

# MICHAEL RICH



*Juniper* • Oil on canvas, 2019 • 44" x 54"

Artist Michael Rich's landscapes are expansive and expressive. Inspired by the vast variety of New England settings and seasons, Rich's work has been called "irascible," but that is a word he likes.

"When I think of something irascible, I think of something unruly, a little wild. At its best, my work has a bit of that," he says. "There's an untamed aspect to New England, it's never the same from minute to minute. As an artist, I try to capture that sense of changing light and the energetic forces of nature."

Rich's technique is as capricious as any New England day. His large paintings, oil on canvas, are mostly "improvised," he shares. To understand light and landscape, Rich does studies in other media, such

as watercolor, pastels, and mixed materials. He is a printmaker as well. However, once he begins a painting, Rich works without preconception, drawing on memories of particular places or points in time.

"It is a strange way to work, not knowing where a picture is going," he muses, adding he often doesn't plan precisely what a picture will be when it's finished. "I sink into the process, into colors and light that feel like a place to me, a place with some resonance. Something happens in a place, and it leaves something behind."

The ripples from past events that Rich paints connect to facets of his personal history and are shaped by images of growing up summering on Nantucket. Coming from a family of engineers and architects,

Rich headed for college planning to study architecture, never considering art as a career. At Rhode Island School of Design, however, he "fell in love, first with drawing, then painting." That passion changed the direction of his life. Today, in addition to his creative work, Rich teaches art at Roger Williams University.

In another nod to the irascibility of his art, Rich notes the influence of the "The Irascibles." An abstract expressionist himself, Rich says his work is informed by these artists, who included Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Willem de Kooning. These painters, and others, were leaders in the abstract expressionism of the 1940s and '50s. Called "The Irascibles," 18 artists signed a letter in 1950 to the president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, objecting to the museum's American Painting Today exhibition and boycotting the competition that accompanied it.

Rich currently has a painting, "*La Serenata*," in European Cultural Centre's Venice Biennial 2022. Rich is especially pleased to have his work there because of the event's reputation as a significant place of international cultural exchange. Deciding which painting he would submit, Rich took a less spontaneous approach than his usual technique. He first worked with curators to select a place in the Palazzo Bembo in Venice, for which he would specifically create the piece. He knew island life—familiar to him from Nantucket—was important to a work that would be shown in Venice, a city of islands.



*Shore Birds* • Oil on canvas, 2019 • 60" x 52"



*Misty* • Oil on paper, 2021 • 30" x 22"

"Having lived on an island, the precariousness of the weather, the light, the wind and sky and sea, living amongst all that—it's so much of what my work is about," he says.

Rich did works on paper and explored with watercolors. He studied John Singer Sargent's work in Venice and visited Monet's house and gardens, where Rich did a small drawing of its famous lily-filled pond. He painted near other bodies of water. When he finally began, "*La Serenata*" he says, "it happened fairly quickly."

With the exhibition coming in the wake of Italy's fierce battle with COVID, Rich wanted, "the work to be very exuberant, not sad, not overly dramatic. I wanted to celebrate what is most beautiful there."

Many of the images Rich made in preparation for "*La Serenata*" will be included in his exhibition at the Old Spouter Gallery on Nantucket. The exhibition, titled "Wanderlust," opens July 22 with an opening reception from 5 to 7 PM. More of his work can viewed all summer at the Old Spouter Gallery on Nantucket. 🏰  
~ Susanna Graham-Pye

**You can find Michael Rich online at [michael-rich.com](http://michael-rich.com).**

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