

SENKEKONTACKET SCENE BY ALISON SHAW.

Two Artists Show Island Views In Granary Gallery Exhibition

By NIS KILDEGAARD

There's plenty to enjoy, and plenty of food for thought, in the new show which opened Sunday at the Granary Gallery in West Tisbury.

Ever since the first tribesmen painted pictures of the hunt on cave walls, humans have interpreted their world through art. Then, just a century ago, came photography, and the debate it spawned still echoes: Can this technology which simply records the visible world fairly be called an art?

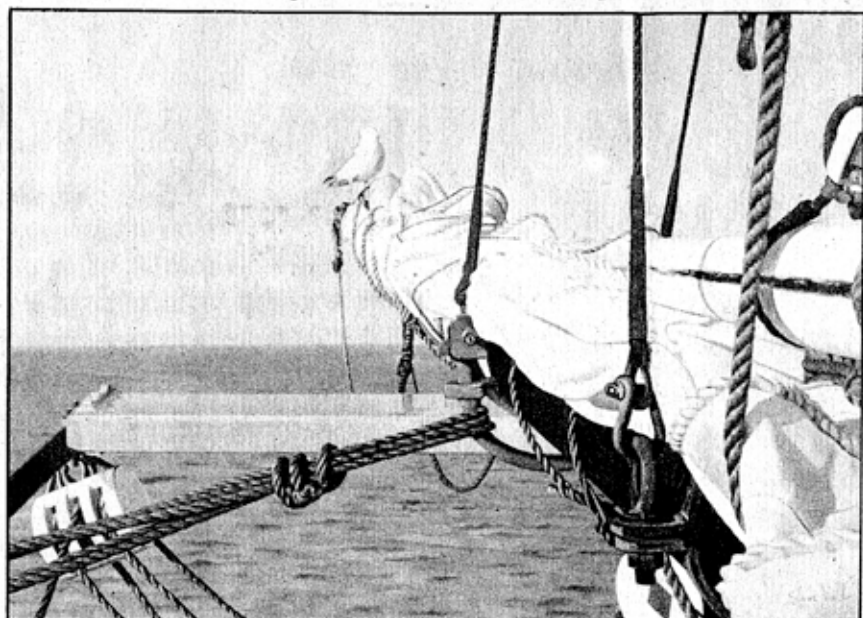
The dual exhibit of work by Steve Mills and Alison Shaw at the Granary Gallery raises this question again, but with a twist.

On the wall of Miss Shaw's roomful of photographs, elegant distillations, visual haikus which capture a highly personal vision of the Vineyard, is a gallery notice: "Even though a photograph has a red dot indicating that it has been sold, it is available for sale again." No such notice is posted with the stunningly

detailed photo-realistic paintings of Steve Mills, but arguably — and this is what is both remarkable and unsettling about his work — there could be.

Mr. Mills works in his studio, from photographs, in a meticulous process that results in large landscape paintings which have a striking photographic reality, their brushstrokes invisible at ranges beyond six or eight inches. It's a startling effect which Mr. Mills has perfected here, forthrightly beautiful, engaging to the eye — and clearly very popular with collectors. In the first half-hour of Sunday evening's opening, Mr. Mills sold paintings worth more than \$25,000.

But here's the provocative question: If two customers wanted to purchase one of Mr. Mills's oil paintings — say, Squibnocket Dunes, a breath-catching scene with every blade of beach grass faithfully recorded — couldn't Mr. Mills get his color slides out and paint it



SHENANDOAH: OIL BY STEVE MILLS.

again? And if he could, does that make the original any less an achievement, any less beautiful, any less a work of art?

Steve Mills has shown his work at the Granary Gallery since 1983, and his openings have become major events on the Vineyard summer arts calendar. He took the summer of 1988 off, declining to show on the Vineyard that year, and this year showed a powerful collection of paintings, including several which resulted from a week spent sailing aboard the Shenandoah.

We left Mr. Mills's beautiful show with a question for the future: What new wonders will this gifted young artist give us when he steps beyond his current studio regime? Given all the technical tools so firmly in his grasp, we can only be sure that the future holds great things for Steve Mills.

In her adjoining gray-paneled room at the Granary Gallery, the photographs of Alison Shaw provide a fascinating counterpoint to the paintings of Mr. Mills. Miss Shaw has never been content merely to record the world around her. She seizes and transforms it.

To watch Miss Shaw's summer shows through the years on the Vineyard has been to see the evolution of

the personal vision she brings to her images, and the steady growth in her power and control over the medium. An Alison Shaw photograph is now almost instantaneously recognizable; the game is to define that personal vision which grows stronger in her work each year.

Consider her photograph entitled *Senkekontacket*, 1988 — a strongly horizontal image, in high contrast, almost Oriental in quality, of a heron poised gracefully at pond's edge. Here are the ingredients of Alison Shaw's vision — the impulse to distill the image and distill again, selecting the part that signifies the whole and printing in high contrast to eliminate the details that distract. And as always, the image is infused with a graphic intelligence which knows, increasingly, what it wants, what it intends in the final print.

Miss Shaw has been photographing the Vineyard for more than a decade. She's working now in essences, evocative symbols, little bits of the Island that connect powerfully with the viewer and set the best of memories in motion.

The current show at the Granary Gallery is up for two weeks. Showing concurrently is a major exhibition of photography by Alfred Eisenstaedt.