended in the window of Herbert & Rist Wine and Liquor Store in Southampton would view another type of diversity as Hamptons visitors and residents marvel at their beauty while walking along Jobs Lane.

The fish “swimming” in the picture window aquarium are surrounded by bottles of wine and liquor and fish netting. The wooden sculptures are made of plywood, old beach fencing, hardware and acrylic paint and fashioned into colorful yet rough-hewn sculptures. Besides location, these fish share another commonality - they were all made by wine and liquor store owner John Rist Jr.

Rist’s fish can be now be found in another Southampton location - the Southampton Historical Museum and Research Center. A solo show of his work - “Fabulous Fish!” - puts on view the different types of fish sculptures made by Rist along with a few paintings.

An Opening Reception takes place today (Aug 10, 2013) from 4 to 6 p.m. The exhibition continues through Nov 2, 2013. This is not the first time Rist’s fish have been exhibited in a gallery but it’s the first time they’ve been the subject of a museum show.

“I just can’t believe how it has taken off,” Rist said of his fish sculptures.

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“Flounder” acrylic on wood sculpture by John Rist, Jr.

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Rist has been a painter all his life but began sculpting fish in 2001. He became inspired after visiting his daughter at school in New Mexico, where he noticed similar fish sculptures rendered in an abstract style.

Many of Rist’s fish sculptures are made from weathered beach fencing that was used to shore up the dunes near the waters of the Hamptons.

“I know the fellow who sells the new stuff every year and he gives me the old stuff,” Rist said of the beach fencing. “I’ve painted all my life and always wanted to do sculpture and never could do much with stone and chisel so I came up with this idea.”

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“Trout” acrylic on wood sculpture by John Rist, Jr.

Each of the fish has a distinct personality that may be inspired by fish Rist has met while surfing the waters of the Hamptons and the Caribbean. Rist said that he learned to surf during his youth in the summer of 1965. In those days, he would pass summers at the “cut” of Flying Point beach in Water Mill where he remembers using his feet to step on and catch one of the many Flounders found in the area.



“School of Grunts” acrylic on wood sculpture by John Rist, Jr.

The fish would become lunch for Rist after roasting them up campfire-style. While surfing over the last 50 years, Rist said has encountered many fish, some unknowing acting as models for his many sculptures.

“I used to travel down to the Caribbean and gaze at the fish down there,” Rist said. “A lot of my fish are tropical fish from those experiences. It’s all part of it— surfing and doing art at the same time.”



“Catfish” acrylic on wood sculpture by John Rist, Jr.

With their vibrant colors, the fish “swimming” in the picture window of Herbert & Rist Wine and Liquor Store adds a dash of unexpected whimsy to tony Jobs Lane. They also can cause some confusion, said Rist.

“I think it is so unique, some people have never seen anything like it before,” Rist said. “I have them hanging right in my wine store. People come in off the streets can’t figure out if it’s a liquor store or art gallery.”



“John Rist Holding a Crevalle Jack Fish” acrylic on wood sculpture
by John Rist, Jr.

BASIC FACTS: “Fabulous Fish” opens August 10 and continues through Nov. 2, 2013 at the Southampton Historical Museum and Research Center. An Opening Reception will be held on Aug 10 from 4 to 6 p.m.

The solo exhibition will be presented at the Rogers Mansion, 17 Meeting House Lane, Southampton Village, NY 11968. www.southamptonhistoricalmuseum.org

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