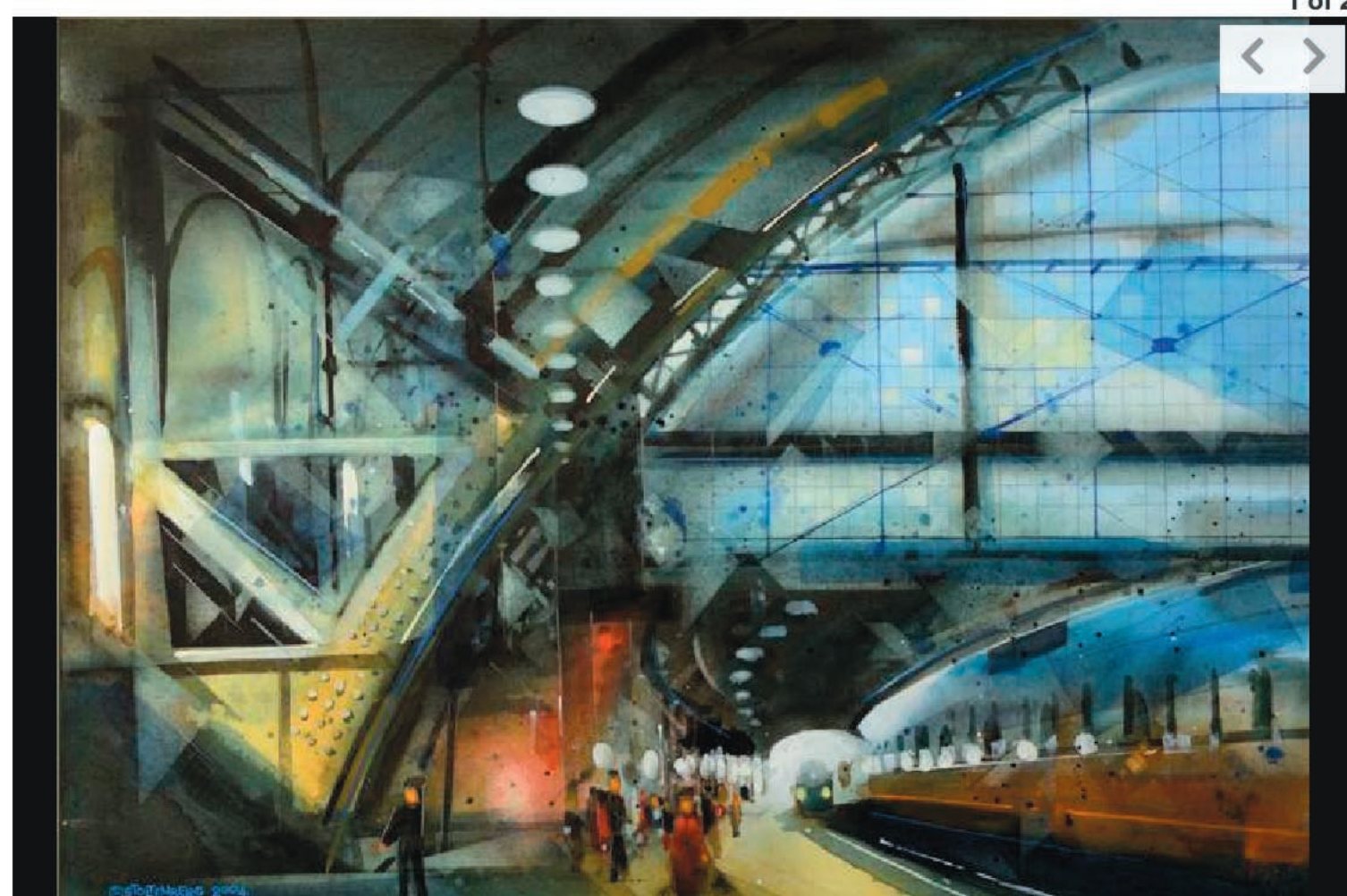


An Impressive Retrospective Of Brewster Artist Donald Stoltenberg Now On View

By JOANNE BRIANA-GARTNER 23 hrs ago

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"Old Sullivan Square Station," an oil painting by the late Donald Stoltenberg of Brewster, exemplifies the artist's interest in

