

PAUL ARSENAULT (Naples, Florida; Hana, Hawaii; Nantucket, Massachusetts)



Naples artist Paul Arsenault will have works on display through Feb. 22 at the Collier County Depot Museum, and he recently finished an autobiography that contains many illustrations of his work. He is celebrating 40 years in Naples.

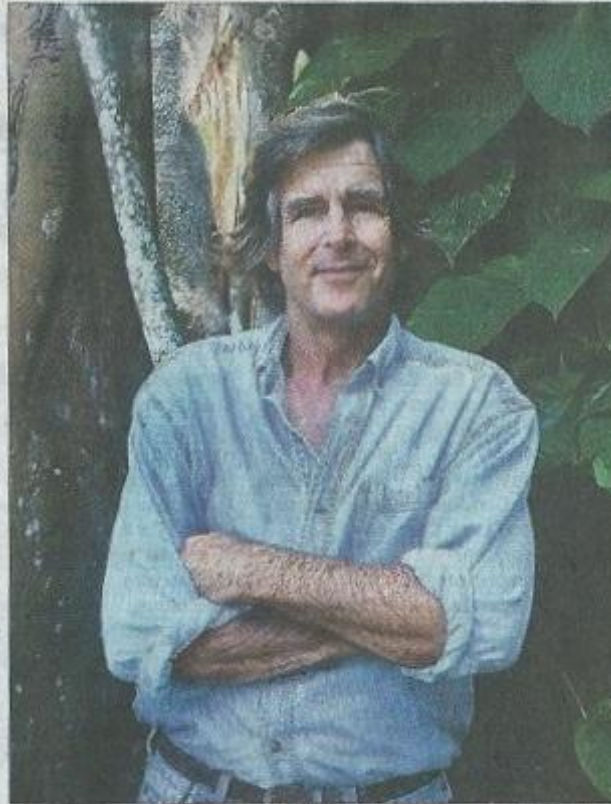
40-year retrospective of Paul Arsenault shows his wide travels and love of Old Naples

By Donald Miller
Daily News Correspondent

Paul Arsenault is the quintessential Neapolitan landscape painter. You can see this in his current exhibition at the Collier County Depot Museum through Feb. 22: a random sampling of 31 canvasses and watercolors honoring his 40-year career here. Arsenault is master of a particular Naples look.

But that is only a large part of who he is. There are other far-flung places he has captured in his bright, personal style coming from traditional American impressionism.

Born in Montreal, Arsenault, 61, is also strongly identified with preserving natural and man-made beauty here, including retention of the lily pond at Caribbean Gardens, the Naples



zoo. At the moment, he is apprehensive about the city losing green space at densely designed Naples Square downtown.

Arsenault also paints in Hana on the verdant eastern coast of Maui, Hawaii, where he and his wife, Eileen, own a second home. He also paints on another island, Nantucket, where his parents honeymooned before moving to the Boston coastal community of Hingham where he grew up.

As if to reinforce his preferences, the artist lists Naples, Nan-

tucket and Maui in that order on his business card. It also notes he produces paintings, murals and mosaics.

