



The Force and Clarity of Silas Marder's Vision

By Mary Cummings

Raised by artistic parents in Springs, just up the road from Pollock and de Kooning, 28-year old Silas Marder took over a barn on his family's property and mounted his first show just two years ago. Herewith, a portrait of the young man as an artist.

Most art galleries make Silas Marder uncomfortable.

What bothers him, he suggested in a recent interview, is their atmosphere of hushed reverence, their pristine white walls and the way art works are displayed like so many precious jewels. In such an environment, *"I feel self-conscious and awkward,"* he said.

Marder's ideal art gallery would be bigger, more flexible and less formal. It would be a place to spend time in an easy, comfortable atmosphere and enjoy the art.

No surprise then that the Silas Marder Gallery in Bridgehampton fits that description. No surprise, either, that it occupies a space like no other—a big, beautiful barn located in the spectacular park-like setting of the family horticultural business, Marders. There, at the end of a gravel path that winds through a magical landscape of greenery punctuated by artfully placed boulders, weathered sheds and the occasional Muscovy duck, it opens its wide doors onto a spacious sculpture garden.

And there, waiting at the door on a recent fine day, was the man whose ideas are embodied in this unusual gallery. Bearded and casually dressed in jeans and sneakers, 28-year-old Silas Marder has a diffident manner that belies the force and clarity of his aesthetic vision. Raised by parents who always had art on the walls and artists in their circle of friends, and who *"conveyed the importance of art"* to their children, Marder said he was lucky, too, in having spent much of his childhood in Springs.

"Pollock's house was down the road; de Kooning was there. There's sort of a mythological thing in Springs," he said. *"I like that whole sense of community. I think it's important."*

As the oldest of four brothers, he has had another advantage, he said. He has been exposed to the family enterprise from the beginning, watching it grow from a firewood business to the huge, and hugely successful, venture in horticultural fine art that it is today. Along the way, he absorbed not only a love of nature but an understanding of how the techniques and concepts of art have a role to play in the garden.

Accompanying his father to "The Creeks," the late artist Alfonso Ossorio's East Hampton estate where art works shared turf with an extraordinary arboretum, he came to view the outdoor environment the way Ossorio might have, to understand the way volume, texture and color contribute to the aesthetic whole and "not to look at landscapes in a traditional sense."

A Brotherhood

That all this would come together in the Silas Marder Gallery was not foreseen, but now that it has, Marder looks back on the chain of events and realizes that everything was taking him *"in a direction."*

"This all started because my younger brother, Mica, is artistic," said Marder. Mica Marder was diagnosed with a variety of learning differences that made regular school work a challenge, and to encourage him to keep following his artistic impulse, his brother approached him with a proposition.

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Eventually, Silas Marder went off to Bennington, where he focused on film and design and took some painting and sculpture courses. Mica Marder studied art at Emerson College in England, but the brothers were always back together every summer. Two years ago Silas organized a show for Mica at Ashawagh Hall in Springs. *"It went very well," said Marder. "We sold a lot of paintings and sculpture."*

Mica Marder had found an appreciative public; Silas Marder had found a métier. After that, the barn on the Bridgehampton property, which had been used mainly for storage, was made available to him and in August of 2004, Marder mounted his first show at the gallery bearing his name. *"That got me to the point where I am now," he said. "We did a full season last year with a mix of shows—a real range of artists."*

Working with his brother has given him a taste for working with younger artists, and he said, *"I always want that to be an element."* Because his roots are in the East End, he will always be interested in showing local artists.

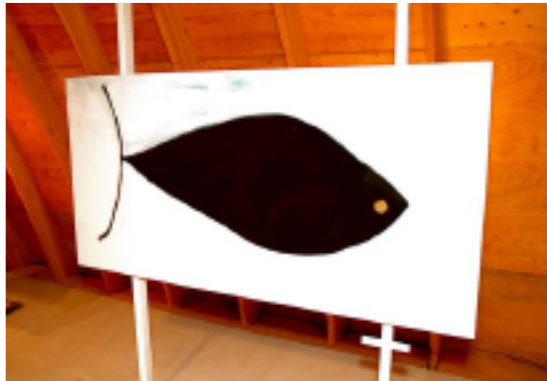
At the same time, he hastened to add, it's important to work with a range of artists. *"I'm not making any rules," he stressed. "I don't want to get stuck."*

Singular Vision

To assure that range, Marder keeps an open mind and makes the rounds, scouting out artists. It's a matter of *"talking to people, going to art fairs, keeping your eyes open,"* he said. Some artists are recommended, some he has seen and *"tracked down."* And sometimes *"it's like mining,"* he said. You go for a while without finding a single artist who has what you're looking for *"and then you find a whole pocket of them."*

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Just as he is the one person who selects the artists, he alone is responsible for every aspect of the gallery's design. To be sure, his parents' sensibility—their artful mix of older materials with the new, for example—has influenced him. It can be seen in the vintage poles and chicken wire used for protective barriers on the stairway and loft, and in the huge coffee table of rough-sawn lumber. The table, strewn with reading matter and positioned next to a couch you sink into and an armchair in the main ground-floor



space, invite visitors to relax and contemplate walls hung with what is often very cutting-edge art.

Two giant sets of overhead lights look as though they might have been expressly commissioned, so perfectly suited are they to the space. In fact, Marder says he spotted them in a farm field out west, stopped his car, “knocked on the door” and purchased them on the spot. “I didn’t know where they would go,” he said. “I just thought they were so cool.”

Rustic, boldly functional and handsome, the lights contribute to the vision Marder has had for the building from the start. “I wanted to keep it as what it is, a barn,” he said. “It’s kind of a cool structure and it’s great for hanging.” From the curved walls of the gothic-arched loft, art works, ingeniously hung, seem to float in the air. A traditional white wall can be used for more classic displays downstairs, where other walls have retained their natural dark hues, the better to offset certain paintings. Artists, he said, “get excited by the possibilities.”

After a winter spent “buried in planning for this year,” Marder emerged in the spring brimming with plans for the 2006 season. For his season-launcher, in May, he asked more than 50 artists each to create three 8-by-10 paintings especially for the occasion. Participating artists were drawn from all over the country and Europe, but about a third of them were local, he said. The concept, as always, was “to get people excited about art.” Ideally, major collectors might discover a new artist at such a show, he suggested, while the accessibility of so many small-scale works might also inspire those who had never done so before to start a collection.



Changing shows will keep the multiple indoor spaces and the sculpture garden active all season; outdoor film screenings on Fridays will continue as will the landscape drawing classes for kids launched last year. Multiple shows, a variety of programs, a lot of excitement—that is Silas Marder’s formula for a successful gallery.

“It’s the nature of the space that you can break it up into multiple shows,” he said.

“You can elaborate on the shows with these programs. You can do a lot of things that spill into each other. That is what I’m excited about.”

photography by Doug Young