Acclaimed artist Donald Stoltenberg (1927-2016) lived on the Cape for more than 50 years. And while many of his contemporaries were reveling in the natural beauty of the Cape, representing its marshes, dunes and expansive sky and beaches in their work, it wasn't the natural beauty of the area that Mr. Stoltenberg took inspiration from; it was its manmade structures. "His interest in architecture and engineering informed his art. For him, these forms were as dramatic as nature's wonders," writes Deborah Forman, guest curator of a retrospective of Mr. Stoltenberg's work.

"Donald Stoltenberg: Building His World," is on view at the Cape Cod Museum of Art through October 2. Originally planned for 2020, the show was inspired by a donation of 20 major works by Mr. Stoltenberg's estate. "That got the exhibitions committee excited about having a retrospective," said Benton Jones, director of art at the museum.

With the show delayed by the pandemic, Mr. Jones said, he was able to reach out to some of Mr. Stoltenberg's close friends in order to borrow more works for the exhibit. Dr. Roger Dunn, a close friend and collector of Mr. Stoltenberg's work, replied to Mr. Jones that he was moving to a smaller home and would like to give his entire collection to the museum, meaning that the Cape Cod Museum of Art now holds the largest collection of work by the artist. "Almost everything you see in this exhibition is owned by the museum," said Mr. Benton, adding that the museum is looking into the possibility of making a traveling exhibit out of the show. "We really do have the best of his work," he said.

Included with the paintings and collagraphs is a collection of travelogues and scrapbooks by Mr. Stoltenberg, on loan from the Brewster Ladies Library. "He had a great love of travel and especially of cruising," Mr. Jones said. An essay in the catalogue by David Zeni, another close friend, describes how the two men met and bonded over a shared love of cruising. "The destination wasn't important," Mr. Zeni writes. "It was the at-sea experience we were after."

The exhibit includes a film of Mr. Stoltenberg in his studio explaining his process for making a watercolor painting. The footage was shot by Czech videographer Pavel Farkas, another acquaintance Mr. Stoltenberg made on his travels. The video can also be viewed on the Cape Cod Museum of Art website.

In addition to his oil and watercolor paintings, Mr. Stoltenberg is often considered the father of collagraphy, a printmaking technique, in which, instead of engraving into a substrate such as metal or wood, the artist builds the plate up with material, inks it and then makes a print. "He literally wrote the book on collagraphy," said Mr. Jones, referring to Mr. Stoltenberg's 1975 book, "Collagraph Printmaking."

Before moving to Brewster Mr. Stoltenberg worked for the Container Corporation of America. Samples of package designs, logos and other graphic design projects completed by Mr. Stoltenberg are included in the exhibit. Mr. Stoltenberg also taught for many years at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln.

With Paul Cézanne and the new Bauhaus as two of his major influences, Mr. Stoltenberg's work is reminiscent of American artist Charles Sheeler, who also focused on paintings of industry and architecture.

"He did a lot of abstraction early on even though you can see that there might be some representational influences here," said Mr. Jones, referencing two of Mr. Stoltenberg's earliest works. "But he really did love the object, so even though his representational paintings have a lot of abstract elements to them, they are always celebrating manmade structures, engineering and the marvels of man."

Bridges, buildings, planes, trains, boats and cathedrals figure heavily into Mr. Stoltenberg's subject matter. The largest painting in the show is Mr. Stoltenberg's interpretation of the Colosseum in Rome; it hangs above the entrance to the Ocean Edge Gallery, to the left of a more local landmark, Nobska Light in Woods Hole. One of the most complex and ambitious structures ever made, it's unsurprising that the Colosseum would be of special interest to an artist fixated on manmade structures.

