

profile

By Molly Hitchings

Adam Thompson: Growing Into Art

When Adam Thompson began painting, it was supposed to be a summer pursuit. A young person's life usually has clear divides dictated by the school year, and all the more when their surroundings change: Adam's family comes to live each summer in the house his grandfather, the Reverend William Thompson, bought in Trinity Park in the 1950s. For a young man whose focus during the rest of the year was studying art history, summers were worlds unto themselves, slow-paced and sunlit, in which his own artistic development began.

As a teenager, he had clear favorites: American realists like Edward Hopper and Andrew Wyeth, and later Jackson Pollack, Robert Motherwell. Adam went to museums. At age 16, he met Charles Danielson, a local artist, who steered him toward oils and set him up with basic materials. Because it was summer, Adam picked up a brush.

"I really wanted to keep it as a summer thing," Adam recalls.

"Things were pretty busy in school and I thought I might clam up if there was too much pressure to paint — I don't do well if stress enters the equation."

His early attempts were not exactly discouraging. Artists have to be 16 to enter the juried All-Island Art Show; at 16, Adam entered a couple of drawings and won third prize. The following summer, with a scant year of painting under his belt, he won second prize for an oil. Since then he has been winning prizes and selling paintings. It's not a bad way to spend the summer.

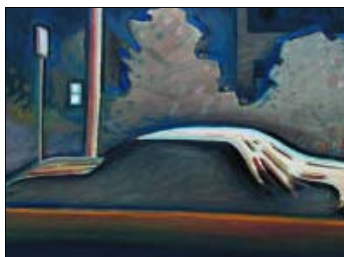
When Adam was 17 he was discovered by Holly Alaimo, owner of the Dragonfly Gallery in Oak Bluffs, who then was on the panel of judges. She has a good eye. She asked him for more stuff.

"I didn't really have any more paintings to show her," said Adam. "So I painted some more, and took them over."

His work at that time was mostly landscapes. "North Road," done in 1999, is a muscular painting with slashes for sky and earth and a pair of stalwart little trees. That early collection doesn't really look like Vineyard art — there are never boats, no cliffs, the ocean doesn't even exist. And there are no buildings, not even a stray road sign. His own neighborhood, the Campground, Adam ignored. "I had no interest in painting people at that point," he says.



"Out Back."



"Pennacook Avenue."

thief. There are no window boxes, no signs of care or of wear; just richly-colored scenes shrouded in shade.

"The mood tends to be sort of lonely and removed," says the artist, who refreshingly leans toward understatement.

This year, his Dragonfly show is based on photographic negatives, so the colors are reversed and the paintings relate to each other more than in past seasons. "I feel like I've gotten good at composition and color and balance," he says. "Now I'm trying to push it a little bit further and make a kind of project."

He is still a fan of Edward Hopper, and his 2003 collection often invokes that artist's pure forms and elegant composition. "He came at a time when abstract modernism had become ubiquitous, and his art stepped out of that. He had a poetic quality which was out of fashion at that point."

"Pennacook Avenue," 2003, is a desolate image of a parked car on a dark street. In the background, one window in a nearby house is lit. Questions leap to mind: Who is awake? Are they thinking of escape? Where might they go in that car? That is what Adam Thompson can do with a brush.

Holly Alaimo, who has shown Adam's work at her gallery for the last five summers, believes his is a mature style, which appeals to people who know their art. "Eighty per-



Adam Thompson at Dragonfly Gallery.

PHOTOS COURTESY/ADAM THOMPSON

cent of his paintings that sell are bought by other painters," she says.

Adam graduated from Yale this spring with a major in art history. Last year, he finally got around to taking some art classes.

This fall, after working through the season at the Field Gallery in West Tisbury, he plans to move to New York City with his girlfriend, Helen. In the Campground house, he paints in an attic bedroom, but apartments are expensive in the city, and there probably won't be a spare room to use as a studio. Adam is unconcerned: "Maybe I'll start doing smaller paintings, or something."

Adam Thompson's work will be shown at Dragonfly Gallery July 21 through Aug. 1. The artist reception is Saturday, July 24, from 4 to 7 pm. For more information, call 508-693-8877.

Molly Hitchings is a freelance writer whose articles frequently appear in The Martha's Vineyard Times and its supplements.



"Screen Door."