



Savio Mizzi's Paintings Blend Forms in Surreal Worlds

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by Cristina Schreil

In one painting, a fish, shimmering and looming larger than life in the foreground, eyes the hook that snagged it. In another, the shadowy silhouette of an angler perched on a rock casts a line against a sky of purple, yellow and orange.



Artwork by Savio Mizzi. Courtesy of The White Room Gallery.

In Savio Mizzi's exhibition of 20 mixed-media paintings at the White Room Gallery in Bridgehampton, a panoply of hues, layers, and animal and human forms create unusual marine worlds suggestive of something from a dream.

But the East Hampton artist insists the works—on display through October 5— spring from nothing more profound than his desire to paint as much as he can.



Artwork by Savio Mizzi. Courtesy of The White Room Gallery.

"To me there is no meaning," Mizzi said in a phone interview. "You paint and you draw because it's in your blood."

The artist estimated he has created upwards of 600 works since moving to New York City in 1974 to study advertising illustration. His paintings are rooted in design and line drawing and in the course of his career he has made posters, book covers and advertisements for such publishing houses as Bantam Books and Dell Books and also Time magazine and Newsday.

For the White Room exhibition, which he shares with underwater photographer Mike Laptew, Mizzi selected paintings inspired by Long Island Sound and the fish that live in it and the deeper waters

offshore—things that remind him of his native Gozo, an island in the Maltese archipelago in the Mediterranean.

Although he still works on commissioned illustrations, he started to concentrate more heavily on painting three or four years ago. At that time, he said, he looked around and asked, “What is there to paint?” In his search for subjects, he realized that “we live at the tip of Long Island,” he said. “A lot of people fish; a lot of people like fish.”



Artwork by Savio Mizzi. Courtesy of The White Room Gallery.

Mizzi is an avid fisherman himself. Like painting and drawing, it’s in his blood, he suggested.

For reference, he draws on photographs, his immediate environment, and his imagination. He follows what he calls a “surrealist style,” citing such inspirations as Salvador Dalí.

Painting a landscape without anything in it “is just boring. I like to add stuff that doesn’t exist,” he said, acknowledging that he gets bored very easily. “I always like to put elements that you can’t, a lot of times, make sense of; it’s beautiful.”



Artwork by Savio Mizzi. Courtesy of The White Room Gallery.

He first sketches out an idea of what he wants—he sees it beforehand in his mind’s eye, he said—and then blends in new forms, sometimes painting layer upon layer until he’s satisfied. He employs different combinations of charcoal, oil, acrylic, watercolor, pencil, or pastel to make it work.

“The morphing of the figure with other things, it does something to me,” he said.

Mizzi believes the human spirit transcends all forms, becoming absorbed into the sea creatures in the White Room exhibition paintings, for one example. In other works, human figures seem to shape shift, changing into animals or trees.

The artist was born with dyslexia and a form of attention deficit disorder, he said, and painting helps bring to life what’s in his head. He struggled to summon the words to describe this process, finally musing that if he could express it, perhaps he wouldn’t need to paint.

He also stressed that he sees the same process at work in his illustrations, paintings and

architecture—he designed his craftsman-style home after moving to the East End in 1990.

“When it comes to illustration and fine art, in reality, there is no difference,” Mizzi said, maintaining that Renaissance artists Raphael and Michelangelo were accomplished illustrators at their core.

“The best artists, as far as I’m concerned, anywhere, were illustrators and, quote unquote, became fine artists,” Mizzi said.

His favorite illustrator is the late Bob Peak, famous for designing such posters as those for the “Star Trek” franchise. Mizzi said Peak’s skill was truly unique, and although he never got to meet the artist in person, he owns the TV Guide cover art Peak created for a television production of “The Diary of Anne Frank.”

Mizzi has also captured such pop culture icons as The Joker (as played by Heath Ledger) and Bob Marley, turning his artistic attention to anything he finds “cool.”

He noted that over the years his style has become looser and more direct.

“When you paint, what the heck, you’re painting,” he said. “You’re doing beautiful things.”

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BASIC FACTS: “Mike Laptew & Savio Mizzi” remains on view through October 5. The White Room Gallery is located at 2415 Main Street, Bridgehampton, NY 11932. www.thewhiteroom.gallery.

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