

Arts & Entertainment

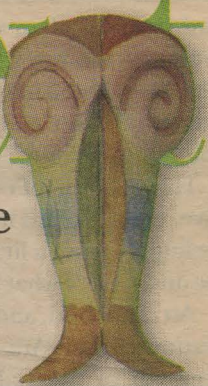
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The rising tide of change

Basile pays homage to the endangered fishermen of New England

By Sue Harrison
 BANNER STAFF

Spend five minutes with Rose Basile and you already know she's a woman not only with a lot of talent but plenty of ideas, opinions and a willingness to share them. Not for the faint-hearted or artspeak crowd, Basile is direct, clear and colorful, in fact, not unlike her paintings.

This Friday the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 460 Commercial St. will present "Fishermen: Alive and Endangered, the paintings of Rose Basile, 1993-2004." The show begins with a reception from 7 to 9 p.m. and continues through May 30. The exhibition then travels to the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum in New Bedford for July and August. The Provincetown show is curated by Julie Heller and the New Bedford show by Alfred Walker.

"This is my mourning and lament for the fishermen," Basile says of the 30 canvasses that make up the show. "Basically society crucifies fishermen." She cites ever-increasing regulations, increasing marine pollution and changing economics as vises that are squeezing the fishing industry from all sides.

On her crucifixion theme, she has a painting titled "The Three Marys" in which a larger-than-life fisherman is nailed spread-armed to the mast of a fishing boat. Instead of the three biblical Marys bearing witness there are three boats each named Mary and hooded fishermen on the dock.

Basile has been painting the fisherman series for over 10 years. Her work is not easily categorized. It's too sophisticated to be called naïve, too figurative to be abstract, too abstract to be realistic. It's as if she throws the rulebook out, opting to chose subjects like boats, dunes, fish, fishermen, whales and waves and turn each into a symbol used to tell a story. Fishermen are defined by their slickers and hooded sweatshirts, boats are all sharp angles of planks meeting at the prow and wavy masts, fish become the simplest expression of fish, little more than figure-eights with one end shaped like a tail. Her colors are an interest-

ing juxtaposition of vivid hues and muted tones — the chrome yellow slickers facing off against the soft-shadowed blues of water and sky.

Brushstrokes turn her skies into ethereal fog, slashing rain or dreamy swirls. The water breaks into waves that climb until they become part of the sky. In her paintings of solid land, dunes are anything but solid as they undulate and dance across the surface in repeating swaths of dun, greens and gold.

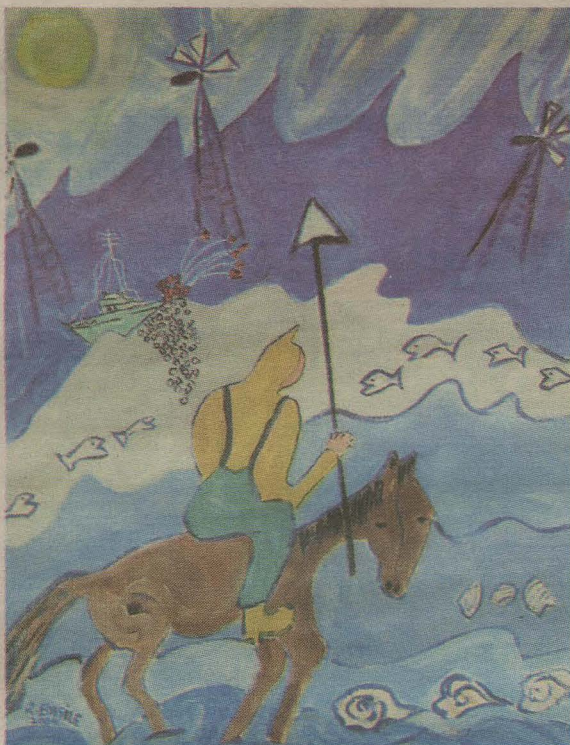
In other canvases fishermen sit in rows on benches watching their own changing fate. Fish swim improbably in circles around the edges of a canvas, whales flip their black tails in unison. Boats, each identical in shape, are lined up on shore in front of cookie cutter buildings whose doors look like the gaping mouths in an Edvard Munch painting.

It all comes together in what looks almost haphazard but is not. Basile starts with a concept



PHOTO SUE HARRISON

Rose Basile with her oil painting "Three Marys."



