

sam barber

PAINTER



PHOTO BY ERIKA WASTROM

BY JOHN GRENIER-FERRIS

Sam Barber, an American Impressionist painter and sculptor who lives in Hyannisport, seems to be a modern-day personification of an Impressionist—he loves life, has a deep, almost romantic appreciation for nature, and has an Impressionist's instinctive understanding of light, color, and texture. Barber brings to mind the image of Monet, sans beard. Striding up for an interview, his attire includes a periwinkle blue shirt, green neckerchief, long shorts, and yellow European sandals. He could be the subject of one of his own paintings. From underneath a Tilley's sun hat and from behind rose-

tinted glasses, he leads the way into his airy, art-filled house to have a drink, some food, and talk about art.

On a warm Sunday afternoon in late spring, Barber sits in his yard, right on the harbor, surrounded by all that is picturesque and genteel in Cape Cod's world. In other words, surrounded by the subject matter of all the great Impressionists: Gardens and sunshine; water and boats and sky.

Barber, now 65, arrived on the Cape in the mid-1960s to study at the Cape School of Art in Provincetown with Henry Hensche, who continued the French Impressionist



Stars and Stripes



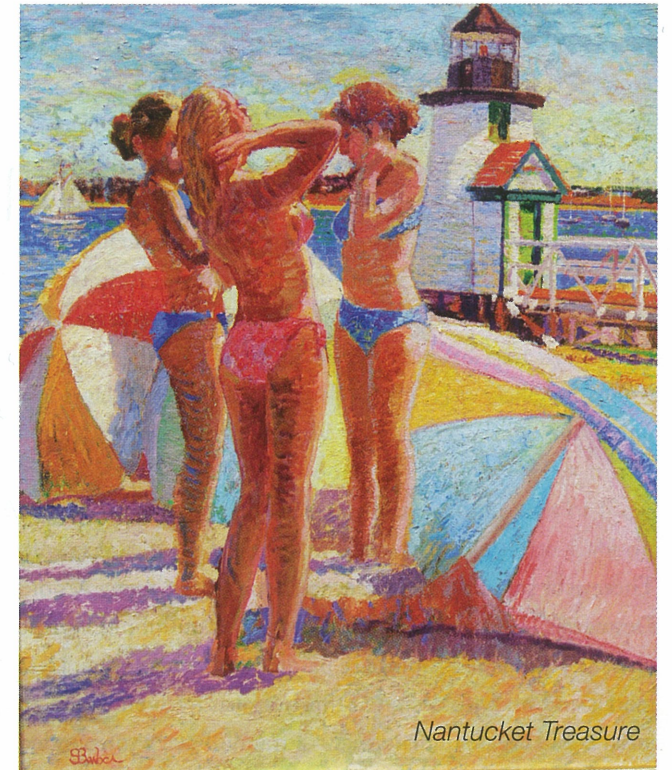
The White Hawk
Sailing Hyannisport

Claude Monet's tradition of seeing light as color. Barber returned to the Cape nine times to study, finally making the area his home. He has lived here for 42 years.

Barber believes he was born to paint, and that painting is something you should learn how to do before you even learn to draw. "You have to paint nice and freely with color," he says, adding that there is nothing else in this world he's qualified to do. "I was born with artistic talent, and I'm left-handed and an Aries," he explains in the earnest way he has of speaking. A nearly finished painting on an easel under a beach umbrella becomes the focus of conversation. The painting is a seascape of a regatta of Laser sailboats, heeling over in a stiff breeze. The sails take up three-quarters of the canvas, the paint is layered on with a palette knife, and simple strokes of color convey the hulls, the waves, and the backs of sailors hiking-out over the gunwales.

Barber explains that color, composition, and subject matter are what matter to him in a painting. He says that color is fifty percent of a successful painting, while composition and subject matter are relegated to twenty-five percent each. He smiles when it is noted that in the easel painting, he seems to have little interest in the actual boats—he just wants to paint those magnificent sails.

And indeed, this painting isn't going to be so much a pictorial record of a boat race as it is an opportunity for Barber to paint white sails that really aren't white. To Barber's eyes, they are filled with the light of that day at that particular hour—simply sails filled with color. Barber paints the sails



Nantucket Treasure

with iridescence, the kind you might see reflected in fish scales, or the inside of an oyster shell.

Barber is also an accomplished sculptor. Like Degas, he sculpts dancers and skaters—figures in graceful motion—but instead of bronze, Barber uses branches of wood he finds, or rather, "sees." The implied motion of a figure catches his eye, and he then takes the wood and bends it and adds pieces, imitating the way a dancer moves in the space, and adding color and sparkle for costume.

At the end of the interview, he points to one of his sculptures near the front gate. But it isn't the sculpture he wants to comment on. It is its shadow, cast against a wall, bathed in color in the afternoon light. In the end, Barber is first and foremost, an Impressionist.

Sam Barber's art may be seen in Tree's Place, Orleans, the Wally Findlay Galleries in New York, Palm Beach, and London, online at www.sambarber.com as well as in numerous museums and public buildings.



Daydreamer Nantucket