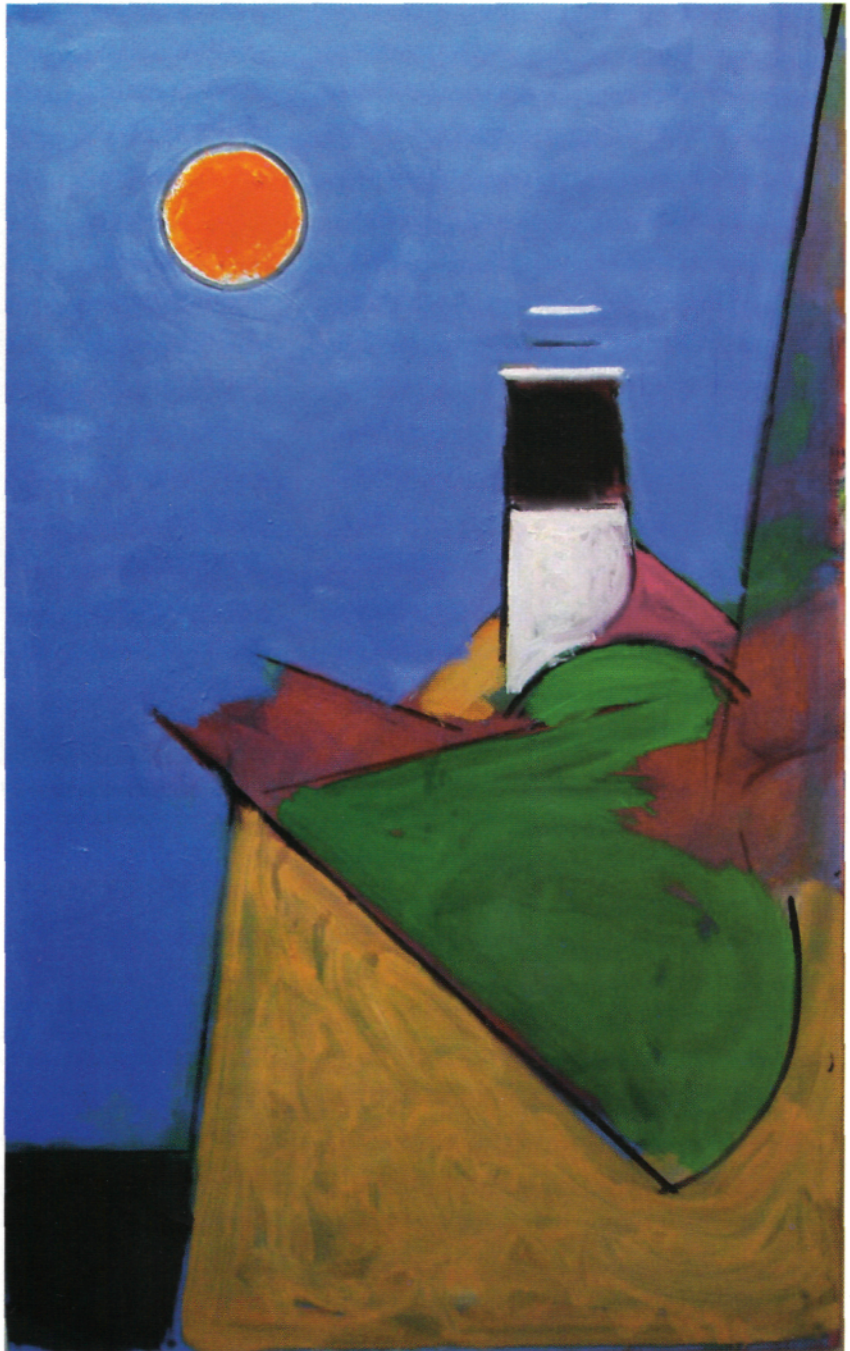


In Good Form

By Debbie Forman

When Paul Resika was a teenager in New York and studying art, he painted lighthouses from models his teacher kept around the studio. But after that, although he's painted landscapes and his famous piers, boats and cottages, the lighthouse didn't appear again in his work until recently – sixty-five years later.

It's odd, he says, referring to rediscovering the lighthouse image after so many years. But he adds: "Piers and boats and lighthouses are forms you can do something with. You do what you can do to get you to work – to find the form."



Paul Resika's "Headland Lighthouse" is part of the exhibition of his paintings at the Berta Walker Gallery in Provincetown.

Paul Resika's paintings take shape
IN COLOR

Resika is sitting at the dining room table of his century-old stucco home in Truro, where he and his wife, Blair, spend the summer season. The house with its red roof feels more like Italy or Provence until you take in the view of Pilgrim Lake, and in the distance, the Days cottages and the Provincetown Monument.

Then you know where you are. This has been the couple's home the last twenty years when they're not in Manhattan. And it is on the Cape where Resika has been inspired to paint those piers, boats and cottages – and now lighthouses – which float in a sea of sparkling color.

An exhibition of his lighthouses runs August 1-17 at the Berta Walker Gallery in Provincetown.

But this day – a misty and chilly afternoon in June – Resika, a tall, rugged man with a crop of white curly hair, a trim beard and an intense gaze, is surrounded by his paintings of flowers that hang in his dining room. Although in photographs, Resika looks formidable – stern, even – today he is warm and outgoing

The walls of his living room are covered with some of his best-known paintings – those brilliant boats and cottages. The staircase to the second floor, where some of his earlier works are hung, puts you in a fishbowl: His paintings of fish line the walls.

Although recognized for his lush colors, Resika also claims the importance of the basic shapes of his subjects, which he pares down to the simplest geometric forms – neat little houses in profile and swishes of color that define his boats. His paintings are just a suggestion of a scene, but it is enough to spark a memory, evoke a mood or illuminate a dream.

