

Local Artist Finds Inspiration Right in His Backyard



Local artist Tom Swimm says he finds inspiration in New England's natural beauty. He's shown here at work, alongside two of his paintings, "Blues in the Bay" and "Serene Snowfall."

By Anne Lilburn

When he was living in California, local artist Tom Swimm built a career out of painting coastal scenes: boats, seascapes, reflections off the water, piers at sunset. He said he often traveled to Italy, where he painted along similar themes, with boats in harbors and cafes at dusk.

The places those paintings reference seem a far cry from his new home in East Hampton, but just like when his studio was in Laguna Beach, Calif., and he walked to the beach, Swimm says he doesn't have to go far to find inspiration. He said that, since moving here in 2021, he finds scenes to paint "right around my house."

"Literally the first year I was here," he said, "when the [first] snow fell, we had a beautiful snowfall. I did a painting of our backyard."

Swimm said his years of specializing in water scenes have prepared him well for his new climate.

"Snow is fun to paint, actually," he said, "because it's a lot like water, in that there's a lot of color in it. It's not just white, you know." He added that he liked "the shadows and the way

the shadows play on the snow."

This isn't the first time Swimm, who is now in his 70s, has spent a lot of time in the snow. He grew up in New York, outside of Albany, and later began a career in advertising, doing art direction for print advertisements, which led to his move to California in 1982. It was there that he began his career as a painter, eventually leaving advertising behind to devote all his time to his painting career.

"I don't have any formal art training. I basically taught myself to paint over the years just by experimenting," Swimm said. "I was influenced by artists like Van Gogh and Hopper. It was always my dream to be a fine artist and be in art galleries."

Over the years, Swimm said he built up a successful business. His artwork was in galleries, he took regular trips to Europe for scenic inspiration, and he made appearances at an annual festival which he said was always successful.

He and his wife, Rosemary, had always loved New England, and they had talked about leaving California before, but it wasn't until the COVID-19 pandemic that they seriously considered the move. Swimm said he realized that he could still work as an artist anywhere, and the east coast was appealing, in part because his son had settled in New York City, where he works as an actor.

In fact, it's his son's career that first led Swimm and his wife to this part of Connecticut. His son was appearing at a show at the Goodspeed Opera House and they went to see him perform.

"We came out here for a month," said Swimm,

"and we spent time in New England, and we really just fell in love with this area in Connecticut specifically, and we were down in Essex, and we had lunch one day, and I just said to my wife, 'That's it. Let's do it. Let's just move here to Connecticut.' She said, 'Okay,' she was all ready for it."

Since moving here in 2021, Swimm said he's enjoyed the change of scenery and the chance to continue to explore new ground even in his 70s.

"Art is geographical when it comes to art galleries and selling artwork," he said. "You know, when I was in Laguna Beach, I wouldn't be painting snow scenes in barns because nobody's going to buy a snow scene or a barn painting in California."

Here, he said, when he goes to a gallery, "people are painting snow scenes, and they're painting cardinals and birds and squirrels and things that are indicative of the New England landscape and they're painting fall color scenes."

Swimm himself said he finds fall inspiring, and loves painting covered bridges.

Swimm said he's also found plenty of opportunities nearby to continue his focus on coastal work. He said he recently spent time in Cape Cod, where he found himself drawn to the many lighthouses, and for the past couple years, he has done an artist's residency program at Mystic Seaport through the American Society of Marine Artists, where he spent two weeks in a studio painting and showing his work to passing tourists.

"[This area] has been very inspiring for me," said Swimm. "We absolutely love it here."

Those looking to see Swimm's artwork in person can find him at two upcoming exhibits. He will be at the Lyme Art Association's "First Impressions" show from Jan. 9 through Feb. 20 in Old Lyme, and also at the Thames River Gallery in New London in its current "Impressionism Then and Now" exhibit.

Bingo at VFW Post

All are invited to bingo every Thursday at VFW Cobra Post 5095, located at 20 North Maple St. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Early Bird Bonanza will be at 6:20 p.m., with regular game play starting at 6:30 p.m. There will be a progressive jackpot and cash prizes.

The Auxiliary Café will be open before games and during intermission, offering hot snacks.

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