

## John Stobart maritime art is focus of Four Arts retrospective

### SOCIETY

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#### If you go

**What:** The Grandeur of America's Age of Sail: The Paintings of John Stobart

**Where:** The Society of the Four Arts

**When:** Through Feb. 28

**For more information:** 561-655-7226 or [www.fourarts.org](http://www.fourarts.org)

LINK TO THE PALM BEACH DAILY NEWS ARTICLE WITH IMAGES:

<http://www.palmbeachdailynews.com/news/content/news/2010/02/05/stobart020410.html>

In his father's eyes, the young John Stobart was a miserable disappointment. He was a failure at school, and it didn't seem as though he'd ever succeed in life. In desperation, his father enrolled him in a school that taught the only thing at which his son excelled — art.

"The instant I got there, did I take off!" said Stobart, now 80 and the subject of "The Grandeur of America's Age of Sail: The Paintings of John Stobart," a retrospective exhibition at The Society of the Four Arts.

Today, Stobart's historically accurate paintings of American ships and ports during the heyday of sail power in the 19th century command prices as high as \$500,000. Jack Warner, founder of the Westervelt-Warner Museum of American Art in Tuscaloosa, Ala., owns six of his paintings.

"He's one of my favorite artists," the collector said.

The exhibition was organized by the Four Arts and the artist's foundation.

With 60 oil paintings spanning six decades, it tracks Stobart's progress from dunce to "the Rembrandt of contemporary maritime painters."

He's called that by J. Russell Jinishian, author of *Bound for Blue Water*, the bible of contemporary marine art, who likens Stobart's signature chiaroscuro lighting to that of the famous Dutch painter.

The Four Arts rarely showcases work by living artists. But Stobart's work is exceptional, and maritime art is popular in Palm Beach, said Nancy Mato, executive vice president and curator.

Stobart's art is grounded in the traditional classical training he received at the Derby College of Arts and Crafts in his hometown of Derby, Great Britain, and the Royal Academy of Arts in London.

He's a staunch advocate of painting from life. Several of his landscapes painted on the spot are in the show. Artists develop their individuality by

interpreting what they see, he said. "The whole point is that you've got to get your personality in the painting," he said. "That's the nucleus of what fine art is about."

During his Royal Academy years, the artist discovered his facility for combining land-based and nautical architecture in paintings such as *King's Reach*, a portrayal of the Thames River waterfront.

Later, during a voyage to visit his father, who had moved to Zimbabwe, Stobart conceived a lucrative idea — portraying the pride of the merchant shipping fleet for their owners. That part of his career is represented in works such as *Elder Dempster Forcados*, which depicts the *Forcados* plying a bend in the Sapele River in Nigeria.

After a decade of profitable commissions, photography displaced painting as the shipping companies' medium of choice, and Stobart looked elsewhere for subjects.

He noticed that although the history of British ports and vessels was well documented in art, that of their American counterparts was not. In 1966, he made a cold call on Kennedy Galleries, a leading American art dealer in New York, carrying four rolled-up paintings of historic American sailing ships under his arm. The gallery gave him a show and launched his career.

Stobart's paintings are meticulously researched from sources such as period engravings and photographs and vessel plans.

Every painting tells a story. One 1884 scene slopes past men shoveling snow on a street in New Bedford, Mass., toward a whaling brig floating in the icy water. Another depicts ships abandoned in San Francisco's harbor when passengers took off for the gold fields.

Palm Beach resident Kenneth Richter, whose *Harbourtown by Moonlight* is in the exhibition, likes to get lost in the painting's "utterly serene feeling, with the beautiful moonlit harbor and the light reflecting off the water. You can sit and look at it and work your way into it with your mind."

These days Stobart, who lives in Fort Lauderdale and Westport, Mass., is in a position to offer artists the kind of help he would have appreciated when he was starting out. The Stobart Foundation provides financial aid to artists who show promise in painting directly from nature to help them make the transition from art school to the marketplace.