"Don Quixote of Nantucket Sound" points to the possible conflict between the generation of offshore wind power and fishing.



"Fishermen Caravan in Dunes" shows Basile's willingness to leave the rules behind.

and does many drawings and studies before pulling out her oils to execute the final painting. She sometimes paints several versions of the story, each rendition adding different elements of design or color.

Basile with her ample pro-

portions, shock of unruly white hair and smile edged with mischief embodies a love of life. She is both an astute observer and a willing participant who is constantly reaching for another slice of cheese from the wheel of life.

A retired teacher, she turned to art full-time late in life. Although she studied at the Museum School in Boston, attending classes at night while working, she kept her day job. But her love of art stretches all the way back to childhood.

"They should have known I'd be in the art world," Basile says of her parents. "My mother had this awful Italian pottery, very colorful, and she set the table with it. I would remove mine

■ **BASILE** continued from page 41

and put in a plain white plate. When my mother would ask me why, I would tell her I wanted to put in my own colors and the color was the food."

Her own use of color is intuitive, she says, and it flows from feeling. "I paint a little of what I see and a lot of what I feel."

An only child, and a first generation Italian-American, she grew up in the Italian ghetto First Ward in Newark, N.J. living upstairs from the pharmacy her father ran.

"I love being Italian," she says. "I didn't speak a word of English until I was seven because I spent all my time with my grandmother."

What the family lacked in funds, it made up for in spirit. She recalls going to the opera but never sitting in the nice seats, always watching from the \$2 standing room only area. She jokes about her childhood escapades like the time she jumped into the vat where the local men were making wine and came home with purple legs.

And her independent streak seems to go way back.

"When I was eight my mother took me to the park and all I wanted to do was go fishing. I grabbed the fish and took them home and put them in the tub. My father came home and said, 'Can't we even bathe here?'" She answered back that no one was bathing if it meant hurting her fish.

She was not the only high spirited member of the family and her Aunt Jenny, a self-taught muralist, offered her own off center inspiration. Jenny whitewashed her kitchen walls and painted murals of Italian towns that changed every season. When her creative urges outgrew her house, she took to the street.

"She started going around town with a ladder and buckets of paint," Basile says. "She painted any little wall they would give her in churches and in the neighborhood taverns."

Growing up, Basile was not only allowed to have opinions, she was encouraged, especially by her father who always wanted her to think things through and



"Fishermen's Coop," oil on canvas by Rose Basile

make up her own mind. He gave her something else, too, a lifelong love of fishing.

"My father would go fishing on the beach all night and take me," she says. "We went to places like Shark River, Ship Bottom, Love Lady and Barnegut. I just love those names."

Those long nights were the start of something for her. She fished with her Dad and later fished on her own off Long Island and then Chatham, where she lived for many years. It was natural that fishermen would be one of the subjects she would come to paint over and over.



"Portuguese Houses & Boats" blends home and work in an almost abstract form.

But, she says, it's always more than a picture, it's a social commentary. She's made a lot of commentary including a series on the Statue of Liberty in honor of her mother's arrival on Ellis Island. She's painted whale canvases including one with a whale being lifted by crane into the maw of a Japanese processing ship.

She knew at a certain point of her life that she had to give herself over to her art.

