



"Evening on Bradford Street," oil on canvas

'Vanishing History'

Plein air painter Robert Abele captures iconic buildings on the Cape

BY DEBRA LAWLESS

When painter Robert Abele was growing up, he worked in his family's general store in a two-story brick building with a vintage red-and-white neon sign spelling out the store's name.

Today Abele, 47, who has a degree in fine arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York, makes his living painting and teaching painting. Yet something of that old store, Gillard's, lingers in Abele and emerges in his paintings of what he dubs "a vanishing his-

tory of America's past." The Brewster General Store, The Academy Playhouse in Orleans, Dutra's Market in North Truro—such iconic buildings as these form the backbone of Abele's Cape Cod work.

"I'm drawn to looking at these places because I share a connection," says Abele. "Every artist is a big soup pot—we spend so much time working on our craft that we don't pay enough attention to the aesthetic inside of us. In the last two years, I've learned to listen to myself."



PAUL SCHULENBURG

View Near Coast Guard Station oil on canvas 24x30

ADDISONARTGALLERY

508.255.6200 addisonart.com 43 South Orleans Road, Orleans, Cape Cod, Massachusetts

Cape Cod has been a presence in Abele's life since his parents honeymooned in Provincetown. Abele was born nine months later in Bronxville, N.Y., and spent his childhood summers in Provincetown where he learned about the long tradition of Provincetown painters beginning with Charles Webster Hawthorne, who founded the Cape Cod School of Art in 1899. At 17, he painted his first plein air piece—Days' Cottages in Truro with Cape Cod Bay behind them. "That landscape has just been embedded in me," he says.

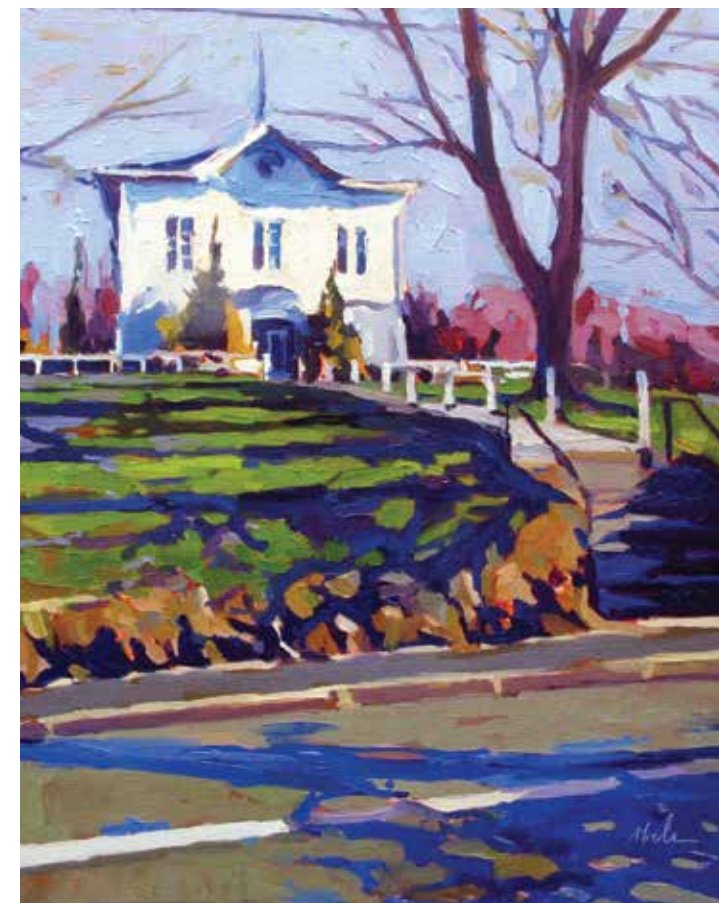
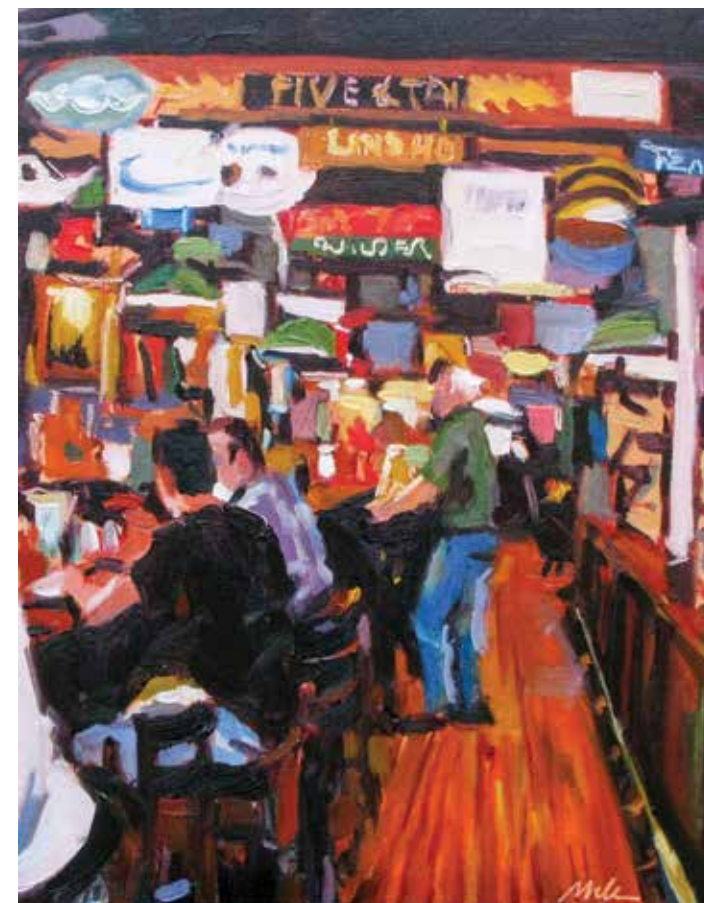
Today, Abele still prefers to paint outdoors in oils. Although at first he used this technique for practical reasons—he was working 60 hours a week in the family store and plein air paintings must be done quickly. When he saw the French landscape painter Camille Corot's studies "after nature," he says, "a lightbulb went off for me." Corot is known as a pioneer in painting outdoors in natural light, or plein air painting.

