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ALAIN LE CHATELIER

MEMORIES AND MERMAIDS



I watch as painter Alain Le Chatelier unrolls a painting over six feet wide: “This is the largest painting I have done on canvas, other than a fresco,” he says. Back in the Caribbean for his annual visit and solo show at Les Artisans in Gustavia, Le Chatelier explains that this large canvas is called “Caribbean Landscape,” which he painted in Paris, calling upon his memories of the island. Tucked in amongst lush tropical vegetation one finds a traditional little cottage, an iguana, birds, an airplane, and a sailboat. “It’s a mix of various locations on the island, taking from memory,” Le Chatelier admits, pointing out that the vegetation is more “rain forest” variety than what one might really find here, but the overall feeling is definitely Saint Barth. Along the same theme are smaller paintings of agave and cacti, in seductive shades of green and blue.

“I just had an exhibit in Sweden, where I sold 60 paintings,” Le Chatelier notes. “I was at a gallery in the small town of Ystad and have been invited to do a poster for a jazz festival there next year.” He also has an exhibition coming up this summer in East Dennis, MA, on Cape Cod, hosted by jeweler Ross Coppelman, who also shows at Les Artisans. “I went there and it is an amazing place to show my

work,” Le Chatelier says.

The piece de resistance of this year’s show in Saint Barth is a painting of a mermaid, albeit an erotic mermaid sitting on an underwater throne with books by her side: cleverly enough she’s been reading Jules Verne, and Hemingway’s “The Old Man And The Sea.” The purple armchair actually resides in Le Chatelier’s living room: “It was my grandfather’s chair,” he explains, noting that mermaids (in his mind’s eye) are always erotic. This one has scales that begin on her upper thighs, with the rest of her body exposed, while adored with a pearl necklace.

The painting’s blue and purple tones are very vibrant, and looking closely one sees a little scuba diver trying to get a better view of this underwater princess, as well as brightly colored fish swimming out of her Medusa-like hair. “I did research with underwater photos and images of things I’ve seen here,” says the artist, who refers to both the mermaid and the Caribbean Landscape as “dream paintings.” These are the kind of tableaux that he is known for: slightly altered reality with a touch of fun, and so much to look at, you never tire of looking!

Ellen Lampert-Gréaux
Photo: Rosemond Gréaux

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