

PHOTO ESSAY

FIRST FAMILY

Six generations of the Vose family have been educating New England collectors since 1841.



Carey Vose, assistant director of Vose Galleries of Boston and Vose Contemporary Realism, in the gallery living room. Behind her is a painting by George Durrie.



You can say that the Vose Galleries of Boston knows a thing or two about contemporary realism based on the mere fact that when the gallery first opened its doors in 1841, the contemporary artists they carried are now those who grace museum walls throughout the world—artists like Courbet, Corot, Millet, Rousseau and Delacroix.

“We have started handling contemporary realism again now,” says Marcia Vose, who runs the gallery along with her husband Bill Vose, the fifth generation of the Vose family to work in the gallery. “But we actually handled contemporary work from 1841 to 1960 until realism was eclipsed by abstraction. But now, everything is drying up and traditional art is harder and harder to find. Even second tier 19th century work brings in the six figures. So we decided we could get more quality in the gallery by going after contemporary realism.”

Headed up by Marcia and Bill’s daughter Carey, the contemporary realism division of the gallery has been expanding exponentially over the past few years and now includes painting and sculpture by artists like Joel Babb, Liz Haywood-Sullivan, Elliot Offner, David Brega, Michael Theise, Robert Douglas Hunter, Carol Rowan and Virginia Precourt. Polly Thayer Starr, another contemporary Boston artist, just passed away last year at the age of 101 and is still represented by the gallery.

“Polly’s was the first show we had after reintroducing contemporary realism,” says Marcia. “She is very well known in Boston and, actually, she had shows with us as far back as 1932 and 1949. We went to the nursing home to visit her and she had just stashes of paintings that had never been seen. So we did five shows of her work and people just fell in love with it.”

Babb, who paints large panoramic scenes of Boston, is another contemporary artist who is having much success with the gallery.

“He is the most successful contemporary artist we have,” says Marcia. “We had the first show with him last spring. He never had a show with a gallery before because he was never comfortable with galleries, but he came in here, really liked the gallery and the show was a blockbuster.”

Above the mantle hangs *Sailing Off Rocky Coast* by Henry Wolcott Boss.



PHOTO BY PETER GREAVES

The gallery is the oldest family-owned art gallery in America. From left: Elizabeth, Carey, Abbot (Bill), and Marcia Vose.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON CONSTANT



The dining room is the perfect place to showcase a number of the gallery's master paintings.



The home-like interior of each of the gallery's floors is designed to make collectors feel at ease.



The first floor and entryway of the gallery was recently updated for the first time in 20 years.



The gallery includes five stories of display space for works by artists both living and deceased.



Carey Vose in front of paintings by Liz Haywood-Sullivan in the Vose Contemporary Realism division, which opened in 2001 and shares space with the main gallery.



PHOTO COURTESY OF VOSE GALLERIES

The gallery is located in a traditional Boston brownstone building on Newbury Street, the center of the city's art community.

It's hard to imagine anyone not liking the gallery once they step foot in the space and feel the buzz of activity in the air. Located on Boston's famous Newbury Street, in an old brownstone that dates back to the 1880s, the five stories of the gallery feels like a private home with furniture, fireplaces and antiques interspersed with the art on each level. In fact, Bill and his wife live on the top floor during the week and share their own private art collection with long time collectors and artists. Each gallery room has an intimate and personal feel, which only further drives home the fact that Vose Galleries is the oldest family-owned art gallery in the country.

"We've recently repainted the first floor and the dining room and re-landscaped for the first time in 40 years," says Bill. "Last year was the best year we had and the year before it was the same thing. And this is after the horrendous year of 2001. My parents bought this building in 1960 and paid \$39,000 for it, and everyone said they were overpaying for it. They spent a year and a half and another \$20,000 redoing it."

Bill credits their success to the family touch that he, his brother, his wife and his two daughters bring to the gallery along with their ability to draw a more national audience to the space.

"All of the Vose's have lived above the store except my grandfather, and he's the one who died in debt," says Bill. "When my parents purchased this building in 1960, this end of Newbury Street was very seedy, and our building was an old rooming house. Across the street was a red light district. But it has really changed over the years. Someone just told me that in the last 40 years, 250 galleries have come and gone on Newbury Street alone. That's how fast they come and go."

It's not just Boston that the Vose's have helped educate about art over the last nearly 150 years. The gallery boasts a national clientele which dates back to Bill's grandfather, Robert Vose, touring the country and helping museums across America purchase quality work.

"During the Depression and the second World War, my grandfather would take shows on the road for six months out

of the year to museums and other galleries," says Bill. "He would go by train and spent a lot of time in Los Angeles as well. But that's what really allowed him to keep the gallery. He developed a client base across the country, especially museums who saw him as this Easterner who brought culture to other cities. He would come in, advise a museum and build local patronage for those museums as well. He was very successful at this."

Bill worked in other industries out of college and then joined the family full time in 1966 when his father had an accident. Now, after over 40 years of business, Bill has brought his two daughters, Carey and Elizabeth, into the fold as well.

"Yes, they are involved now, the sixth generation," says Bill. "At first we made them go out and get the green behind their ears washed out so they spent some time working in retail. Now Carey has been with us for five years and Beth about the same. Both majored in studio art and art history, so they have the best backgrounds for this of any of the generations." ●