A SEA-LOVING HERITAGE

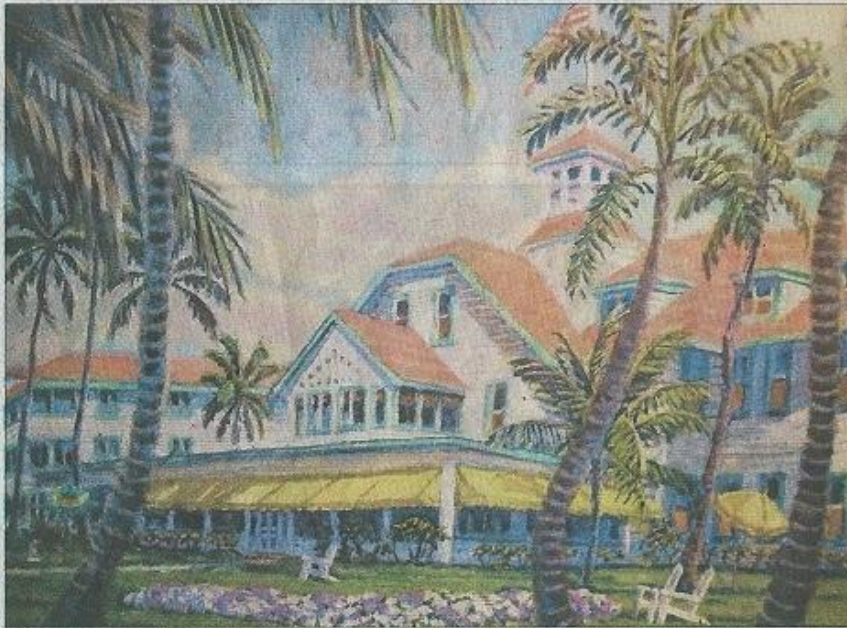
Nantucket has stimulated his lifelong love of capturing ships moored in harbors, whether in Naples or on trips to the



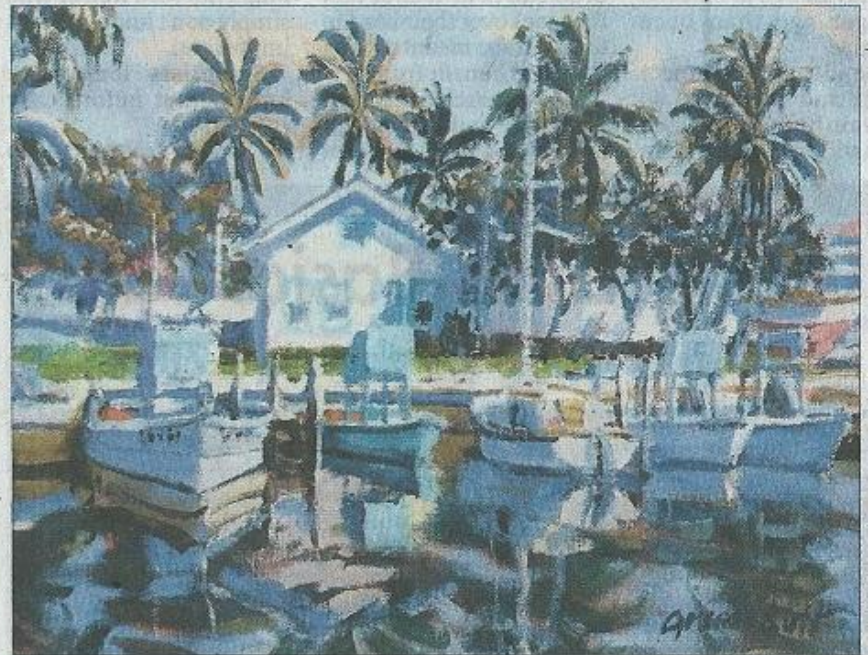
"Haldeman Creek Fish House"



"The Naples Pier"



"The Naples Hotel," a look at a long-gone landmark that was two blocks east of the Naples Pier



"Turner Marina"

ALL ARTWORK BY PAUL ARSENAULT

Caribbean, South Seas, Vietnam and other exotic Asian places. He was motivated to travel widely, he says, because of man-driven encroachments altering these natural areas.

As a result of his recent travel to the Near East, Arsenault has almost completed a series of oils depicting his first impressions of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates and the Arab Sultanate of Oman. He has painted their new and old markets and domes, turquoise waters, creamy sand dunes and jagged mountains, commissioned by a friend in Dubai who wanted the impressions of an artist seeing them for the first time.

The artist tells his life story in his recently self-published, handsome 156-page autobiography, "Paul Arsenault: My Journey as a Painter," containing many color illustrations of his work. Choosing art as a career, he studied painting at the Art Institute of Boston and became, at 21, a seaman on a 90-foot ship equipped for ecological water testing off Florida.

