

Press

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From postage stamps to posters

Oren Sherman's art successful in all sizes

By Johanna Crosby

Truro artist-illustrator Oren Sherman has had several brushes with fame and fortune during his career. He has designed eight U.S. postage stamps, a VISA card, and designs for Steuben Glass Company, the Olympics and Disney. He has won awards for his collectible art posters of the Tall Ships sailing into Boston Harbor during the nation's Bicentennial celebration, the Kentucky Derby, and the Brooklyn Bridge Centennial.

Several years ago he enjoyed the heady experience of watching an episode of the TV show "Spenser for Hire" in which the plot was built around one of his original Boston prints. When the show cut to the commercial for Burger King, Sherman spotted his design on the double cheeseburger box

But Sherman, 42, takes it all in stride. "When you have success as an artist you don't own it, you borrow it," he says. "You always have to be fresh and new."

Sherman's credo and his object to create high-quality art at affordable prices for middle-income buyers have guided his career. His latest project, "The New England Portfolio," will be on display at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum's Thanksgiving arts and crafts show, which opened yesterday and is running through tomorrow.

The 11 works depict familiar scenes of Boston (Back Bay and the Swan Boats) and Cape Cod (Provincetown, Marsh View and Corn Hill). Each limited-edition offset lithograph is hand-signed and numbered and sells for under \$100.

"My work is designed to be an original print. It's not merely a reproduction of a painting," he says, adding that only 1,500 of each design will ever be produced.

Prints in movie

Sherman, who also has a studio in Boston, says his posters

fill the gap between college dorm posters and the often prohibitive cost of an original painting. His work is available in several shops on the Cape.

Prints of his lithographs of Boston have been featured on magazine covers, including Yankee Magazine, and the playbill for "Shear Madness." They'll also be seen in the movie "The Out of Towners," a comedy starring Steve Martin and Goldie Hawn which will open next month.

"They wanted more Boston flavor on the sets," Sherman says, adding that some of his Cape prints also may appear in the film.

Sherman began his career as a degree project at the Rhode Island School of Design. Inspired by the classic travel posters of majestic ocean liners, he decided to revive the form by designing "The Boston Series," a three-poster set of offset lithographs. He says he peddled them to every store and government agency in Boston and was turned down. He finally took them to the Harvard Coop, using his life savings and that of a friend to publish them himself. About 30,000 posters were sold at \$10 each.

Another time he used his car as collateral to launch his Tall Ships poster. He recouped his costs in 10 days.

Sherman, who teaches in the illustration department at RISD, urges his students to follow his example.

"You can't sit and wait to be discovered. You have to get your work out there."

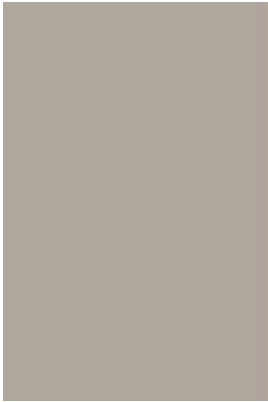
Illustrating anthology

Sherman produced designs for a slew of corporations, including Coca Cola, Estee Lauder, and Citibank from 1978-89. Weary of the demands of the corporate world, he went to New York in 1992 to rediscover why he wanted to be an artist. Random House hired him to illustrate "An Anthology of Greek Myth," which is due out Christmas 1999. The project took five years to complete.

"It was hard, but wonderful," Sherman says.

Two years ago, he decide to return to poster designs and "make them better than anybody else." He describes his designs as "stylistically modern with a classic influence."

Sherman says he aims to crate a "perfect reality" that people can connect to emotionally.



Inspiration comes easy.

"A lot of ideas are backlogged in my mind," he says. "I go by a scene and it touches my heart."