

A hushed reverence

Deborah Martin's paintings time travel through town's built and natural worlds

By Susan Rand Brown

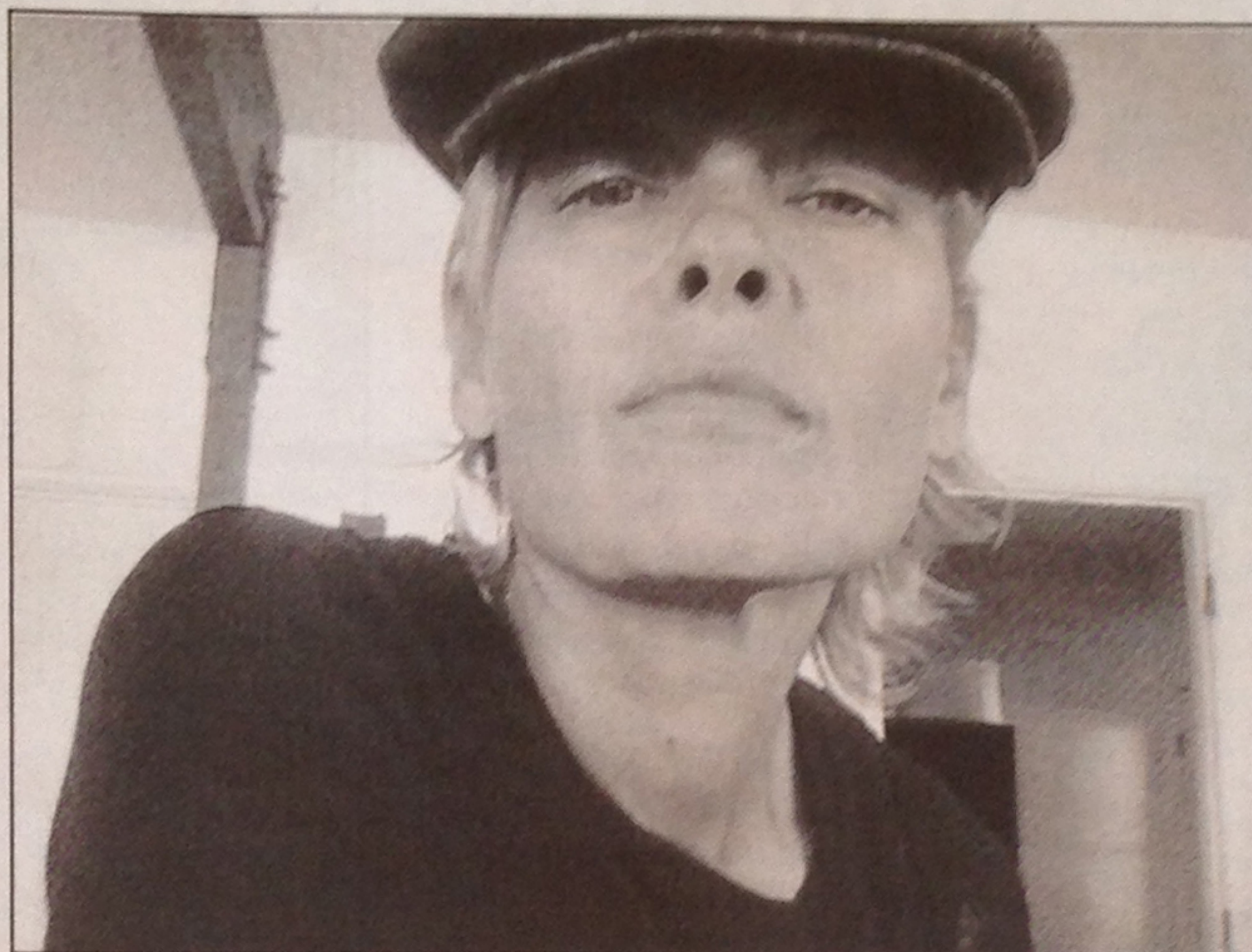
BANNER CORRESPONDENT

For much of the 1990s, Deborah Martin was a Provincetown year-rounder, showing Polaroid photography in local galleries while running her own house-painting business. Wooden structures battered by decay, storms and a town losing a battle against gentrification are themes that unify Martin's locale-specific work. She is also drawn to interiors, such as bedrooms, stairs and open doors glimpsed from the inside, where a storyline can be imagined.

With her new show, "Narrow Lands," which opens with a reception from 7 to 9 p.m. Friday, July 19, at Kobalt Gallery in Provincetown, her first season there, this gifted painter conveys the magic light and shifting palette of mist, fog and shadow that pulls artists to the Outer Cape.

While Martin calls herself an American realist, and has been compared to Truro's Edward Hopper and Maine's Andrew Wyeth, her brushwork has an open, flowing spontaneity; still, her subject has much in common with painters whose melding of landscape and structure offer a template for isolation and separation.

Martin's paintings also share Hopper's sense of mystery: scenes tiptoe close enough to their off-balance subjects without intruding. The interior of



Deborah Martin

PHOTOS COURTESY KOBALT GALLERY

the un-renovated house where Martin, as an art student living in Boston, stayed while visiting Provincetown provided an especially poignant subject. Using Polaroid images, her usual practice that later can inspire a painting, Martin, in her softly lit pieces, creates a record of this fragile community as it undergoes rapid change.

Recalling the group of Provincetown paintings titled "Captain John Simmons Interiors," where rooms seem abandoned and our attention is drawn to off-center objects — a clothes hamper, misshapen hangers, tossed-aside pillows — Martin notes in an artist's

statement, "As a young adult I was to return to the Cape regularly while attending the Museum School in Boston. The interiors [in this series] are specific to a house in Provincetown I rented with a gang of girls way 'back in the day.' This house now lies abandoned. Oddly enough the memories of staying in this house did not surface until after I completed the paintings."

In other paintings, structures with archaic, bleached-out exteriors also suggest the barest evidence of human habitation. The glowing "Pink" captures a small cluster of structures on Montello and Conant streets. What Martin pho-

Just the facts

What: Narrow Lands, paintings by Deborah

Where: Kobalt Gallery, 366 Commercial St., Provincetown

When: Opening reception, 7-9 p.m. Friday, July 19; running to July 30.

tographed on an earlier visit to town as a gentle pink house set with other small structures is today significantly renovated and unrecognizable; only the shed and birdhouses survive.

Martin was a 2011 recipient of a grant to mid-career artists, sponsored in part by the Lillian Orlowsky and William Freed Foundation and the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, and participated in a small-scale group show there. Often she works with writers and video artists in a context she calls "collaborative conversation," which takes form in publications and installations.

In addition to "Narrow Lands," Martin is known for "Home on the Strange: In Search of the Salton Sea" and "America," which documents small towns (Kobalt Gallery also has paintings from this series). Martin now lives and works in California's Mojave Desert, documenting, in collaboration with a West Coast poet, a remote unincorporated town.

In the desert paintings, Martin's interest is what is lost when hardscrabble land attracts a developer's eye; in her "Narrow Lands" series, a soft palette intimates the loss of the built environment, abandoned or gentrified into oblivion.



"Cabral," oil on canvas, by Deborah Martin.



"Pink," oil on canvas, by Deborah Martin.