

ART REVIEW: Cape Ann Museum features ‘Charles Movalli: Cape Ann & Beyond’

Saturday

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We have important painters from Cape Ann. We also have essential painters from Cape Ann. Like Charles Movalli. The longtime teacher, scholar and above all, artist, who passed away last year, has a exhibition of works on view through May 21 at the Cape Ann Museum. "Charles Movalli: Cape Ann & Beyond" is a show you do not want to miss.

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

If you go...

WHAT: Charles Movalli: Cape Ann & Beyond

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

WHEN: through May 21

TICKETS: Free with museum admission. Visit www.capeannmuseum.org or call 978-283-0455.

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Like Charles Movalli. The longtime teacher, scholar and above all, artist, who passed away last year, has a exhibition of works on view through May 21 at the Cape Ann Museum. "Charles Movalli: Cape Ann & Beyond" is a show you do not want to miss.

In fact, when you're in the gallery, you won't want to leave. About four dozen substantial works, oil or acrylic on canvas, linen and board, this exhibition contains paintings that extend geographically beyond Movalli's long exploration of Cape Ann perspectives.

Yes, of course, Smith Cove is represented. Pigeon Cove. The Back Shore. The railways on Rocky Neck. But also Monhegan and Wicasset, Maine. And farther afield, Venice, Puerto Vallarta, Honfleur, Banff.

Geographically far-ranging, but always on the water, and mostly on the docks.

Just considering Movalli a marine artist would be short-sighted though. As with any great artist, those are simply the details, the subject matter. The substance lies elsewhere.

There are no toss-aways in this exhibition, which brings together works from Movalli's widow Dale Ratcliff Movalli, from the museum's own collection, and from the many artists, collectors and friends who are fortunate enough to have acquired his paintings.

The galleries — with about four dozen paintings, a long video interview, a bust of Movalli by Dan Altshuler, and a replica of Movalli's plein-air set-up, complete with easel, palette and painter's box, thermos and gear — are perfectly set up for viewing.

These paintings need space. Long space, for appreciating — envying really. Up close you can see textures, shapes, areas of light, and, of course, check the labels. Go stand up close if you want to see what he did, how he worked.

But you have to be away from them to see them. Close up they look like different paintings.

Take a long view to appreciate Movalli's vision. Stand at the farthest part of the gallery, as far as possible from the paintings, and take in what Movalli imagined. See the shadows and light, the depth of field — an enormous facet in these works. But most importantly, stand back to see the whole, what Movalli must have imagined in his process.

There are not many early paintings here. Most date from this century, and give the impression that Movalli was never an artist in training, but was always sophisticated. A major retrospective seems a necessity, after tasting this exhibition.

Movalli's long career as a teacher and prolific writer — he contributed to "American Artist" magazine for decades, and wrote a number of books on technique and about other artists — fostered a deep respect among his peers, his students and his followers. His body of work — exemplified in this modest but striking sample — stands out among recent generations of Cape Ann's artists.

This is not an exhibition that shocks or provokes. In that way, Movalli proves — as essential artists do repeatedly — that profound work does not originate in controversial subject matter. It can of course. But it can also simply be the sensitive, trained and insightful appreciation of what we have around us every day.

There will be a number of gallery talks and special events during the course of "Charles Movalli: Cape Ann & Beyond," beginning this Saturday, March 11, at 2 p.m., when Dale Movalli speaks about her life with the artist. For a complete listing visit www.capeannmuseum.org or call 978-283-0455.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com

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