

Sea, sand influence Swedish painter

Thomas Henry celebrates 10th year on-island

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After three days in the Egyptian desert, Viktoria Hallenius, her sister and two friends arrived in a Bedouin camp, where they bathed in a hot spring and slept beneath a sky full of stars.

"Waking up the next morning, with the heat, you lose all your worries and really your sense of being part of something enormous is very strong," said Hallenius, a Swedish-born painter who lives part of the year in London and makes her solo U.S. debut tomorrow at the Thomas Henry Gallery on Centre Street.



Photo by Alicia Hull

Swedish-born artist Viktoria Hallenius credits the Scandinavian Skagen painters for influencing her work that's part of a new exhibit opening Friday at Thomas Henry Gallery on Centre Street.

Hallenius, 34, draws much of the inspiration for her paintings of sea, sand and sky from exotic locales like Egypt but this will be her first trip across the Atlantic.

"It's so new," she said

recently from London, where she was getting ready to ship her last four paintings to the Thomas Henry Gallery.

Her show is part of THOS. HENRY, PAGE 4E

gallery owner Paul Copson's 10th anniversary celebration.

"I think because of her stature as a painter it's nice to combine our 10th anniversary with an artist like her. She's young and she's got an incredible reputation," Copson said.

While sand, sea and sky dominate Hallenius' paintings on display at Thomas Henry, many also include suggestive figures that stand out from the landscape as if emerging from a seaside mist. Her figure painting themselves are fea-

tureless but still full of movement and emotion.

"Because I grew up by the sea I have a great love for the sea and being in nature," said Hallenius. "I think there's so much beauty around us and (my painting) is about nature and beauty and people, enjoying nature."

Along with Bedouins on horseback in the deserts of Egypt, Hallenius paints the beaches of Costa Rica, Spain and the Italian island of Sardinia. She's also created images from photographs of Nantucket, like the painting

titled "Afternoon Stroll at Wauwinet" with two slender behatted figures walking a crescent of harbor sand. This week since arriving on the island, she's been painting at beaches around the island.

Hallenius grew up on the west coast of Sweden and moved to England when she was a teenager. After studying at St. Andrew's University in Scotland and London's Chelsea College of Art, she returned to Sweden to paint and still lives there part of the year, she said. Despite being so young, she

has already been part of two dozen group and solo shows in London, Finland and Sweden.

Along with travel, she said she's influenced in general by the Impressionists but more specifically by the Scandinavian Skagen painters, an artists' colony that emerged in the late 1800s on a peninsula in northern Denmark. The area remains a popular destination for artists and tourists today.

In an article on Hallenius'

THOS. HENRY, PAGE 5E

website, art historian Pontus Erikers said as with many other Scandinavian artists, light plays a key role for Hallenius. "As such, it is natural that the prototypes are amongst the Skagen painters and the Impressionists," Erikers said.

Hallenius said each of her paintings starts as an image in her mind and then progresses on the canvas with increasing energy. "I sort of just attack the painting for the colors and hopefully see it grow," she said. "I'm very interested in paint itself."

Rather than fully cover each canvas in paint, Hallenius makes the canvas work, letting its coarse structure form the texture of

each painting. "I'm very careful not to overwork a painting," she said.

Copson said such spare use of paint is one of the things that made Hallenius' work stand out for him when he saw it for the first time at an art show in London.

"It just leapt out at me and it was absolutely right for Nantucket," Copson said.

Copson, who named his gallery after his two sons, said with so many paintings on the island of the ocean - including many pieces in his gallery - he would have shied away from Hallenius' work if it weren't so unusual.

"The subject matter is the

same but the style is completely Scandinavian and it's warm as well," he said recently, looking at paintings that had arrived for the show. "There's nobody painting like that."

Copson's focus since opening Thomas Henry Gallery 10 years ago has been bringing contemporary West of England artists to the island. Thomas Henry also has an office in Dorchester, England and shows its work regularly at Gallery 27 on London's famous Cork Street. "There are fantastic painters here but it's nice to have new blood," Copson said.

Copson's gallery window next to Weeds is distinctive

for its the large, singular seascapes by Robert Jones. Copson said 10 years ago when he was on his way to New York from London, Jones convinced him to try setting up shop on Nantucket instead. Copson said his show of Jones' work on the island sold out and he's been here ever since.

In 1999, he started showing the brilliant orange sunsets and minimalist skylines of London artist Tom Rickman. He also has Luke Morgan's studies of seagulls, unique mixed media pieces by Scottish painter and draftsman Malcolm Cheape, like "The Refit in Dry Dock" that mixes oil with collaged shipping plans. In addition

to Hallenius, new artists include Nantucket painter William McLane, whose ironic image of a cow titled "Contemplating the Jump" amuses viewers, and Colin Halliday, who painted a new series of atmospheric seascapes during the time of unsettled weather between April and June of this year.

"Essentially I'm just trying to add a new perspective by bringing fresh artists here," Copson said.

Thomas Henry Gallery, 14 Centre St. hosts a show of works by Scandinavian artist Viktoria Hallenius with an opening from 6-8 p.m. Friday Aug. 5. For more information call (508) 228-7679.