Drinking in Resika's colors, you figure he had to have studied with Hans Hofmann. And, of course, he did, while still a teenager in 1946

and '47, in New York and Provincetown. But, he says, Hofmann taught in black and white, with charcoal drawing. His students worked from a model or still life. A lot of what he conveyed in his classes was about volume. Although Resika is often referred to as a master with color, he says, he didn't start out that way. "I became a colorist. Color is my thing in the last twenty or so years."

Hofmann is well known for his expressionistic colors, which he learned from Matisse and the

Fauves when he was in Paris in the early years of the 20th century. He also knew the Cubists, and when he came to America, he carried European modernism with him. Hofmann brought together in his own work these two concepts – expressionistic color and the essence of geometric form – which were considered opposing forces by Picasso and Matisse, who had a long-standing rivalry.

You see this same merging of volume and inventive color in Resika's work. But his path to that point through more than six decades wasn't a straight one. His early work was abstract, and he had quick success with shows in New York before he was out

of his teens. "I was a hip kid and knew a lot of painters and poets," he says.

He was barely twenty when he and some of his artist friends began to question abstraction. He laughs. "Who were we to question it? We were just kids. It was presumptuous. We were not museum rats." But they did go to the Museum of Modern Art. "That was our place," he says. He credits an exhibition of the work of Pierre Bonnard at that museum with opening their eyes to realism. The show "had a big affect on us," he says.

In 1950, Resika went to Europe – Paris,



Paul Resika pares down his images to essential forms with brilliant colors.

Photo by Blair Resika

Rome and Venice. He settled in Venice where he studied the old masters, and his work followed those traditions. To show the progression of the works, Blair Resika brings in a laptop, which holds more than 2,800 images. She clicks to his abstractions from the late '40s, then onto his venture into realism with dark and muted colors from his years in Italy. And finally those blooming piers and boats.

When he returned to America in the mid-'50s, he began painting outdoors and saw the light, which has intrigued him ever since. Abstract Expressionism was in full swing and Pop would soon take over, but Resika persisted in doing his own thing, mostly subtly shaded and fluid landscapes that show the influence of 19th-century painters like Corot, and, Resika says, done "in the school of (Edwin) Dickinson."

In the 1980s, Resika started simplifying, paring down his objects to archetypal emblems. He painted his series of "Provincetown Piers" – simple structures of the buildings on Mac-

**Paul Resika
is inspired by
familiar
motifs –
piers, boats
and light-
houses –
which he
explores
with gusto.**

Millan Wharf, boats and sometimes a mast breaking the scene. His buildings are constructed of flat planes and angled roofs. His brushwork is adventurous and expressionistic, gently picking up some of the gestures of the Abstract Expressionists. Skies are awash in squiggles of sunset colors and the bay is various shades of blue. His colors have brightened. He uses the pier motif again and again. Sometimes his objects are in shadow. Other times they are outlined. On other occasions, the work is more fluid, and the shapes are simply brushes of color.

As he continued his pier series into the '90s, the colors become more brilliant, his brushwork more animated. Then in the late '90s, he began his "Vessels" paintings, with clusters of little boats, often against a background of a single sweep of color. The forms, which are made up of a shorthand of strokes, sometimes verge on abstraction. A fascinating duality is created when he paints watery reflections of his boats. He mostly loses the horizon and the

The lighthouse in Resika's "Blue Lighthouse" seems afloat in a sea of blue.



"The Cloud" is a loosely painted image that evokes a serene mood.



objects float in a sea of orange, which catches fire and blazes across the painting. Or his boats seem caught in a fog of blue or embedded in a piercing yellow sunlight.

But now he is done with vessels and piers and cottages. "I stopped painting (them) when I ran out of the pleasure of doing it," he says.

Resika has had numerous shows in galleries from New York to San Francisco and he is in the collections of major museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C.

A short walk from his house is his light-filled studio, a converted garage where he has installed a large window. Resika is working on a painting from another series, inspired by the woods of Maine. Sitting nobly on an easel, the painting has pointed rocklike shapes, a mountainous form and two tree trunks, one thick and imposing, the other a spindly line, like one of the masts in his "Vessels" series. On the walls of the studio are tacked images by other artists. And there are dozens of notebooks and brushes – and two guitars. He doesn't play, he says, but some day he'd like to paint one. "I like the idea of an obvious motif," he says

Resika is committed to motifs – whether flowers, piers, boats or figures on a beach – which he explores until there is no more to discover. And then he finds another icon.

Now he is onto lighthouses, coming full circle back to the image he painted in his youth at the instruction of his teacher. Of course, these are different from those early ones, but not so different from his vessels and piers.

"Blue Lighthouse" has a white lighthouse that is sequestered at the bottom corner. A moon looks down on it, and a rig from a boat breaks the vast space of blue. "The Candle" is a lighthouse against an orange sky and among jagged green and purple pyramid forms. Are they dunes or rocks?

"The Cloud" is awash in blue with a

swish of the brush that makes a picturesque cloud. There's a lighthouse and next to it, Resika's familiar house. "Headland Lighthouse" spills into the abstract. The lighthouse is apparent but it sits on a precipice among angular forms and circular shapes. So much compelling color, yet basic forms structure the painting.

Resika paints every day from afternoon to evening. "I paint all the time. That's what I do. It's all I want to do," he says. And then: "If you love to paint and you can paint, it's marvelous. And if you can make a living at it - all the better." ♦

Thinking of going?

What: Paul Resika paintings

When: August 1-17

Where: Berta Walker Gallery, 208 Bradford Street, Provincetown

Contact: 508-487-6411; www.bertawalker.com



The angular forms in "The Candle" add a dynamic rhythm to the composition.