

# AEQAI

## Artists Robert Off and John Stobart Collaborate in Exhibit

By Laura A. Hobson

With a collaborative spirit, John Stobart, Robert Off and John A. Ruthven are exhibiting their recent works at Eisele Gallery of Fine Art located in Fairfax, Ohio from November 15 through December 29. All artists, they focus on different themes: John Stobart – maritime and historic riverfront scenes, Robert Off – miniature room boxes and John A. Ruthven – wildlife art.



The Eisele Gallery has curated an exciting exhibition and sale of miniature rooms created by Cincinnati miniature artist Robert Off in collaboration with acclaimed maritime artist John Stobart, whose sea scenes are also for sale. Two miniature rooms that Off created for the exhibit depict the interior of a traditional New England Whaling Museum with original Stobart paintings gracing the walls.



How did the collaboration occur? “I first met John Stobart when I was chair of the Art Committee at the University Club,” Off says. Stobart gave a talk there in 1998, which Off heard. “I have been a fan of his for a long time,” remarked Off particularly in Stobart’s use of light in the narrative paintings which Stobart creates. Formerly a real estate broker, Off saw Stobart at a November 2011 art opening held at Eisele Gallery and told him how much he admired his work.

Now a miniature room specialist, he showed John pictures of his boxes finished with reproduction paintings. “We must do something,” said Off. He invited Stobart to his studio, went to lunch and a partnership was born. “Have you ever thought about a collaboration?” Off asked Stobart. Initially, Stobart replied, “No.” Twenty minutes later, Stobart said, “I really want to do this. What do you have in mind?” They both went home and returned to meet together with a draft of plans.

From there developed a collaboration and friendship between Off and Stobart that resulted in miniature boxes complete with original paintings by Stobart. Stobart realized that the paintings had to be flatter, without a lot of detail, and the process took longer than he thought. “We both enjoyed working with each other,” said Off. “It was a happy artistic collaboration that centered around these boxes starting three years ago and ending this year. Life is too short to do the same thing over and over,” commented Off. “We get to work and meet with people you admire.” Sales are the validation you receive from the creation of art, he noted.

Another interconnection is Eisele’s representation of Stobart’s work after Closson’s closed in 2010. Born in England in 1929, Stobart concentrated on sea scenes, including Cincinnati riverfront vistas. Fourteen original Stobart paintings priced from \$26,000 to \$325,000 are in this show along with two boxes made by Off.

Entitled “Contemporary Whaling Museum” and “New England Whaling Museum,” both boxes sold for several thousands of dollars. The Kentucky Gateway Museum in Maysville bought the latter box and added it to the Kathleen Savage Browning Miniatures Collection. On the walls of the box are original Stobart paintings and scrimshaw. In the living room resides a captain’s chair. As a surprise, Stobart often hides a bottle in many of his paintings.

With a family house in Hyannisport, Massachusetts on Cape Cod, Off developed a love for the sea at an early age. Fascinated by the ocean, he crewed on various boats and took a year after college to sail all over the Atlantic. Thus, his interest in maritime themes, which eventually extended to art.



Also as a child, his father taught him to paint miniature soldiers, which prompted his interest in miniature art. Furthering his passion, Off collected contemporary art and served on the boards of the Contemporary Art Center and The Taft Museum.

Further inspired by a Mrs. James Thorne, an ardent collector of miniature rooms exhibited at the Chicago Art Institute, Off began creating rooms. “My artistic intent is spiritual, rather than materialistic: I create through space, composition and light.” The

scale of his rooms is 1 inch to 1 foot. The boxes are meant to slide into an existing bookcase and measure 12” x 24” x 12”. Each piece is fabricated, measured and drawn with each accessory – fireplaces, wallpaper, et al – purchased with their arrangement and placement designed by Off. “The controlling of contrast is at the heart of the artistry,” said Off.

In grammar school, Stobart developed an instinct for drawing by age six. “You’re never going to put bread on your table,” his father told him. He enrolled in Derby College of Art in 1946 where he achieved high honors and a county scholarship to London’s Royal Academy. Because the architecture along the river Thames fascinated him, he began to exhibit small landscapes painted in the countryside outside London. On a ship that visited Africa, he stopped in many ports and painted ships. John Constable, a landscape English painter (1776 – 1837), heavily influenced Stobart’s paintings.

Both Off and Stobart attribute some of their success to hard work and dedication. They have both put in the hours. Stobart finds an emotional lift to do miniature painting; it takes a lot of time and represents a challenge. He commented that miniatures are more in the European tradition of craftsmanship. With an obligation to produce works for a gallery, he said “You need to be inspired.” But, at the same time, he found the culture of art in jeopardy. “I fought to get where I am,” he said. Off remarked he loves working with his hands. Whereas in real estate, he worked

large deals, in art, he has a tactile response to his craft. Stobart claimed, "I am painting for posterity. Look what you've left behind."

They chose the fall to collaborate on the show because it is the time of year for gift purchasing. "You have to expose yourself," said Stobart by giving talks. With 12 to 15 boxes in circulation, Off said it takes him about three months to create a room; the same time it takes Stobart to create a painting. "Art should be fun and exciting," said Bob Off.

This is an unusual pairing of works at the Eisele Gallery, but worth the visit.

The logo for AEQAI, featuring the letters A, E, Q, A, and I in a large, dark red, serif font. The letters are closely spaced and have a classic, elegant appearance.

<http://aeqai.com/main/2013/12/artists-robert-off-and-john-stobart-collaborate-in-exhibit/>