If you're lucky, on a summer morning or evening, you might find Abele painting at the side of a road, protected from the sun by an umbrella. Although Abele makes his craft look easy, plein air painting is challenging—aside from the perils caused by the wind blowing your easel, biting insects, stray dogs and curious onlookers who want to chat, the shadows are constantly on the move. "You're always tracking the sun," he says, "and you can't noodle around."

"Perspective, composition, color, value—everything is hitting you at once," he says. "Unless you have all your ducks in a row, it'll be a wipe-out." But the rewards are great for this kind of work—Abele's paintings are fresh and spontaneous.

Another influence on Abele is Edward Hopper, who also painted houses in Provincetown and Truro. But you would never confuse Abele with Hopper. Abele loves the "purple light" of the Cape, and it comes out in his paintings' jewel tones. Also, the often-colorful roads running by Abele's stores and houses are always

Robert Abele's oil paintings often focus on popular Cape Cod landmarks, such as his depiction of Brewster General Store in "Shade and Refreshments," at left, or his representation of the Land Ho! restaurant, below.



1) Alison Shaw, Steve Koppel and Bryant Austin 2) Kyle Dailey and Bryant Austin 3) Bryant Austin speaks with gallery visitors during a book signing session.

FOCUS GALLERY

Focus Gallery in Chatham held a book signing and talk with whale photographer Bryant Austin on June 11 and 12.

Gallery Events

Aug 5: The **Creative Arts Center** will host an opening reception for its annual Printmakers of Cape Cod exhibit. 4:30 - 6 p.m. 154 Crowell Road, Chatham, 508-945-3583, creativeartscenter.org

Aug 12: **Provincetown Art Association and Museum** will host an opening reception for a special 12x12 member exhibition featuring the works of emerging and established artists. 8 p.m. 460 Commercial St., Provincetown, 508-487-1750, paam.org

Aug 25: An opening reception will be held at **Woodruff's Art Center** for the encaustic wax exhibit "Textures of Nature." 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. One North Market St., Mashpee Commons, 508-477-5767, woodruffartcenter.com

Robert Abele's oil on canvas interpretation of the Orleans Playhouse, at left, adds new perspective to a familiar Cape Cod destination.

worth a second look. "I love roads, I love to put a lot of energy into my roads," says Abele. For the past two years, Abele has also been painting indoors, producing gorgeous interiors like "Boudoir" and "Morning Light."

"I always believe in never finishing a painting fully," he says. "I want you to see a lot of the underpainting, the brushstrokes. A painting has a life."

At gallery openings, Abele observes how people look at his paintings. "When they stop, that's when it hits me: I've done something right."

Robert Abele's works can be viewed at Addison Art Gallery, 43 South Orleans Road (Route 28), Orleans. For more information, call the gallery at 508-255-6200.