He quit that job in Fort Pierce, where he learned more about painting from Albert "Bean" Backus, the "Monet of the Everglades." Backus also taught black artists who became known as the "Florida Highwaymen," selling their paintings along the roads.

Arsenault's moment of epiphany was his first visit to Corkscrew Sanctuary. Its ancient cypresses convinced him to settle here near the Gulf. He also traveled around the United States and, for a brief time, rode the rails as a hobo, all the while exhibiting gumption with little hard cash in hand. These early travels kindled his need to explore and paint exotic places.

MAKING A HOME

He wed Eileen Arsenault, originally of Alexandria, La., here in 1965, and has worked fulltime to become a popular art-

IF YOU GO

What: 40-year retrospective of works by Paul Arsenault, Naples realist painter

Where: Collier County Depot Museum, Fifth Avenue South

When: Monday-Friday 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturday 9 a.m.-4 p.m. through Feb. 22, 2014

Admission: Free

ist. Eileen, a longtime board member of the Audubon Society, oversees the Arsenault Gallery, 764 12th Ave. S. near the city dock.

Together they contribute their time, gallery space and donations to various ecological and other natural causes. They also recently completed payments on a 1918 white-painted house with two cottages in Old Naples. Since a banyan tree dominates the property, Arsenault calls this hideaway near the Naples Pier the "Banyan Arts Social and Pleasure Club."

In his Depot show, Arsenault's pours his talents into Naples' past and present. The history of Naples is a favorite subject, but area beaches, cottages and quaint Old Naples byways are as well. With oil paint or watercolor, he quickly applies his battery of techniques and paint strokes to capture the effects of subtropical light.

CORNERING MOODS

Arsenault's loosely-done style often appears more vivid than reality, because he chooses simplified forms and strong colors as well as cool whites and blues. These display more of his seemingly effortless brushwork than trying for hard edges.

In a few brush strokes Arsenault captures an array of effects, from light dappling trees and ponds to making old cottages, stores and cabins suddenly appear refreshed. He offers moods and overall impressions rather than minute detail and paints impressions of flowers rather than identifying them by form.

This is a particularly productive period, Arsenault says. His studio assistant is busy assembling a room full of finished works.

The Arsenault Gallery contains many of his iconic works.

Arsenault makes no excursions into other styles; he has his own traditional vision of what he wants in his work. His paint application in "Seminole Village" in the Depot show is, however, drier in this recreated tableau than his more identifiable juicy look. In the latter paintings repeated slashes of green — his favorite color — become palm trees and their fronds simplified forms easily identified with his swift technique.

Among other works on exhibit, "Cottages by the Pier" in brilliant yellow and white brings a sharp sense of a day's brilliant sunlight. In a similar way, "Carambas, Marco Island," catches the last days of a rustic white-painted fishery. "Trackside," the largest painting, is a close-up impression of the Depot Museum's trains outdoors enlivened by the overhead arch of its Spanish roof.

It is well done as is Arsenault's recapturing of the "Old Naples Hotel" in white and rose. Demolished in the 1960s, the clapboard inn was a winter Xanadu for Northerners, Arsenault recalled.

In a watercolor study of "Fishing Boats, Aqualane," the artist brings soft colors and lets the white paper show through in a satisfying harmony of interlocking planes.

HAPPY AT WORK

One has the feeling that if Naples has a memorable site, Arsenault has painted it.

Saying he paints every day, Arsenault has to be a happy man to work as he does. Enter his home through a tall wooden gate. There in the front court you will find a small jungle dominated by his mosaic-based fountain as green bromeliads fill the rest of the space like a carpet.

It beats mowing, leaving him for other projects, like a hardworking week on Maui. This is an artist who keeps his paintings, his jungle and two brown cats close at hand.

Art critic Donald Miller lives in Naples. Reach him at miller88@embarqmail.com