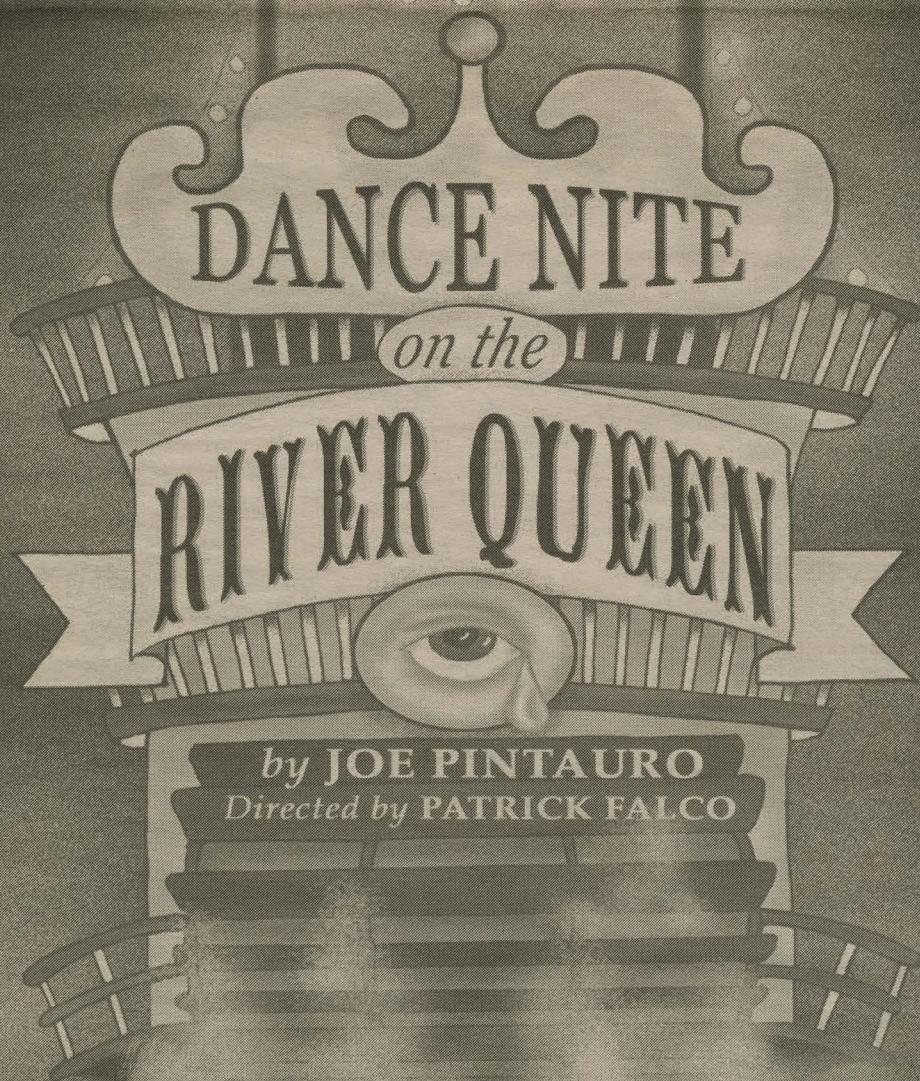
"I woke up one morning and said, 'I'm going to spend the rest of my life painting.'" She sold everything and came to Provincetown where she studied with Steve Kennedy, Carol Westcott, Rob DuToit, Sal Del Deo and Lillian Orlovsky. And though each of those teachers may have added to the mix, the paintings remain a style all her own. Her paintings, because of the amount of work leading up to each of them, come slowly. She only completed 10 paintings this year and 14 the year before. And there are dozens of subjects on her list of things to paint.

"There are so many scenes I haven't painted, not that they haven't been painted but I haven't painted them," she says. "I've got them in my eye ... I'm painting ideas and I've got plenty of them."

For her the idea, the interpretation, the underlying message is equal to the image. "I think that's what painting's about. It's about the idea and I'd better paint it differently (than what's been done). Otherwise I better just go out and take a picture"

Rose Basile is represented by the Julie Heller Gallery in Provincetown and ACME Fine Arts in Boston. Her work is in the permanent collection of the Provincetown Art Association.

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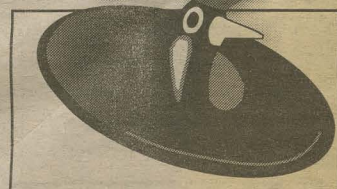
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BY ELLEN LEBOW

It's unclear why Rose Basile's paintings of Provincetown are labeled folk painting. It can't be because her colors are bright; so were Henry Henche's. It can't be because she's unschooled; though not an academic, Basile has studied with the best in town. It can't be because she paints scenes of local life; so did all the Provincetown artists. It can't be because of a naive sense of design; her compositions are as sophisticated as the rest of them.

And, if the most accurate definition of a folk artist is one who uses

undefinable is that it springs from an original impulse, an idiosyncratic source. Artwork that rises directly from an artist's true nature has an immediacy the most carefully crafted canvas can never approach.

Immediacy in painting is not the same as speed. It doesn't mean not thought out. Basile conceives of each picture ahead of time, drawing free-style compositions on paper and singling out colors with a thin, oil wash. The freshness of her work lies partly in the leap she makes from study to finished canvas, never allowing the former to chain-down the latter. In fact, Basile never allows any rule of

curve of that hill. That's an act of immediacy: grasping the change that's needed, sometimes against all logic, and doing it without hesitation.

