

## An encounter with Jackie O



Artist Steve Mills, whose view of Alley's General Store hangs on the wall.

GLOBE PHOTO BY TOM LANDERS

Steve Mills was painting recently at one of his favorite spots, Alley's General Store in Tisbury on Martha's Vineyard, when a famous dark-haired woman with a soft voice stopped in to admire his work.

"There are so many celebrities on the island that it's really no big thing when someone well-known goes by," the 24-year-old artist recalled several weeks later. "But I guess I should have recognized her right away. It's just that I was concentrating on the picture..."

The famous woman was nonplussed to go unrecognized, even if Tisbury is the only place in civilization where she, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, has to introduce herself.

The artist and Mrs. Onassis chatted. Mr. Mills extended an invitation for a private showing of his work, which has since developed a small but influential following, and they parted company, he for his painting, she for her new beach house at Gay Head.

Thus did fortune shine again on Steve Mills, young man wonder, who went to college to become a weatherman and ended up an artist whose patrons include retired opera singer Beverly Sills, author Vance Packard, actress Jeanne Cagney Morrison and some of the country's most successful painters who spend some or all of their lives on the Vineyard.

But fortune has been working overtime for Mr. Mills, beaming a steady pulse in his direction since his fateful decision to quit the University of Lowell and his dreams of meteorology forever.

"I don't think I really wanted to be a meteorologist," he said in an interview recently in Boston. "I know that now but at the time I thought I really wanted to be one."

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## A Vineyard encounter with Jackie O

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He quit school after two months, took a job in a factory, then arranged a summer job as a gardener on the Vineyard, where he had spent his boyhood.

"I had a day off one day and I went up to Menemsha to draw. And this guy went by and asked me to draw his boat. I got \$75 for three hours work, which was much better than I was doing gardening, so I took it up full time."

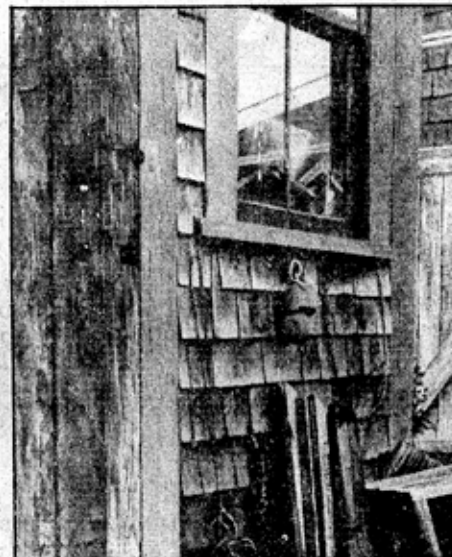
People describe the Mills style as trompe l'oeil, neo-realism or photo realism. He said people have recognized in his work the influences of Andrew Wyeth, Norman Rockwell and Richard Estes, "which is quite a nice compliment."

There are many more established artists associated with the Vineyard — Kib Bramhall, illustrator Donald Carrick, Stanley Murphy and Alan Whiting — but few artists have come out of the blocks with the lightning speed of Steve Mills.

The Vineyard Gazette reviewer wrote of Mr. Mills' work that "it is not the work of just another weekend painter but a stirring statement by a young man with Vineyard in his veins."

His show at the Red Barn Emporium at the beginning of the month was by all accounts a success and people are saying a star has been born.

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One of Steve Mills' paintings.