

Granary Gallery Features Life Magazine Photographers

By NIS KILDEGAARD

This week's show at the Granary Gallery in West Tisbury is all about photography. Even the paintings.

After years of featuring the work of the great photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt, the Granary needed to do something new in this first exhibition since the death of the photographer last August. What the gallery has done is truly a gift to the Island. The Granary has mounted an ambitious show of work by the original Dream Team of photographers who, using the forum of Life Magazine, together created the modern medium of photojournalism.

Alfred Eisenstaedt Remembered is the title of the show which fills the gallery space occupied last year by Bramhall & Dunn; the show features photos by Eiseie so famous, and so much-exhibited at the Granary, that if you don't recognize them you really haven't been paying attention. But this exhibition also includes the work of Mr. Eisenstaedt's early colleagues at Life — such luminaries as Carl Mydans, Hank Walker, George Silk and Margaret Bourke White. Together, this collection of work has all the impact of a good museum exhibition, documenting the unique power of the photograph to tell a human story.

Carl Mydans's work is featured in this show, and the photographer and his wife were on hand to greet the public at the Granary Gallery on Sunday evening. His work is filled with those magical moments when the photographer's craft surpasses itself and achieves the eloquence of art.

One of Mr. Mydans's pictures, entitled *Ministers Meeting, Fascist Rome, Italy, 1940*, depicts a Roman square filled with shiny black cars. The camera's high vantage point makes the limousines seem as menacing as so many beetles on a dinner plate. Another image records the landing of Gen. Douglas MacArthur at Luzon in the Philippines in 1945; the photographer has managed to get to the beach before the general, and catches him in historic mid-stride, ankle-deep in the Pacific surf. Yet another photograph is entitled *On the 6:25 from Grand Central to Stamford, Nov. 22, 1963* — it shows a train car full of business-suited commuters, their faces hidden behind outspread newspapers from which the huge black type positively shouts, **PRESIDENT SHOT DEAD**. The image of John F. Kennedy looks out eerily from a newspaper page



SUNFLOWERS: OIL ON LINEN BY STEVE MILLS.

in the foreground. These are haunting images, pictures that not only record our history but have become emblems for it.

One enthusiastic gallery visitor on Sunday stopped Chris Morse, the new owner of the Granary, and thanked him for putting on this exhibition. "This is amazing," the fellow said. "These are pictures I've only seen in books." Chris said he had watched parents taking their children through the show earlier in the day, telling them the stories behind each historic picture. Indeed, this is an exhibition that does full justice to the notion that a good picture is worth a thousand words.

Also featured at the Granary Gallery this week is painter Steve Mills, a perennial Island favorite whose translations of photographs into paintings seem to grow more vivid and more flaw-

less with the passing of each year.

You will look in vain for brushstrokes in Mr. Mills' paintings; each of his works is a hyper-detailed exercise in technical mastery. And this year, Mr. Mills is exploring the qualities of light in interesting new ways. Look at his *Sunflowers*, in which the back-lighting gives a glow to each golden blossom. Look at his *Ocean Park Shadows*, in which the glancing light of near-evening saturates the park with warm color and sends shadows careening. Look at his *First Light — First Boat*, arguably the most dramatic painting in this show. The horizon is lined in red, the sky shading into deep twilight blue. Quartz lamps on the harbor burn like electric suns, and the sky is reflected in the flat calm of the harbor waters. The hush before the day of traffic is palpable.

Amazing though they are, the paint-

ings of Steve Mills always strike us, in some sense, as answers to a question we don't remember asking. Look a second time at his *Sunflowers*, at the way the background is thrown into soft-focus. The artist must have taken that picture with the lens aperture wide-open, you say. But wait, this is a painting, not a photograph. To be as precise as we can, this is actually a painting of a photograph of a field of sunflowers. So when you look at the illustration that accompanies this review, you'll be looking at a photo of a painting of a photo. Does your head hurt yet? Perhaps it's supposed to.

In Carl Mydans's photograph from 1963, a trainload of commuters hold up newspaper pictures of the dead President, and somehow this haunting image drives home the force of a national tragedy. In the paintings of Steve Mills, we view images twice-removed from reality which somehow manage, with the force of their vividness and precision, to make us experience that reality as if for the very first time.