

Artist Profile

William T. Hall

Interview by Abby Luby

When you look at William Talmadge Hall's watercolors of seafaring life, two things hit you — the briny scent of the sea and the distant cry of seagulls. Hall's images of harpooning vessels on the shimmering Atlantic Ocean off Block Island seem to emerge from a mystical place and float up to the paper's surface; he has clearly mastered the mercurial nature of watercolor painting and expertly portrays a myriad of fishing techniques used for over a century.

Scenes of coastal life come to us from Hall's youth and his memory deftly serves up images teeming with an indelible sense of life at sea. "My dad was a sword-fisherman and I fished with him for about 25 years," Hall recalls. "We used to call it the rodeo on the ocean. We had our own boat

off Block Island and along with swordfishing, we did cod, lobster and bottom fishing. I've seen wonderful stuff out on the water, the tuna jumping, the whales swirling all around us - just like Melville's *Moby Dick*."

In "Ocean Clipper", two vessels divide darker and lighter waters and our eye is led to a lone fisherman balancing precariously on a slender gangway over the water known as the "Pulpit. Harpooners are thought of as the high priests of swordfishing." His wait becomes our moment of stillness; it's that tranquility that is stunning in all of Hall's work.

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Bill Hall, fine artist. Photograph by Constance Brown





Block Island 1928



Ocean Clipper. Block Island



Edrie Jane, Block Island fishing boat. Water Color



Schooner rigged for swordfishing. Block Island, RI



Parking NYC

Hall shares with us his silent curiosity. Sandwiched between two multi-floored buildings is a parking garage with two men painting the roof. Inside the two hotels are service workers individually framed by the windows where they actively and methodically carry on as the hum of city life never stops. “These and my other paintings like it are about working people,” says Hall. “They are the heroic labor class that I love.”

Ocean View Hotel on a hillside overlooking the harbor. The once palatial hotel was built by the gold-rush wealthy Nicholas Ball in 1872 and hosted, among other dignitaries, President Ulysses S. Grant. In 1966 the Ocean View Hotel burned to the ground. “As a boy, I played inside that hotel until it burned down,” says Hall. “It was known to have the longest bar in the world.” The painting shows us the structure, aloft a hill, in its final years of neglect contrasted by active fishermen below in the bay busy with their gear. “Block Island had a unique social appeal because it was a place for those who didn’t fit in the more elite establishment of Newport,” Hall says. “These were folks who were not socially acceptable — some had married their nannies, had families and were shunned. They came to Block Island because they still wanted to vacation in discreet privacy on the ocean.”

Hall is adroitly able to switch his focus away from the sea and to people. “Parking NYC”, is Hall’s depiction of what he calls “the invisible worker.” In muted tones, the watercolor is a “snapshot” of workers in our midst that we sometimes easily dismiss. Hall shares with us his silent curiosity. Sandwiched between two multi-floored buildings is a parking garage with two men painting the roof. Inside the two hotels are service workers individually framed by the windows where they actively and methodically carry on as the hum of city life never stops. “These and my other paintings like it are about working people,” says Hall. “They are the heroic labor class that I love.”

Hall has been experimenting with oils for the last five years and the medium has become a challenging artistic conquest. “Hostess”, is an oil painting redolent of the Ashcan School known for depicting men and women in their everyday life and a style Hall embraces. The work shows a tall slim, blond woman in a blue dress standing at a restaurant’s hosting station, engrossed in her reservation list. The nuanced elegance of this woman is seen by her hair and skin illuminated against the dark browns of the restaurant’s interior. Again, Hall recalls his days as a youngster when his parents took him out to dinner. “There were always very attrac-



Hostess

tive women in the 1950's and 60's working in lounges and restaurants who, for me as a kid, were very glamorous, and seemed almost like a different mother figure."

