

ART REVIEW: Cape Ann Museum focuses on oil painter Fitz Henry Lane's expertise in lithography

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

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Fitz Henry Lane, one of the 19th century's most noted oil painters, spent many years honing his skills as a lithographer, working with other skilled printmakers, and then capitalizing on the sale of his work. "Drawn from Nature & on Stone: Lithographs of Fitz Henry Lane," on view at the Cape Ann Museum through March, investigates his growth in the printmaking craft, and explores the many facets of lithography that made it such a popular and essential medium in the period.

If you go...

WHAT: "Drawn from Nature & on Stone: Lithographs of Fitz Henry Lane"

WHERE: Cape Ann Museum, 27 Pleasant St., Gloucester

WHEN: through March 4

TICKETS: Free with museum admission. Call 978-283-0455 or visit www.capeannmuseum.org.

It was the home entertainment center of an earlier era. The piano, with a musical score sitting on the rack. A score that was decorated with a lithograph, adding a visual ornament to the printed music.

This simple arrangement gave rise to multiple occupations that provided artists with income — occupations that have since greatly diminished in financial importance. The music publisher. The piano builder. The composer. And the lithographer.

Making reproducible prints of a work of art — carving on stone, or some other transferable surface, and fabricating multiple copies of the same image — gave visual artists an affordable means to reach the general public.

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Lane did not exclusively contribute lithographs to musical scores, of course. Scores were just one of many ways that lithographs made it into the homes of art-lovers who could not possibly afford the original works of artists.

Panoramas of townscapes, as they were called, were popular, and Lane's lithographs of Gloucester, New Bedford, Boston, Millbury, Worcester, Lowell — and many other cities exhibited here — captured views of those towns that residents admired. Portraits were drawn, images of ships and historic scenes as well — the dramatic capture of the burning port of St. John in New Brunswick might be the most striking work in the exhibition.

Georgia Barnhill serves as guest curator for "Drawn from Nature & on Stone," and author of the extensive catalog that accompanies the exhibition. Scholars will be interested not only in the publication, but with the launch of the museum's online Fitz Henry Lane catalogue raisonné. The exhibition not only includes works from CAM's historic Lane collection, but loans from multiple historic and antiquarian societies, galleries, libraries and other museums.

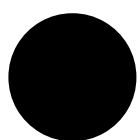
The small exhibition — a generous sampling of the approximately 65 lithographs Lane is thought to have created — with some original oil paintings, sits in the Cape Ann Gallery, just across the entryway from CAM's permanent Lane galleries. The joint exhibitions, along with the online resources, form a comprehensive tool for the appreciation and study of Lane's life and work.

The exhibition offers many engaging works, and also subtly reiterates the dedication Lane brought to his craft. Many written accounts of his life have enumerated his engagement with shipbuilders, sailors and dock-hands in working on his oil paintings — he knew every knot and detail on his ships. So to his dedication to print-making, detailed in this exhibition: Lane worked through every facet of printmaking, both the business aspects and the artistic ones, and acquired a true expertise in the craft.

Lithography exhibitions can be dreary affairs, with small, intensely detailed works requiring an exhaustive effort to be appreciated. Not so here. Beautifully illuminated, with extensive, comprehensive labeling that gives context and creates a coherent narrative about Lane's printmaking apprenticeship and development, "Drawn from Nature & on Stone" occupies the gallery colorfully and attractively.

"Drawn from Nature & on Stone: Lithographs of Fitz Henry Lane," runs through March 4 at the Cape Ann Museum. Call 978-283-0455 or visit www.capeannmuseum.org.

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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