

Beauty abounds in Abbe, Jones exhibits in Rockport

Tuesday

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Works by Judith Abbe and Mildred Jones are featured at the Rockport Art Association & Museum.

By Keith Powers capeann@wickedlocal.com

A pervasive aspect of artistic life on Cape Ann revolves around taking advantage of the diverse natural beauty. The broad sweep of the sea, the depths of Dogtown, the action on the waterfront—all of these attract proficient artists, and fire up imaginations.

But so too, the small details. The personalities. The architecture. The gardens. Especially, the light and shapes. Judith Abbe and Mildred Jones, much different painters, explore these details—both on Cape Ann, and farther afield as well.

Jude Abbe shows work in two local settings—both worth exploring. At the Rockport Art Association & Museum, seventeen oils, most in a traditional style, show traditional subjects—the harbor, friends, gardens—painted with skill. A smaller number, but even more diverse, hang in the lobby of Bank Gloucester.

Light and shadow are the given tools of any plein air artist. Installed in the Marguerite Pearson Room at RAA&M, Abbe's works do not arrest the viewer with novelty or surprising subject matter, but reward any time spent with sophisticated technique and detail. Enjoy a moment before "Wedding Dress," or "Fading Light," and note where edges of light and shadow subtly begin and end, or blend.

Even more strikingly, the set of paintings in the Bank Gloucester lobby demand even closer contemplation. "In for the Night," a looming nocturne ship portrait, has volume, energy and mystery. Any of the oils in the lobby would make a collector proud. (Wonderful too, to find these paintings in a public space normally given over to commerce. In a decidedly hopeless way, it makes hope feel possible.)

Mildred Jones (1899-1992) can hardly be considered a "Cape Ann artist." She studied at the Philadelphia Museum, and then in Paris, and worked a long career in New York, London, Cambridge and the Caribbean. She also summered in Rockport, and maintained a High Street studio, as well as her affiliation with the RAA&M, for many decades.

Her family donated hundreds of her works to the RAA&M recently, and a selection of 30 or so oils hang now in the Maddocks Gallery. The subjects predominantly come from Cape Ann or the Caribbean. Viewers can only hope that this is a prelude to a much more substantial retrospective of her work, now that the RAA&M has possession of such a substantial body of her paintings.

Her subjects spread out to include portraits, genre studies, nature, and local scenes from her travels, notably in the Caribbean. This modest exhibition only grazes its depth.

Loving portraits populate this selection, and several garden/nature works. Spend some time before the vague and lush "Lilies and Blue Ribbon." You won't regret it.

Both Jude Abbe's works and those of Mildred Jones hang in the Rockport Art Association and Museum through Dec. 31. Abbe's paintings remain on view at Bank Gloucester (and don't miss the irresistible Emile Gruppé also hanging behind the teller windows) through Jan. 13. For the RAA&M, visit rockportartassn.org or call 978-546-6604.

If you go...

What: Jude Abbe, two exhibitions, and Mildred Jones

Where: Rockport Art Association and Museum, 12 Main St., Rockport

Bank Gloucester, 160 Main St., Gloucester

When: At RAA&M through Dec. 31; at Bank Gloucester through Jan. 13

Tickets: Free. Visit rockportartassn.org or call 978-546-6604.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow @PowersKeith; email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com.

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