

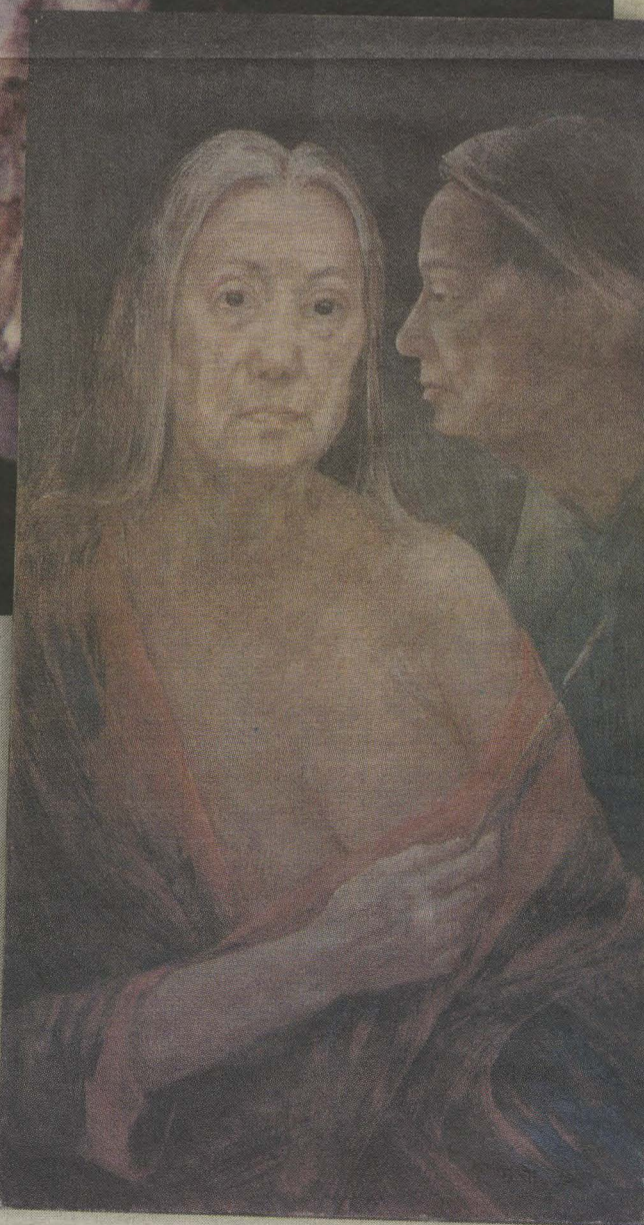
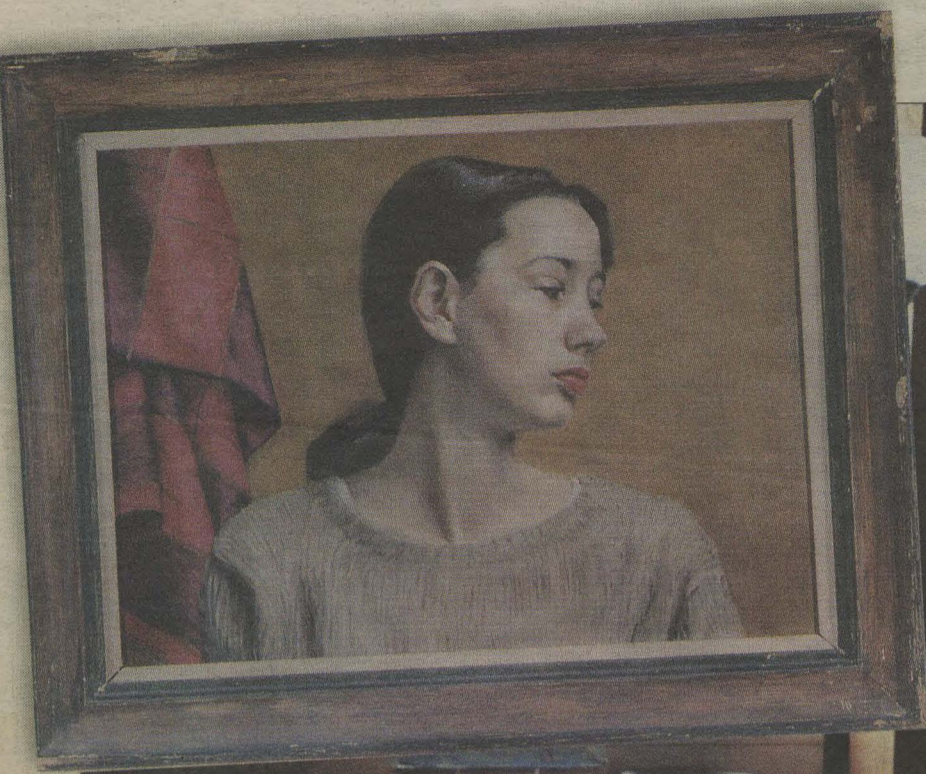
Arts & Entertainment

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Mary Fassett has seven decades of translating life into art

PHOTOS ANN WOOD

Mary Fassett in her home studio in Truro. Above: A self-portrait by Mary Fassett done in 1943. Right: A recent self-portrait by Mary Fassett.

