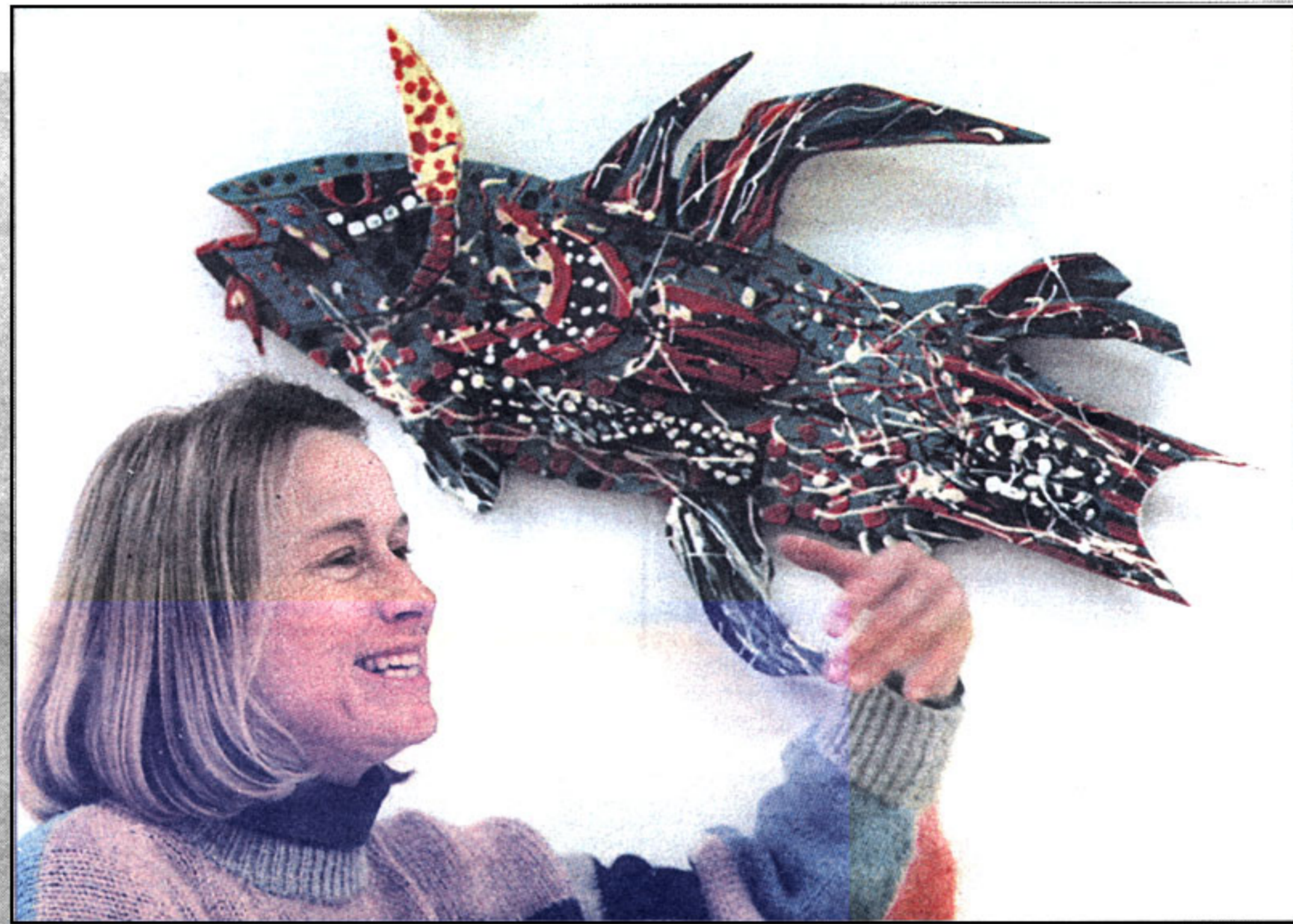
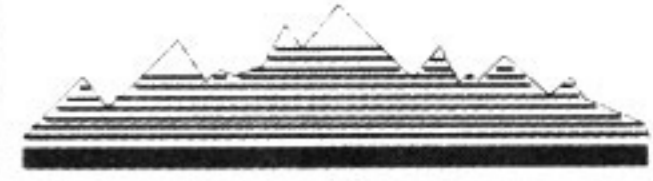


this **Week**



Artist at sea _____

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Film _____

Oscar night was just a little too respectable this year. I missed Cher.

