

# What's old is new at Cape museums



ELLEN ALBANESE FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**A restoration of Ralph and Martha Cahoon's studio at the Cahoon Museum of American Art.**

**By Ellen Albanese**

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Mermaids and monarchs and pirates — oh, my! The dust has settled on some significant renovations and new construction at several Cape Cod museums. The Cahoon Museum of American Art — home of Ralph Cahoon's whimsical mermaid paintings — has reopened in its historical home in Cotuit following a \$2.5 million expansion and renovation. Underwater explorer Barry Clifford, whose discovery of the sunken pirate ship *Whydah* off the coast of Wellfleet yielded what is said to be the world's only authenticated pirate treasure, has

opened the Whydah Pirate Museum in West Yarmouth. And the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History's new butterfly house will reopen in June, adding to the Brewster site's diverse exhibits on Cape Cod habitats.

The Cahoon Museum highlights folk artists Ralph and Martha Cahoon, who bought the 1782 building in 1945 and made it their home and studio. Martha learned furniture painting from her Swedish immigrant father and went on to paint country scenes and natural motifs, such as flowers and birds. Ralph, from a Cape Cod family of fishermen, is best known for his tongue-in-cheek paintings of mermaids in everyday situations — at a tea party, whipping up a meal, dealing with a fender bender on Route 28. The museum's permanent collection focuses on American art from the early 19th century to the present, including several lovely landscapes by John Joseph Enneking.

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