

A Book Review: Flying the Colors

by A.J. Peluso, Jr.

Flying the Colors: The Unseen Treasures of Nineteenth-Century American Marine Art

by Alan Granby and Janice Hyland, with an introduction by Stuart M. Frank

Mystic Seaport (in association with Hudson Hills Press), Mystic, Connecticut, 2009, 384 pp., hardbound, \$125, available from the Mystic Museum Maritime Bookstore, 75 Greenvillage Avenue, PO Box 6000, Mystic, CT 06355-0090, phone (860) 572-5386, or on line (www.mysticseaport.org/flyingthecolors).

This book is one great leap to a fuller appreciation of American marine art.

It is introduced by Stuart M. Frank, senior curator at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, with his excellent essay, "Saltwater Glory: Visions of American Seafaring Prowess in the Age of Sail." Let his last sentences serve as a summary: "This anthology is thus a showcase of the rarely seen and the newly cherished, a unique treasure trove of revelations and surprises. To have them gathered together and printed so faithfully adds substantially to our appreciation and understanding of the artists, great and small, who produced them, and the sumptuous genre that so eloquently addresses our illustrious seafaring past."

There isn't much on the bookshelf that champions American marine art. There's been John Wilmerding's *A History of American Marine Painting* (1968) and his monographs on Fitz Hugh Lane (1971) (updated in 2005 as *Fitz Henry Lane*) and *Robert Salmon: Painter of Ships and Shore* (1971); Rudolph Schaefer's *J.E. Buttersworth: 19th-Century Marine Painter* (1975); Roger Stein's *Seascape and the American Imagination* (1975); Harold Sniffen's *Antonio Jacobsen's Painted Ships on Painted Oceans* (1994); and Richard Kugler's *William Bradford: Sailing Ships & Arctic Seas* (2003). That's 40 years' worth.

Now, however, we have a major effort to properly appreciate America's unsurpassed maritime art history. It comes with scholarly and celebratory attention and with more than 200 beautifully reproduced color plates. The paintings, deftly chosen, are for the most part from private collections and represent the "unseen treasures" of the book's subtitle.

The artists, and most of the important ones are here, are grouped in useful categories and dedicated chapters, together with studied commentary for each image, and each portrait, whether American or "international," is flying the colors.

I. Fine Art: Birch, Bradford, Lane, Salmon, Silva, and Richards.

II. American Marine Art: Bard, Badger, Baker, Cozzens, Freitag, Huger, Pansing, Raleigh, A. Cary Smith, Joseph B. Smith, Stubbs, and Willis.

III. James Buttersworth.

IV. Antonio Jacobsen.

V. International: Corsini, Hughes, McFarlane, Pellegrin, Roux, the Yorkes, and China trade artists.

Nevertheless, I have two quibbles.

It was good to see the San Franciscan William Coulter on board, but his neighbors Joseph Lee and Gideon Denny could have been invited. Philadelphia's Alexander Stuart didn't make it, nor did the New Orleans artists Edward Arnold and James Guy Evans. Galveston's Julius Stockfleth deserved a look. The Great Lakes artists could have made an eye-opening group of six.

There will come a day when artists will no longer be defined as those with a chisel or a brush. Then the superb lithographic work of Charles Parsons and his son Charles R. Parsons will be properly recognized, as will the unique work of Frances Flora Bond Palmer and the drama of Mississippi steamboat racing, which she so vividly captured. There may also be a time when photographers will be certified.

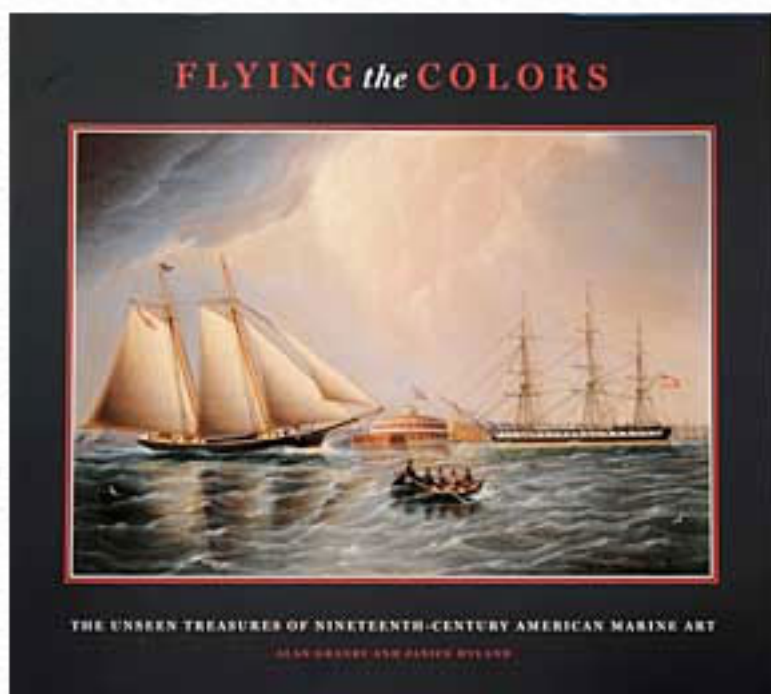
Of course, to have added all the above would have created a book that could only have been delivered by U-Haul, but Alan Granby and Janice Hyland do say in their introduction, "This leaves an open door for volume two."

(Tony Peluso contributed notes about several of the artists for the book. His help is graciously acknowledged. Ed.)

Originally published in the September 2009 issue of *Maine Antique Digest*. (c) 2009 Maine Antique Digest

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The steamboat *Connecticut*—Antonio Jacobsen at his best.



The Yacht "America" Off Castle Garden—James Buttersworth at his best.