

The Vineyard Ferry's last journey immortalized by Mills

The residents of Martha's Vineyard lost an icon this past November. When their ferry, *Islander*, was retired from service after 55 years of bringing people to the island. For Steve Mills, who grew up in Martha's Vineyard, such a moment had to be memorialized on canvas in a way only he could. The result is a 36 x 60" intensely realistic canvas that shows the ferry leaving the dock in Woods Hole and heading to the Vineyard for its final voyage.

"I've painted the boat a dozen times over the years and it has been such a mainstay and workhorse on the island. I practically grew up on her,"

says Mills. "When you would see her coming around the bend on a stormy day, you knew you were home. The boat is such an icon of my childhood and thinking back just brings big, warm, fuzzy feelings. It's very sad to see it go."

Mills painting of the *Islander* has sparked a whole series of events. Granary Gallery owner Chris Morse decided to hold a special unveiling for the new piece and has also invited 40 other Vineyard artists to do their own version of the *Islander's* last voyage in early December 2006.

"The funny thing is that there is nothing wrong with the boat. It's just

old," says Mills. "It's completely solid. That's why I wanted to do it on such a big canvas. People see it and say, 'Oh my God.' It really shocks them."

This reaction is something that Morse has grown used to after showing Mills' work for the past 26 years in his Vineyard gallery. "Steve Mills paints with a clarity that humbles the most discerning viewer," says Morse. "Constantly driving to tighten his work, Steve's realism continues to amaze the viewer."

Besides the ferry paintings, Mills has been preoccupied with covering his canvases with small objects. His most recent exhibition at the

Top

Last Time, oil on linen, 36 x 60"

The artist says: Doing a large landscape with such tight detail is different for me.

Collectors from the Martha's Vineyard market would most likely appreciate this painting more, as this ferry, *Islander*, has been a major part of Vineyard life and is being retired after 55 years.

Bottom

Puzzling Times, oil on board, 46 x 60"

The artist says: This is the kind of painting people will actually try to find mistakes in.

The only thing different is that I used my wife's name as one of the clues. The title says it all—with the old beat up crossword puzzle book, the New York Times crossword puzzle, whether or not to use a pencil or pen, the text in the newspaper, which is referencing the war in Iraq—puzzling times.







▲ *The Tip*, oil on linen, 24 x 36"

The artist says: The play of light through the glass, over the money, onto the peeling paint, which gradually goes out of focus—all these textures juxtaposed to create a very interesting image.

▼ *Weathered*, oil on linen, 38 x 54"

The artist says: The light raking across the peeling paint was a real draw for me. Painting this large gave me the opportunity to explore the raised paint against the wood in great detail.





Challenge Me, oil on linen, 30 x 40"

The artist says: All of us have looked over a Scrabble board at some time in our life and it evokes an old memory.

Granary Gallery included images of corks, paint tubes, bottle caps and coins.

"I have always thought it was fun to really take a close look at things people normally take for granted," says Mills. "One of my first still life paintings was a wine jug completely full of pennies—I just filled the whole frame with coins. These things have a special life that people don't even look at. I want to fill the canvas from corner to corner with this subject matter. You could paint a lifetime in your backyard if you just look close enough."

Mills also enjoys painting both water and glass because the two offer highly reflective surfaces that completely break down into abstract elements when brought to such a large scale as he does in his paintings. And, unlike some Photorealist painters, Mills is always looking for different subjects to paint.

"It keeps me from being bored and lets my collectors see a whole range of styles," says Mills. "As far as the water and glass, they really have similar qualities. It's that magic of translucency that pulls people in. Things can look wet and transparent at the same time."

Mills prepares for painting in the same regimented

style as he paints. He says it is important to document not only how long each painting takes to finish, but also what paintings he is working on at different times of the year.

"I pretty much log in each day, sit at my easel and go to work. It's what I've been doing for years," says Mills. "It's important to maintain a certain discipline so I know how much time I have to meet my deadline. I have a log where I keep track of what I'm painting in 15-minute intervals, so I know how long I spent on each painting and historically what I was painting each day of each year. I do them one at a time and I can usually finish 12 a year." ●

Price Range Indicator

Our at-a-glance Price Range Indicator shows what you can expect to pay for this artist's work.

	Small	Medium	Large
1995	\$2,600	\$6,700	\$8,000
2000	\$3,600	\$7,600	\$21,200
2006	\$4,000-\$15,000	\$15,000-\$40,000	\$40,000-\$60,000