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## SILAS MARDER Cultivating a Young Gallery

BY CARISSA KATZ

When Silas Marder opened his gallery in a big barn behind his family's nursery and garden center in Bridgehampton, he "didn't want to make too many rules and I didn't want to be afraid to do things in a way they haven't been done before," he said.

"If you're going to do it like everyone else, why bother? That's no fun."

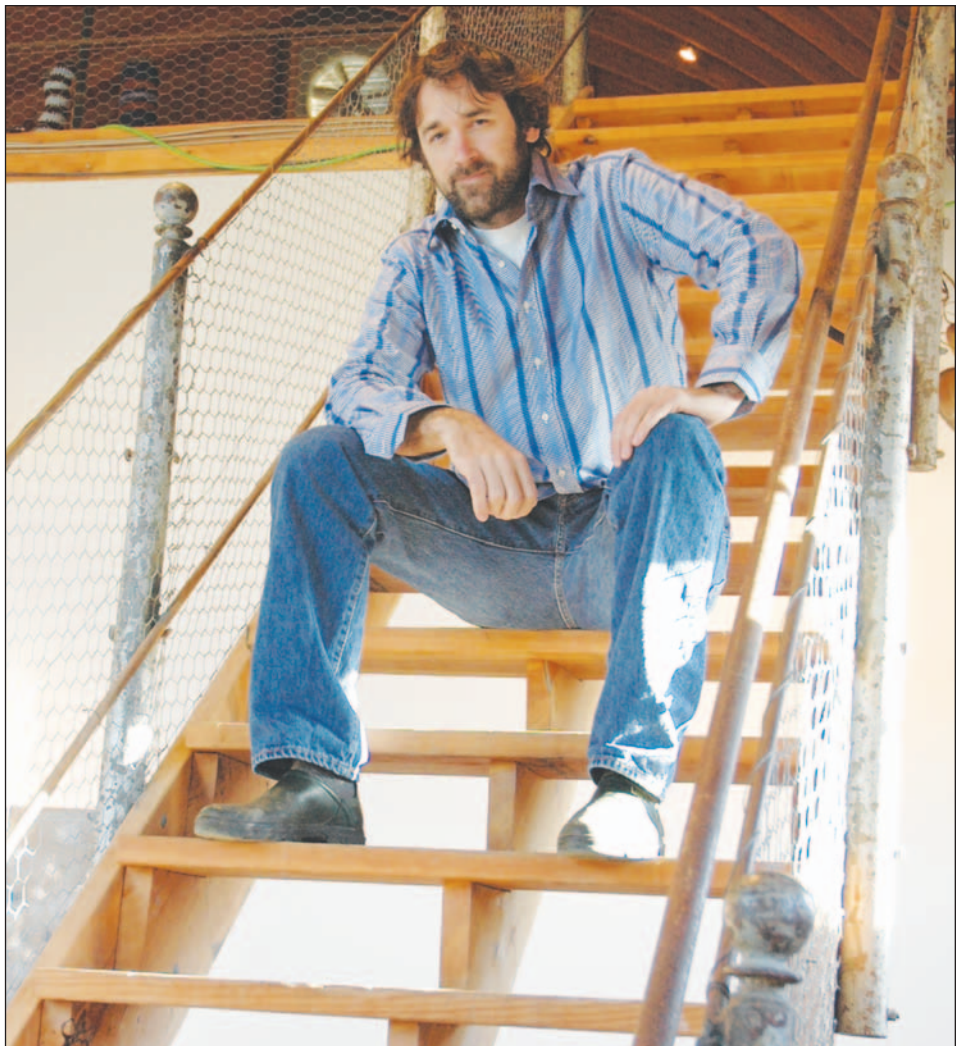
The first exhibit at the Silas Marder Gallery featured work by the gallery owner's younger brother Mica Invisible Marder, a painter and sculptor. At the time Mr. Marder thought it might be the gallery's one and only show. "I didn't think it would go beyond that, necessarily. There was no thought that this would be forever, but I decided to let it evolve and try not to get too far ahead of myself." There was a next show, and a show after that, and more than two years later, Mr. Marder's gallery seems here to stay.

For the second show, he brought in artists from Springs, whom he grew up with and around. "I started with what's important to me. Springs artists made sense."

He was raised mostly in Springs, the oldest of four brothers. His parents, Charlie and Kathleen, who started the Marders nursery and landscaping business there, had lots of friends who were artists, so he grew up looking at their work, hearing stories about them, and going to art openings at Ashawagh Hall, which was just a stone's throw from home. "That made a real impression on me as a kid, that sense of community," he said.

That he turned out to have such a passion for art is largely due to the influence of his parents — their love of art and their creative approach to their own work. In the early 1980s, Marders was on the forefront of landscape design here, counting among its projects Alfonso Ossorio's famous Creeks estate in East Hampton.

"The way he was using trees, applying ideas of art to the landscape, that inspired my dad and in turn inspired me," Mr.



*Morgan McGivern*

Marder said. "Horticulturally, he had one of the best specimen conifer collections, not only in this country, but in the world."

"I grew up in the business," he said. "I've done everything from deliveries to merchandising to sales." When he was little, he would go with his dad to jobs and sit in as his parents talked shop around the house.

Even with his gallery to run, Mr. Marder still works in the family business. The two, he said, "really tie in well with each other."