By Ann Wood
 BANNER STAFF

If any one person could define the word artist, it would be Mary Fassett. After all, she's not trapped in one medium or genre, she doesn't care about status, and she sure as hell was never out to make money.

A retrospective representing more than 70 years of work will be on view, beginning with a reception from 7 to 9 p.m. on Friday, in the Carl Murchison Memorial Gallery in the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 460 Commercial St. The show, comprised of portraits, multi-figured allegorical oil paintings, ceramics and etchings, will run through June 15.

"Well, it's just something you do. It's habit, I guess," she says of her lifetime of making art.

"You can't make a living [at it] if you're creative."

She's that, and tough as nails. For more than seven decades, 88-year-old Fassett has refused to limit her art — in her home alone there are paintings in nearly every medium as well as drawings, tiles, urns, busts and sculptures. While she learned from her father, portrait and landscape painter Truman Fassett, who happens to be listed in the "Who Was Who in American Art," the younger Fassett didn't want her reality or her art confined, and chose to remain mostly self-taught. "My father was a painter, and he used to let me paint in his studio [as a child]," she says, adding that, while her sisters painted alongside her, they lacked the motivation to continue.

When Fassett attempted to learn more about art, what she

was taught at Sarah Lawrence College was that she was better off learning on her own.

"The teacher was always trying to impose his philosophy on everyone," she says. So in true tough-Fassett form, she up and quit the class. The instructor did teach her to draw models, she admits, and reaches in her loft to retrieve a framed nude created in that class.

While virtually untaught, Fassett remains true to traditional methods of painting, as is evident in her landscapes and portraits. But she says she now "draws from her head," working less from nature and more from an inner vision. Her visual work seems to translate feelings expressed in literature and music — both of which she's well versed in and eager to discuss.

"I was also very interested in music and wanted to be a pi-

anist," she says, adding that she never had the necessary dexterity needed to go pro. "I was always tempted to spend my time practicing."

And she continues to practice. A white baby grand piano sits in the middle of her bedroom in her Truro home sur-

rounded by paintings. Paintings that tell the story of her life. She points to landscapes created more out of boredom than inspiration. "It's just what I did in the car while I waited [for my husband]," she says of a single

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"Listeners," oil on panel by Mary Fasset.

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hill with a couple of trees in the background. Then there are the Swiss landscapes painted while visiting the country with one of her husbands who was from Switzerland. "We had two wonderful summers with that view," she says.

Back in the living room, Fasset points to a painting of what she calls a Gandhi-like figure, a man of wisdom, sitting just inside of a cave with the family outside — they are the last people in the world, left alone in a desert.

"We're ruining this planet, so that's what it might be like," she says of the piece. Then she pulls out another, this one painted in egg tempera. The figures, in reds, blues, yellows and grays are all connected in a sort of swirling orgy. "This is all about sex, and it's supposed to be funny. [But] it's too outrageous for the show," she says.

There's also a more conventional cranberry bog painted in the 1940s and the bust of a seven-year-old friend crafted about four decades ago.

"I'm glad I saved a lot of my old work," she says, walking into

her bathroom where tiles are decorated with a rabbit, figures in motion and people trapped in bottles. "I went through a phase of doing people trapped in bottles. ... People really dug it."

On the lawn of Fasset's home, a woman in pink seems to be either dancing or halting uninvited guests. ("I would have liked to be a sculptor but I thought that would be really boring [because] I couldn't do anything abstract," she says.)

Fasset bought her Truro home in 1980, shortly after returning from a decade in France. When asked where she grew up, she hesitates. "That's a good question, because I grew up in too many places," she says, adding that she was born in Boston, moved to New York City as a young child, then Long Is-

land. Her parents later sent her and her sister away to a progressive school in Florida. "That was really wonderful," she says, adding that the state was "unexploited" at that time. "If I totaled it up, I've lived in nine different states in this country." She also lived in Switzerland and briefly in both London and Italy.

Besides painting and sculpting, creating ceramic urns and playing classical piano, Fasset is spending a lot of time on the computer, writing philosophical pieces and translating French literature.