After Hall graduated from Rhode Island School of Design with a BFA in Illustration, he was scooped up by the advertising world which he attests was truly the era of "Mad Men." He was a professional illustrator for 35 years. "I fell into the advertising business by accident because I could draw well and create storyboards. But I never gave up my desire to be a fine artist." That illustration clearly lends to storytelling is seen in "Quonset Ferry", an oil painting where Hall weaves in his memorable view of ferries and fishing boats passing one another near Point Judith. The velvety teal water magnetically pulls us in as the slow rolling waves separate two men – one on each boat. As they pass one another, one stands in the hull of the ferry's large car deck, the other on a small fishing boat. For Hall, it was a story played out on the car deck, "which was like a stage with two doors and you could look right through," Hall says. "When we were fishing we would see the men working on the boat and we'd wave to each other. It was like watching a movie that you've seen before."

Hall says painting with watercolors is different from oils. "Watercolors are easier — you know when the painting is finished because the paper can only take so much water. With oils, you can always do more. I am pursuing oil painting to solve some of its unique problems. And at my age, it's more about the fight for time. It keeps me going and it's exciting."

www.williamtalmadgehall.com

Quonset Ferry



The Tranquil Moment in Bill Hall's Paintings

BY ABBY LUBY

When you look at [William Talmadge Hall's](#) watercolors of seafaring life, two things hit you — the briny scent of the sea and the distant cry of seagulls. Hall's images of harpooning sloops on the shimmering Atlantic Ocean off Block Island seem to emerge from a mystical place and float up to the paper's surface; he has clearly mastered the mercurial nature of watercolor painting and expertly portrays a myriad of fishing techniques used for over a century.

Scenes of coastal life come to us from Hall's youth and his memory deftly serves up images teeming with an indelible sense of life at sea. "My dad was a harpoon swordfisherman and I fished with him for about 25 years," Hall recalls. "We used to call it the rodeo on the ocean. We had our own boat off Block Island and along with harpoon swordfishing, we did cod, lobster and bottom fishing. I've seen wonderful stuff out on the water, the tuna jumping, the whales swirling all around us - just like Melville's Moby Dick."

In "Ocean Clipper," two vessels divide darker and lighter waters and our eye is led to a lone harpooner balancing precariously on a slender gangway over the water known as the "Pulpit." "It's called the Pulpit because it's for delivering the 'last sermon'," Hall explains. "Harpooners are thought of as the high priests of swordfishing." The harpooner's wait becomes our moment of stillness; it's that tranquility that is stunning in all of Hall's work.

Hall is a natural storyteller and embeds his own personal narrative in his paintings. "Block Island 028," shows the neglected [Ocean View Hotel](#) on a hillside overlooking the bay. The once palatial hotel was built by the gold-rush wealthy Nicholas Ball in 1872 and hosted, among other dignitaries, President Ulysses S. Grant. In 1966 the Oceanview Hotel burned to the ground. "As a boy, I played inside that hotel until it burned down," says Hall. "It was known to have the longest bar in the world." The painting shows us the structure aloft a hill in its final years of neglect contrasted by active fishermen below in the bay busy with their gear. "Block Island had a unique social appeal because it was a place for those who didn't fit in the more elite establishment of Newport," Hall says. "These were folks who were not socially acceptable – some had married their nannies, had families and were shunned. They came to Block Island because they still wanted to be on live on the coast."

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methodically carry on as the hum of city life never stops. “These and my other paintings like it are about working people,” says Hall. “They are the heroic labor class that I love.”

At 70, Hall has been experimenting with oils for the last five years and the medium has become a challenging artistic conquest. “Hostess,” is an oil painting redolent of the Ashcan School known for depicting men and women in their everyday life and a style Hall embraces. The work shows a tall slim, blond woman in a blue dress standing at a restaurant’s hosting station, engrossed in her reservation list. The nuanced elegance of this woman is seen by her hair and skin illuminated against the dark browns of the restaurant’s interior. Again, Hall recalls his days as a youngster when his parents took him out to dinner. “There were always very attractive women in the 1950’s and 60’s working in lounges and restaurants who, for me as a kid, were very glamorous, and seemed almost like a different mother figure.”

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