Other images of architectural structures include St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice, Montmartre in Paris, rooftops in Munich, as well as closer-by landmarks such as the Longfellow Bridge in Boston and the old Sullivan Square subway station in Charlestown.

"He had a fascination with bridges," Mr. Jones said. In "Third Avenue El," the massive structure of the underside of the subway platform dominates the work with chunky horizontal shapes, but the artist also includes on top of the dark solid areas frenetic line work that seems to dance across the image.

"Not a lot of artists embrace diagonals the way he did," said Mr. Jones, pointing out many examples in Mr. Stoltenberg's work. "It was a motif that he visited over and over again."

A precise and controlled abstraction rather than something more wild and freewheeling is one way to describe Mr. Stoltenberg's style.

"We've been digitizing the collection, and it's been interesting to have photographs of these images, and you zoom in and you keep on zooming in and it reveals all these interior worlds," Mr. Jones said. "He had the ability to be very abstract and yet so deliberate, all in the same painting."

"There's a luminosity to his work," said Mr. Jones, "the way he refracts the light, creating beams of light that shoot across the canvas, often connecting through the painting somehow."

"Even things you think an artist would make perpendicular within the frame, he refuses to do; he puts rooflines at an angle and creates a horizon that isn't flat. He chose to see things from a different perspective. It really makes you stop and look."

In the collagraph "Byzantine Tondo," rather than his usual triangles, Mr. Stoltenberg embraces arches and circles.

"I really love this one," Mr. Jones said, "the way he grabs these circles and somehow pulls that shape out of everything around it."

Despite his love of structure, there are a few landscapes in the show, notably the collagraphs "Provincetown, 1987" and "Waterfront 1986." "Even when he paints landscapes they are minimal as far as trees and rocks go," said Mr. Jones, pointing to "Waterfront," which focuses on the anchor and the boat in the foreground and the angular rooftops of the houses along the shoreline. The image of Provincetown Harbor features a grouping of dock pilings in the foreground of the work.

When it comes to Cape Cod houses with their triangular dormers and angled roofs, Mr. Stoltenberg created bold prismatic abstractions.

And then there are his boats.

Appropriately on view in the museum's Ocean Edge Gallery, the collection of boat paintings on display by Mr. Stoltenberg includes every kind of oceangoing vessel: sailboats, ferryboats, cruise ships and windjammers; boats under sail and boats still at dock. One of the focal pieces is a grand painting of the QE2 powerfully slicing its way through the water.

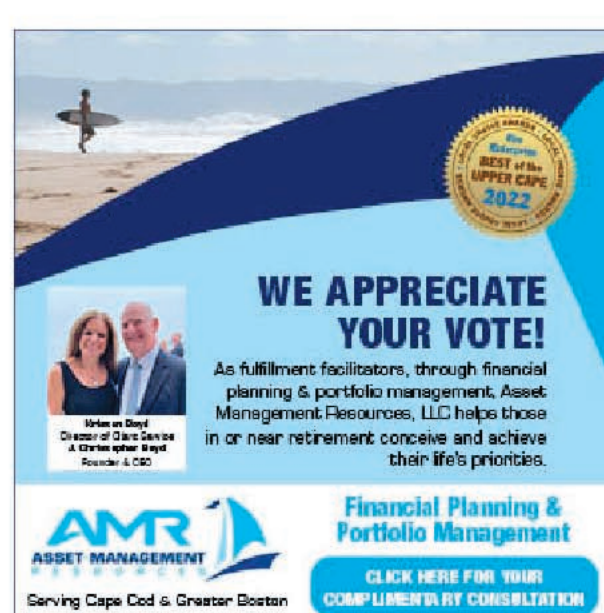
He was an artist who chose to spend the majority of his time creating in his studio rather than seeking out sales and exhibitions. Mr. Jones said he's excited for the chance to show off Mr. Stoltenberg's work and "bring to light for the first time an artist that we believe deserves more recognition."

"I think that when people see these works they will see that there's something here," Mr. Jones said.



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