"That's my life, you know, it's not only paintings," she says, adding that she sees everything as art, as poetry. While Fasset paints in three- or four-hour stretches, because she's getting older, she needs to take time out to rest. But rest time is not for naught. "I think and write when I'm resting, and that's important, I think. Sketching. Anything I can do in bed," she says. "I'm just dying to paint now but things have been so upsetting with this show going on."

But it doesn't matter. Even if she takes a few days off from the act of painting, we know Fasset's painting in her head. After all, that's what real artists do. □



A bust done by Fasset nearly 40 years ago of a seven-year-old friend.

Truro artist at Schoolhouse Gallery

Mary Fassett opens Saturday

By Margaret Ryan

Tucked away in her custom-built studio in Truro, Mary Fassett creates symbolic, subtle and varied works of art.

Her work, which includes paintings, decorated furniture and ceramic pieces, are all part of a show opening Saturday at North Truro's Schoolhouse Gallery.

Included in the show will be Fassett's fascinating jigsaw-puzzle ceramic-topped table; nine self-portraits; a tall gilded screen showing the fall of Adam and Eve; and her figurative ceramic tiles and dishes.

An interesting past accompanies Fassett's interesting artworks.

A Boston native, Fassett studied painting with her father, Truman Bewlay Fassett. "I went to Sarah Lawrence, but I didn't like to study painting," she said. "From then on I was self-taught."

Among Fassett's self-taught skills was sculpture. A color photograph shows a life-size woman wearing a short dress. It was done in sculpted cement on an armature of wire, and is somewhere in France now, Fassett thinks. "That's where I left it, at any rate."

A handsome, somewhat stern-looking woman whose looks visibly soften as you get to know her, Fassett spent 13 years in the south of France, as well as years in Vermont, and in Falmouth, where she ran her own art school.

She will tell you she has a son, who is an economist at Yale, and three grandchildren. Her son, she said, was the reason why she stopped painting on canvas, and began to work on masonite.

"My son was three," she said. "I was painting a portrait

of a young man. He got jealous and stabbed him in the nose," Fassett said.

Fassett moved to Truro three years ago, and next to her lovely old house quickly had a studio built. "It's post-and-beam, really a nice building," Fassett said of the place where she spends most of her time.

In fact, Fassett said she has literally moved into the studio. "I let my son's family take over the house when they come," she said, and admits she wants to be close to her art.

There is a bedroom behind the painting studio, and downstairs is Fassett's ceramics and printmaking workshop. Her large German shepherd Aaron paces close by her protectively as visitors are shown around.

In the studio are examples of Fassett's collaborations with furniture maker Terry Rockwood of Brewster. Simple and elegant, his wooden pieces enhance and blend with Fassett's art.

A small coffee table becomes a piece of sculpture with the addition of Fassett's painted ceramic tiles. The tall wooden, free-standing screen becomes a backdrop to Fassett's bold Biblical paintings, accentuated with gold leaf.

Fassett also commissioned Rockwood to copy a European wooden settee on which she inlaid designs, and which will also be displayed.

"We inspire each other," Fassett said of her collaboration with Rockwood. "I'm very ambitious, but he's so modest. He doesn't blow his own horn enough."

Fassett's style is realistic. Paintings, prints and even her ceramic plates, tiles and triangular pots tell stories, and

are populated with men and women, animals and even symbolic trees.

One fascinating part of the exhibit promises to be Fassett's series of self-portraits, the earliest done at age 12. The differences among them are striking. A 1958 portrait shows a proud, assertive-looking woman in front of a wild seascape; however, in a later work, the woman's face is troubled, staring out of the frame, as an angel's hand beckons her.

A 1981 portrait shows Fassett essentially as she looks today (although with side-parted hair), seated before a tree that has undergone the changes effected by nature, and time.

Fassett's imagination and artistic drive seem tireless. Hardly an orthodox realist, she doesn't care to paint real-life models ("It's a pain") and likes to use many different media and techniques.

For instance, for her next project, she wants to use "that stuff that shows up under a black light." Thus, only under the black light could one see that the painting might be "not exactly porn," Fassett said with a slight grin, "but something sort of indelicate."

But Fassett still plans to continue with her nymphlike figures and striking portraits. "When I draw myself, it's empathy," she said. "It's like dancing."

Fassett's and Rockwood's show will run May 29 through June 23 at the Schoolhouse Gallery in the Fishnet Building, at the corner of Route 6A and Pond Road in North Truro. The opening reception will be Saturday, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.



Mary Fassett and self portrait

Advocate photo by Gabriel