Part of the key to Basile's ease is her lack of commercial ambition. Although she's always been interested in watercolor and studied it with Robert Ward at the Boston Museum School, Basile took up the artist's life in earnest only after retiring early from teaching school. A few years in Chatham proved too tame for her, artistically speaking. She moved to Provincetown where she felt there was more access to artists, galleries, workshops, and the Portuguese fishing life that has inspired so much of her imagery.

At first, Basile says, she felt like an outsider in such an apparently "young" environment, until someone reminded her that, "You have to have already lived a little to really enjoy Provincetown."

After taking a few classes at the Provincetown Art Association with Sal Del Deo, Tony Vevers, and Sam Messers, Basile began to sense the difference in the direction she was headed as compared to her fellow students. She took off on her own, accumulating paintings in her small studio, not yet ready to show, but charged with the desire to keep working.

Chance visitors would get a glimpse of her work and, grasping Basile's innate talent, predicted her future as a successful artist. Fellow artist Joyce Johnson, was one person who encouraged Basile to show. Gallery owner Berta Walker encouraged her too, and now represents her.

At first, Basile was too emotionally attached to her paintings to let

them go. "When it's a painting of Mr. Jones, the fisherman [for example] it's part of my family I'm parting with," she explains.

Ten years ago she found a solution to her dilemma by painting more than one version of a study, one for show and one for herself. Now, like most artists, Basile will focus on certain personally compelling themes: three women in the dunes, fishermen weighing their catch, the old boat out her window, revamping them through a series of variations.

Now selling regularly, Basile still can't get enough of Provincetown. Some of her paintings are inspired by people she knows or stories she's been told. Others are inspired by the town's most oft-painted icons (the Pilgrim Monument, the shambling rooftops, the fishing pier), or by historic events (the Swim for Life fundraiser, a stranding of whales in the harbor). Each is translated into spirited, almost drunken rhythms and radiant geometry. Elements dive, rise, shoot, angle, veer, and realign into a unified whole. The space around them sings as loudly as the subjects themselves. The monument tilts like a truncated tree; beyond it a great, lumbering orange sun, spiked like a dinosaur's back, rises behind dunes too high to be real. Gulls ripple like wet linen. In "Fishing the Hell Hole" (a series inspired by a story a young friend told of fishing the wild waters off Georges Bank with her father), Basile fills the small canvas with cut, cold, Alp-like waves as sharp as broken teeth; on top of which ride the sketchy outline of small red and blue fishing boats.