He sees the gallery becoming a sort of design studio over time, representing a good roster of artists and an aesthetic sensibility that could be marketed to clients. His favorite artists and designers are the ones who work across mediums, who make

everything they do an outlet for their creativity.

At this early stage in his gallery's life, he is careful to take things slowly. "With all of this, I'm really trying to hold myself back a little bit. Otherwise I'm a maniac. It's easy to get overwhelmed and be up all night thinking."

Like his father, Mr. Marder likes to "contrast vintage materials with new materials to sort of tell a story." The whole Marders complex on Snake Hollow Road is a testament to that. And the barn where the gallery is located — once a big storage space for landscaping equipment — is a mix of the old and the new. The building is contemporary, but a big sliding glass barn door and the huge otherworldly lights that illuminate the gallery are recycled.

Mr. Marder found the lights in a Wisconsin farm field when he was in college there. "I had no idea what I'd do with them, I just thought they were cool," he said. "A big thing my dad taught us is you should never not do something just because you don't know why you're doing it."

In design, as in life, "you've got to be able to improvise and not get stuck. You've got to have the faith a lot of times to consider other options, to use things in ways they weren't necessarily meant to be used."

After two years in Wisconsin, where he spent "more time talking to farmers and hanging out with junk men than going to school," he took a semester off to do a film project in New York, then transferred to Bennington College in Vermont.

While he finished his degree, he commuted back and forth from Vermont to work at Marders, and when he graduated, he was there full time during the season.

A few years after that, the big barn behind the Marders garden shop became available. "We always wanted to do something back there, but we never really knew what." Mr. Marder seized the opportunity.

Rather than transforming the barn with gleaming white walls and climate-controlled spaces, Mr. Marder decided to "let it be what it is and not get too carried away." The open barn with a big upstairs loft still looks like a barn. Most walls remain bare wood, but there's one long white wall and more white in a smaller

back gallery. "Some work hangs better on the barn wall than the white wall."

"I didn't want a white box. That's fine, but for what I wanted to do, I wanted the versatility to show work in different ways." And he wanted people to feel at ease when they walked into the space. "I can't stand going into a gallery and feeling insecure. Everybody should enjoy art in their own way."

The gallery displays work inside and out, and for some shows, a series of little sheds have become exhibit spaces for small solo shows within a larger group show. There's a fire pit outside that's aflame during exhibit openings. Mr. Marder feels like he must be doing something right because "people come to the opening and they don't leave right away."

At about four hours, "our openings are on the longer side," he said. "People bring their kids; they'll play in the sand. It's funny, the adults stay on the grass, but the kids go to straight to the sand. You go out there the next day after an opening and there will be little sand castles everywhere." For him that harkens back to the sense of community he always felt at Ashawagh Hall.

The gallery's 2006 season opened with "The Big Show," an ironically named exhibit featuring 160 works, each measuring exactly 8 by 10 inches.

He spent the winter looking at all sorts of artwork, then contacted the artists he liked best and asked if they were willing to take on the assignment. The canvases were made especially for the show and were shipped off to 53 artists on the East End, around the country, and in Europe, Canada, and New Zealand.

The artists liked the challenge and Mr. Marder loved the results.

"You don't know what they're going to do, then the pieces start showing up, and it's like Christmas," he said. "That gave it a charge. It activated the whole exhibit. . . . It's fun to see these pieces that had nothing to do with each other — abstract, figurative, landscapes, the whole thing. The more I got, the more they started to have in common. That informed the show and the hanging. We wanted a flow and a rhythm. It had to work as an installation for the full 160 pieces."

"The Big Show" brought a crowd to the Silas Marder Gallery, set the tone for the season, and helped to establish the two-year-old gallery's point of view. "It was for big collectors, small collectors, and collectors who have never collected before," Mr. Marder said. The pieces went for as little as \$200 or \$300 and as much as \$1,200. Many of the artists in the exhibit were featured in other shows at the gallery over the summer. He plans to start off next summer with the same concept.

"Each show I'm changing it up a little bit, getting to know the space better and getting to know myself better. And as we're going, we're selling more work," he said on Friday.

He has brought in a mix of established and emerging artists from here and away. "I think a lot of galleries try to mix it up, but a lot of the local galleries weren't showing younger artists," he said. He wanted to provide a venue for work by young artists he admired, like his brother.

Mr. Marder has been a great champion of his brother's work. "I think we've fed off of each other," he said. "I've always sort of idolized him. He was good at sports, surfing. He has this sensitivity in his work. . . . He can capture these moments."

When the Silas Marder Gallery was one of only a handful of local galleries and dealers accepted into the Scope Hamptons international art fair this summer, he showcased his brother's work and that of Grant Haffner, another young Springs artist. The gallery will also be included in Scope Miami, an even bigger version of the fair.

For Mr. Marder, participation in the two fairs is a great validation for the gallery. He was also asked to curate the work on display at a reception for the Furniture House, a recently completed addition to the Houses at Sagaponac development, conceived by the late Coco Brown.

"I'm trying to strike a balance between having a formula and not having a formula," he said. "I really want this place to have a point of view and not be too contrived."

The gallery's next show, which will be the last of the season, will open on Saturday. Eight artists will be showcased in the main space and another 15 or 20 will be included in a salon-style show in the smaller back gallery.