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VeroBeach

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Magazine



Annual photo contest winners
wow us with Indian River County's

LIQUID BEAUTY

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TRAVELING LIGHT

HAVING PAINTED IN VENICE, PARIS, AND NEW YORK CITY,
PLEIN AIR AND MARITIME ARTIST LEONARD MIZEREK
HAS FOUND ANCHORAGE IN VERO BEACH

BY CHRIS FASOLINO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVEN MARTINE

Artist Leonard Mizerek finds
his inspiration in nature from
light, sky, and water.



Above: *Sunset Offshore*, oil on canvas, 24 x 48 inches
Right: *Sunshine in the Keys*, oil on canvas, 40 x 60 inches



Sailboats gliding upon a vibrant teal sea. Peaceful Florida marshland beneath a sky that is clouded yet glimmering with morning light. The colorful harbor of Key West, with sunshine sparkling on the turquoise waters. An ocean sunset glimpsed through the sails of a schooner. The rooftops of Paris under a dawn sky. A cresting wave flecked with the opalescent hues of morning or evening.

These are a just a few of the beautiful images that can be found in the paintings of Leonard Mizerek. Influenced by Impressionism, he is an artist who loves the ocean and is drawn to maritime themes. Having found inspiration in varied travels, and having earned international acclaim, Mizerek has now chosen to call Vero Beach his home.

His accolades include a Merit Award at the Coos Art Museum, the Salzman Award at the National Arts Museum, the Exhibiting Artist Members Show, and the treasured Iron Man Award from the American Society of Marine Artists. He has had exhibitions at the Mystic Seaport Museum, the Delaware Art Museum, and the San Diego Maritime Museum as well as numerous other venues. He has been an artist in residence at the Museum Yvonne Jean-Haffen in Dinan, France, where three of his paintings are now in the museum collection. His work has been featured in *Sea History*, *Fine Art Today*, *American Art Review*, and *Marine Art Quarterly*. So it is of great interest that, with a wry tone that nevertheless conveys genuine enthusiasm, he calls Vero Beach “the center of the universe.”

Mizerek explains: “Vero has so much variety—the inlet, the mangroves, the Jungle Trail, plus the culture and the people. I said, ‘I want to land here.’” And as befits his maritime perspective, he has found a



Some of the local spots Mizerek frequents for inspiration while painting en plein air are McKee Botanical Garden, Jungle Trail, and the balcony of his home at Village Spires.



“I put a color on my palette
and then look at nature
to see where it might be.”

— LEONARD MIZEREK



Calm Sunset, oil on canvas, 24 x 48 inches



Morning Light on the Seine, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches

favorable anchorage, having purchased a beachfront condo at the Village Spires. He plans to divide his time between there and New York City.

Of his Vero Beach home, Mizerek says, “I wake up every day to a beautiful sunrise.” The ocean vistas and ever-changing play of light are inspirational to his work. “I like to set a mood and get a sense of the light. And the skies are so clear and vibrant here.” His wife, Carolyn, says of their home, “We sacrificed square footage for the view. It’s all about the sky and water.”

Given Mizerek’s fascination with light, water, and reflections, it is no surprise that he loves to paint en plein air—in the tradition of the Impressionists—although he may finish a work in his studio. His artistic travels have allowed him to paint while visiting some of the world’s great locations. In Venice, he enjoyed setting up his easel alongside the canals—“they are just luminous.” In Paris, he painted his rooftop scene from a balcony and ensconced himself on the banks of the Seine and in cafés—“I’m always around places where I can eat,” he jokes. When he was in Provence painting the fields of lavender, tourists stopped to take pictures of him. “I was wondering if I should put on a big hat.”

Where does he find inspiration in Vero Beach? The balcony of his new home is one favorite spot. “I set up my easel here just like I did in Paris,” he says. He also enjoys Sebastian Inlet State Park “for the dunes and the openness,” adding, “It’s great to revisit it, because it’s different every time you go back.”

McKee Botanical Garden is another place he appreciates, because “you get up close and personal” to a fascinating variety of plants. This is especially valuable since Mizerek will sometimes use a composite approach; a water lily, for example, might be observed at McKee but included in a painting that is primarily based on a different location, allowing him to bring together some of his favorite discoveries. The Jungle Trail is another special place for him. “With the heat of the jungle and the vegetation, it’s



Above: *Paris Sunset*, oil on canvas, 15 x 30 inches
Right: *Last on the Beach*, oil on canvas, 20 x 16 inches

new material compared to up North. And I see the horizon! When you don’t see the horizon, you’re missing half the joy.” Spoken like a true artist and a true sailor.

Of course, painting en plein air in Florida does have its challenges. “Wind, mosquitoes, blazing heat,” says Mizerek with a droll smile, naming a few. Then there are alligators. Once, while painting in the marshes, he recalls, “I got so immersed in my work that I was not paying attention, and along came a 12-foot alligator. I had spotted him in the distance but had not noticed that he was coming directly toward me—and there he was at the foot of my easel.”





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— LEONARD MIZEREK



Breaking Sea, oil on canvas, 24 x 48 inches

Left: Mizerek has the perfect perch for his latest paintings, an oceanfront view from his Village Spires condominium.
Right: *Bright Day Sailing*, oil on canvas, 24 x 36 inches
Below: *Moonlight Arrival*, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 inches



Mizerek abandoned the canvas and fled to his car. After investigating the palette, perhaps to see if it was edible, the gator moved on. “Apparently, he was not an art lover,” Mizerek jokes. The artist retrieved the painting and finished it, adding a shadowy shape in the water. “Yes, it was a suggestion of my newfound friend.” Thankfully, Mizerek has a sense of adventure; after all, he once participated in an event in which artists painted scenes from Patrick O’Brian’s seafaring novels while gallery visitors were served rum, so a swashbuckling flair is part of his personality.

The inconveniences and even occasional risks of painting en plein air are well worth it for the inspiration that comes from being immersed in nature. “You get what I call lucky surprises,” Mizerek says. Changing light can be very rewarding, as is the firsthand study of color in nature. “I put a color on my palette and then look at nature to see where it might be. Some of these radiant colors today have a wonderful spark to them.” Although by itself a radiant color might seem unnaturally bright, Mizerek will overlay it with other colors, allowing the light to come through in a way that conveys natural phenomena.

John Stringer of the J.M. Stringer Gallery has been representing Mizerek’s work for two decades, and he is now happy to have the artist as a neighbor. “We’re on a journey with artists,” Stringer says. “What gives me the greatest satisfaction is seeing them evolve and achieve success.” He believes that Mizerek’s work is about emotion—“the emotion one feels when looking at a beautiful scene on the water. He uses light to evoke that emotion.”

A noble example is the painting *Moonlight Arrival*, which Mizerek has chosen to hang in his new Vero Beach home. It is always of interest to see which paintings an artist chooses to live with. *Moonlight Arrival* portrays a graceful sailing

vessel anchored for the night in peaceful waters; a warm yellow light from its cabin counterpoints the silvery moonlight. It is an appropriately cozy image for a home, while also being undeniably beautiful. It manifests the themes present throughout Mizerek’s art: his love of light, reflections, water, and sky. All considered, it is a truly fitting choice for the artist’s own anchorage. 🌙