Basile draws in her pictures with dashes and worms of cobalt and fire-

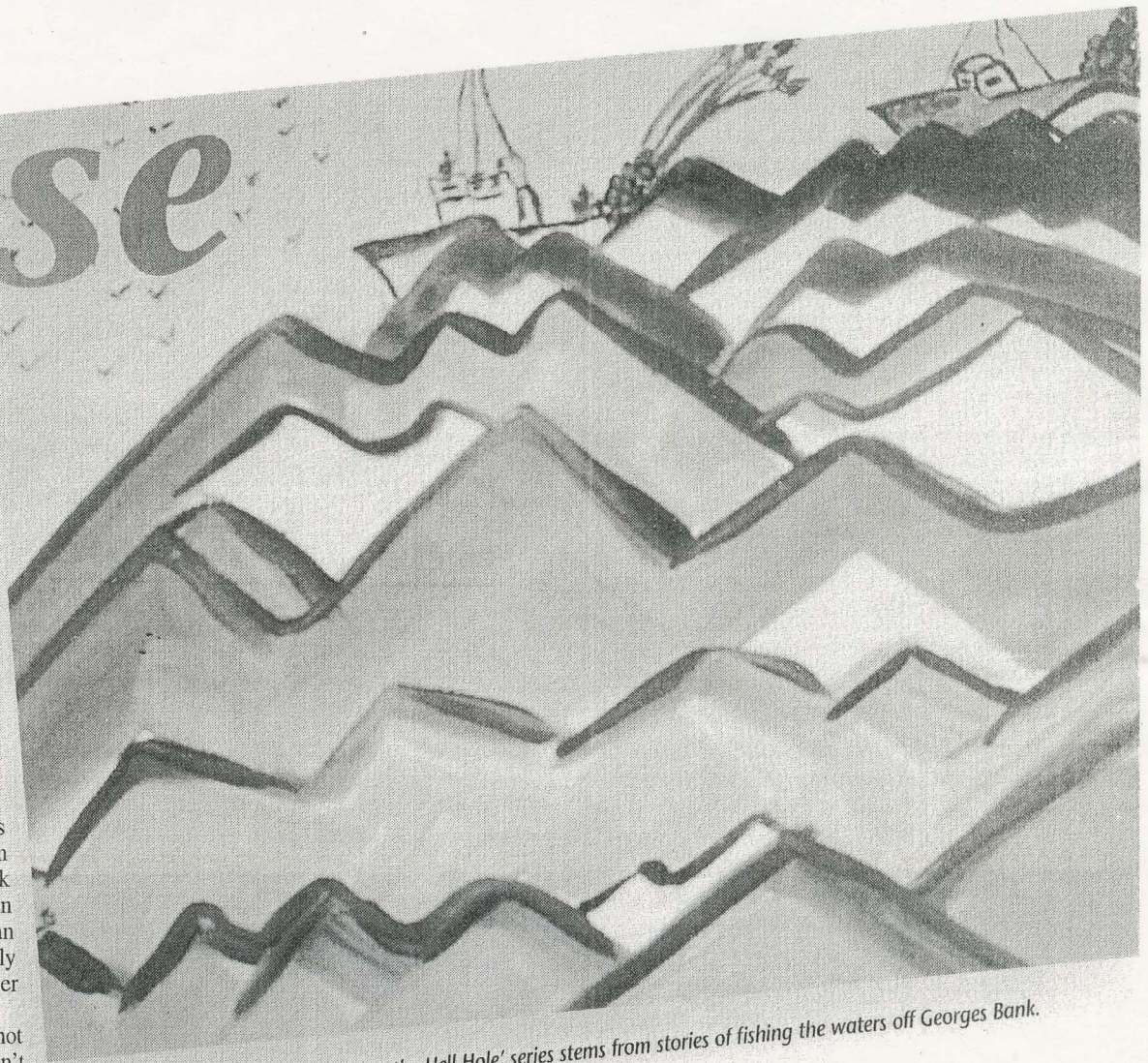
engine red. Her hand is loose. Influenced by the advice of Japanese watercolorists not to describe everything but leave something for the viewer's eye to complete, things in her paintings are suggested rather than studied. At best, she paints in oils like a watercolorist, without pooling in details the way oils can lure an artist to use them.

Her most powerful images are when she frees herself from historical particulars and reduces everything down to simplest gestures. Then a rooftop becomes a flick of an angle, and a cloud links the buckling of a beach blanket to the unrolling of a dune. You can't tell when or why she will drench a painting in turquoise, or leave an enormous lobster or heavy fish as a mere sketch — transparent — in the hand of a solid fisherman.

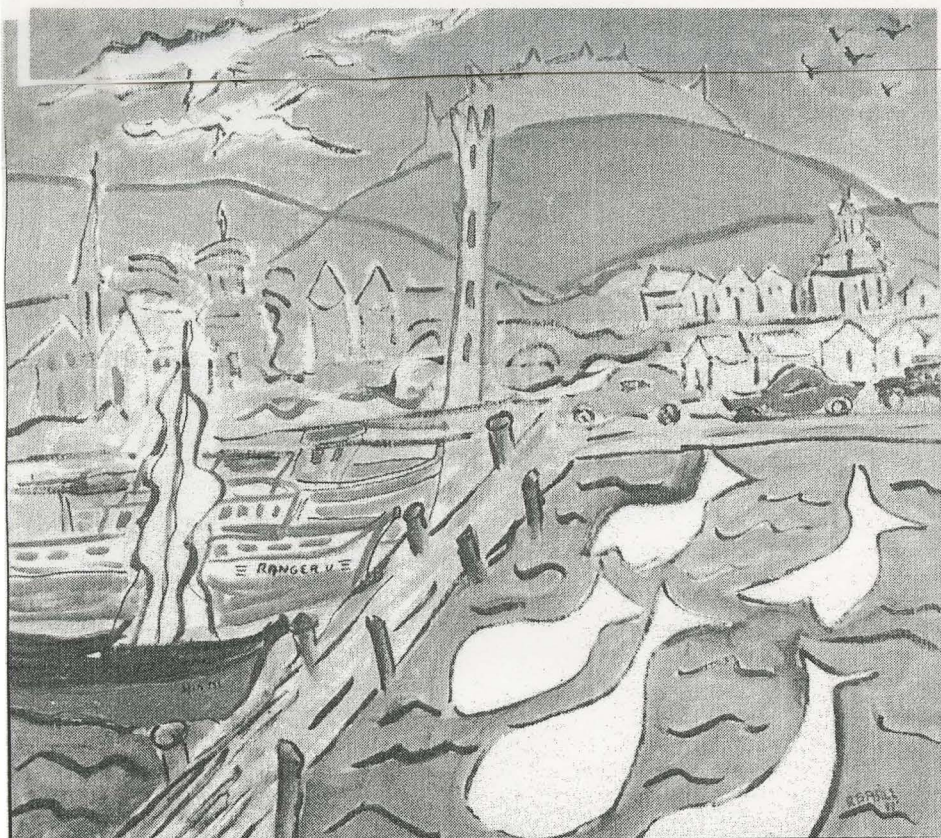
The fishermen themselves become beautiful, eerie male totems, brilliant yellow waders stacked into blue, hooded sweat-shirts, a brushstroke for a face.

