

Art

Three Painters Interpret the Island

By Gerald R. Kelly

At the Granary Gallery, which has taken over more than half of the Red Barn Emporium, the newest work of three dissimilar artists has plenty of room to be displayed generously. The Sunday reception has crowded with the Vineyard gallery set. All three artists were at the party hosted by Brandy Wight and Bruce Blackwell.

First on view is the art of Steve Mills, a native who is intimate with the critical points of the Vineyard, from the ferry landings to the up-island cuts in the beach to let the pond water stream out to the ocean.

His paintings have a startling, arresting clarity to them as the artist goes a stride beyond realism, a reach toward perfectability. Even the scars in the road are touched by Mills' alchemy.

"As the Doors Close" is a scene that is part of all Vineyarders, the view from a ferryboat as the wake bubbles to a near boil in the wake. It was photographed in June, and Steve Mills began the painstaking creative task of transforming it into the very quintessence of the view. He said that when he showed it and other paintings in Florida, this was the favorite of those who had never been here. There is good reason, for this has a strange, just right, look of an island to it. It goes beyond just Vineyard Haven and the two boatline slips. It is an artist's distillation.

An unusual painting for Mr. Mills is "Off Season Fog," viewed from just off Coastwise Packet Company's dock and the Black Dog Restaurant with its familiar black dog on the swinging sign. For this, the artist forsakes his signature heightened clarity for a fine, slight mist that gently diffuses the color and lines. It is the kind of morning mist that hovers over the land for moments before



Lots Mailou Jones' watercolor "Reflections-Menemsha."

being cleared away by sunlight.

"The Cut at Chilmark" shows the instant, etched erosion of a pond opening, just after the fresh water has rinsed swiftly over the sand, creating small erosions, streams, and puddles of bright water with the slight surf just beyond and a great, imposing sky filled with feathered clouds.

Each of the paintings in this show is its own revelation of a wonderful aspect of the Vineyard. Mills is a distinctive, thoughtful artist who has a penetrating and illuminating vision of the Vineyard.

Teresa Lamb Seeley is an artist totally unlike Steve Mills, to the disparagement of neither. Her art grasps a viewer's imagination and sets off a small flare of wonderment. What is there that is so familiar and so different about these paintings in gouache? You study them a moment before you figure it out. They have the great gusto and pleasure that the best of folk art contains, the quick recognition of why the artist did this delightful work.

The paintings have the offbeat quality of primitive painting executed with the flawless technique of a trained artist, as though the sheer joy of subject had been retained in the soul of the artist.

She loves these scenes the way Grandma Moses must have loved little snow slope scenes, littered with kids on sleds and skates. But Terre Seeley has technique heaped on elan. It gives a fresh, rosy-cheeked enthusiasm to her art that is contagious.

"Off North Road" is a fall scene, with bright reds and browns in a crowded pattern in the background and a slightly stylized bare-branched tree in the foreground. The outdoorsy scene is viewed through a window with a grapevine wreath hanging in a corner.

Some of the paintings, such as "Wren," could have been embroidered with bright colored thread - they have a texture and delight to them that again is evocative of folk art. There are a few embroideries, in fact, hanging on this wall along with other folk art - carved ducks and blue porcelain and old-fashioned chairs painted black and decorated brightly.

Ms. Seeley is a Chilmarker by marriage, now a part of the Harris family. The Vineyard is as much a part of the paintings as they would be had she painted them with the white clay of Harris land near the brickworks and the colors of the cliffs along with all the

rich colors that appear here.

She has just finished a book to be published next spring, "The Black Dog," with totally irresistible paintings of a black pup growing up on the Vineyard Haven waterfront, in the home of Robert and Charlene Douglas and on their schooner, the Shenandoah. Ms. Seeley said she thinks of herself as an illustrator, which is no drawback, given the history of American art which flourished in magazines and books.

Lois Mailou Jones, at 87, is timeless and boundary-less. She has a great range of styles and subjects, only a part of which are shown in this fine exhibit. Her Vineyard scenes are enriched and brightened by her palette born of Haiti. The fine greens of trees and shrubs in Chilmark have the same deep, lively coloration as Haitian scenes. It is music that fuels the Haiti scene and, one imagines, the same music that enlivens her views of the Vineyard to which she has been coming for so many summers.

"Eventide at Quitsa" has a spirited little dock rambling out onto the pond, with a bright small fleet of boats tied up nearby. Her bright artist's vision brings out the continuity of the scenes. That which she finds striking in Haiti is also arresting on the Vineyard.