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### "Max Moran A Brush with Brilliance" Ann Lloyd

Like pearls on a string, artist Max Moran collects pieces of perceptions . . . people, places, ideas and experiences. Then he synthesizes them into paintings that are luminous treasures in their own right. Martha's Vineyard is the latest in his string of "total immersions," a collection that has included study in Ireland, living within an Amish community, and, as Degas did, a season spent backstage painting with a ballet company. Moran is an accomplished figurative and landscape painter, a commissioned portrait painter and sculptor, and a writer and illustrator of children's books. He has painted billboards, sold antiques, and his work is shown in galleries in San Francisco, Columbus, Chicago, and, soon to be, New York. At 26, Moran has amassed on "fortune" in life experiences, and produced another in a prolific outpouring of art and styles. It helped to get an early start. "I had a coup of sorts, when I was 17," Moran says. "A portrait I did was chosen by the Ohio Bicentennial Commission to be hung in Washington's National Gallery." Moran says his portrait of Ohio's General Dicks "is still there, probably in some basement somewhere." With a credo borrowed from James Dean, Moran says, "Every artist owes it to his craft to experience everything once." He explains, "The more experienced a traveler you are, the more you're exposed to, the more you're going to look at things with a wiser eye. It's the same with people. I think everyone takes a little piece from everyone they meet. We're not just ourselves but made up of thousands of pieces." "It's dangerous living," Moran concedes, "but I try to experience the whole genre, the whole spectrum. There's a lot of material out there." Moran makes use of it all. With references as disparate as his background, he quotes Picasso, Kant, "The New England Journal of Medicine", Claes Oldenburg, and Carl Sagan. "If you're given a lifetime," Moran recalls Sagan saying. "This tiny section of all the worlds knowledge is all you'll ever be able to encompass. This can be applied to so many things," he adds, most specifically to his own recent move to Martha's Vineyard. "It's one of those places," says Moran, "where there's a landscape to be painted around every corner. The island has a lot of diversity for such a small space." In his easy gestural brushstrokes, Moran is recording at roughly the rate of a canvas a day. His landscapes are his attempt to communicate "the moment, the hour, the spontaneity of the scene," and he employs his loose and flowing style because "it tells much more than infinite detail." "Too much observation kills it," he says. "You tend to start to rationalize things." One ideal he mentions are the delicate portraits of John Singer Sargent, "where a nose is a big flat stroke, yet from a distance it all falls into place." Another is Pissaro. "You get a rush, a high, from his landscapes - landscapes have the power to affect people," and

the impressionist style, he adds, lends itself to innovation. "Once you know how to dissect a landscape, it's like knowing a language. It's almost mechanical, extremely fast. Before I'm conscious of what I've even put on, I've got half the picture done." With the sun at low angles, Moran paints on location, blending the colors of the sky and clouds first. "It's a very quick thing. The sun changes so quickly, but once you key the colors, they can be mixed right on the canvas. It's just a matter of placing them in the right spots." He says he never erases or paints out, because, "maybe it wasn't a mistake in the first place." His canvas is prepared with a brownish ground that cuts down on glare. He explains that it slows the refractory as you focus from landscape to canvas. Moran feels strongly about painting for the future, using conservation measures and the best oil paints. "The masters," he points out, "were initially called craftsmen, not artists, because of their restorative skills. When I paint something it's going to be around for a long, long time." His respect of the craft is genuine. Of all creative expressions, painting, he feels, is the highest form. "It is a medium for the masses. No matter how badly an apple is rendered, if it triggers your sense of smell, of taste, it has succeeded," and to Max Moran, a painting that communicates, is as much an obligation as it is a reward. Picture #1 "Vineyard Haven Garden," 28" X 36", oil on canvas The viewer's mind supplies fragrance and the hum of bees to complete the sensory experience of this garden landscape by Martha's Vineyard artist Max Moran. He paints on location, in early morning or late afternoon, often turning out a canvas a day, despite nature's unpleasant realities. "I had a problem with these little swarms of gnats," he says, "that smacked right into the blue sky of the canvas. I'd have to scrape them off, but now I've taken up smoking a pipe or cigars and they stay away." Picture #2 "The Amish of Mt. Victory, Ohio" 56" x 44", oil on canvas The faces of these Amish children project a sense of how their insular existence teaches them to regard the outer world. Though Max Moran lived with and painted the Amish for three years, they allowed only children to be represented in his paintings. "They were old order; I enjoy their honesty." He continues to do figurative painting, but says he has finished his work with the Amish. "I pushed it to where I thought it could go and went on