Basile's small paintings beckon with their buzzing quality and the unabashed heat of their colors. It's these joyous, crayon, in-your-face colors that may seduce some into thinking Basile's paintings are capricious. Perhaps they are, in the sense that the wind is capricious. In Basile's work is the constant sense of wind; sometimes the sea wind of Provincetown, or, more clearly, the wind of Rose Basile's psyche, her apparent wired happiness.

Rose Basile's work can be seen at the Berta Walker Gallery, 208 Bradford St., Provincetown, through Oct. 15. The same exhibit also features the work of two other Lower Cape Artists: Jane Eccles and Erna Partoll.



Basile's 'Fishing the Hell Hole' series stems from stories of fishing the waters off Georges Bank.



'Heart of Provincetown,' oil by Rose Basile

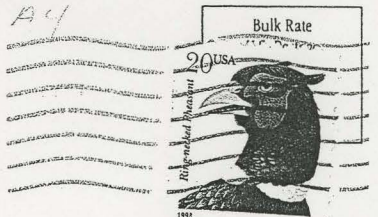
traditional methods and forms handed down generation to generation within a certain culture, then all artists are folk artists and there's no need for distinctions.

What makes Rose Basile's style

"reality" to dictate what the picture wants. In one rough study, a fisherman's rectangular-shaped car stops on a sloping hill. In the finished painting, the car's front hood has been arched downward to follow the



**PERSPECTIVES OF
PROVINCETOWN:
PAINTINGS OF ROSE BASILE**
AUGUST 3 - AUGUST 28



Rose Basile loves Provincetown, and that feeling exudes from her lively, "folk-expressionist" paintings of the town—its harbor, fishermen, and sea. Color dominates these paintings, as well as a bold, direct style that draws the viewer into Basile's world and accentuates her affection for her subject.

*Gallery Night: Thursday, August 19, 5-9 pm.
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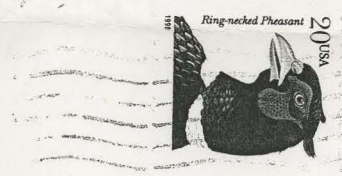


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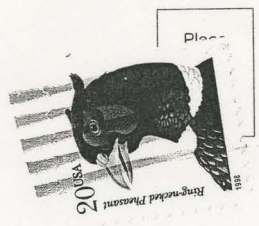
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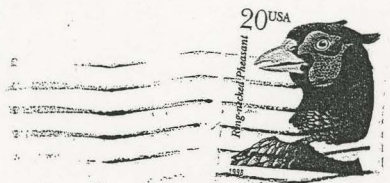


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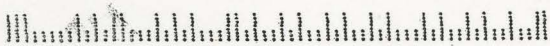


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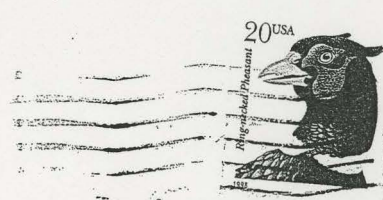
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