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Dance _____

Montana Ballet presents 'Choreographers Who Broke the Ice' at 7:30 p.m.

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Art _____

Photographic works by Rudi Dietrich and David Mathews at BHS gallery.

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Artistic adventure

Susan Dabney painted on deck as her ship rounded the tip of South America

Artist Susan Burrows Dabney had always loved painting outdoors. But when she recently boarded a 90-passenger ship for a trip around the tip of South America, she found painting in high winds, strong currents, cloudbursts and constantly changing landscapes was challenging at best.

"It's so interesting as an artist when you can go anywhere," says Dabney, 45. This trip, however, came as a total surprise — in more ways than one.

For eight months, Dabney's mother and grandmother had been planning a trip sponsored by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and National Geographic that would retrace the route of Charles Darwin's ship, the *Beagle*.

When Dabney's grandmother suddenly couldn't go just two weeks before the cruise, Dabney jumped at the chance.

She grabbed an easel (half the size of her usual one), the birch boards she paints on and a Spanish translation book. "I speak no Spanish."

She had to put her paint into small jars and label them face cream to get them through customs. Turpentine was another matter. Because she couldn't take it, she had to try to find paint thinner when she got to Chile.

"That was the beginning of my adventure," Dabney says with a laugh. She finally found turpentine in of all places a library in Santiago, Chile. So bought all she found, knowing she'd have to use it sparingly or run out. She planned to paint all 14 days of the voyage, two paintings each day.

"The reason I am so impassioned about painting when I go places is I hate to say goodbye," Dabney says. Through her paintings she takes a little something of the place and the people with her. "Once I paint something, it is there forever inside of me."

Dabney and her mother flew to Puerto Montt where they were to board their ship, a small beautiful craft with cherry wood cabins and teak decks. While waiting, Dabney had a taxi driver drop her at a spot where so she could paint. He was to return at 4 p.m.

Little children gathered around, wanted to take her home with them, and an old man brought her a homemade burrito. The taxi driver barely came back in time. The gang plank went up the moment she wheeled her wet paintings on board.

"The next day I got up at 5:30 a.m.," Dabney says. "It

was gorgeous. I took my stuff out on deck." While she normally does two sketches then begins to paint, those plans quickly went awry.

"The boat was rocking and rolling. The wind was blowing." But the big thing was the scenes; they were changing so quickly she had to skip sketching and paint like crazy. "The ship was moving the whole time."

Two and a half hours into her painting, she looked down to see bright red spots on the beautiful teak deck. She realized with horror that the red was coming from paint she'd spilled and spread on the bottoms of her sneakers.

"I absolutely freaked out," Dabney says. She used some of her precious turpentine to clean up what she could, but the deckhands had to sand the entire back deck to get it off. "That was my first day."

As the ship worked its way through narrow fjords, Dabney painted with rugs under her easel. "It was a treacherous, tiny little passage."

Her landscapes were constantly changing. "Glaciers came right down to the water." In other areas there was very little vegetation. "It was so stark, dark and remote, majestic and rocky. The wind was always blowing. The sky changed so much."

"It was such a growing trip for me because it pushed me beyond all my limits," Dabney says. "I depend so much on the landscapes staying there. It's a wonderful thing to be able to capture the color and light as the land is going by."

While passing through what is known as the Roaring '40s, the ship had to go out into the ocean and the winds and currents really picked up. Dabney had left her painting to go upstairs and get something to eat, trying to warm up. A gush of wind blew all the tables and chairs across the upper deck. And on the lower deck, Dabney's easel and fresh painting went flying.

Amazingly it landed safely. "That was really close. Luckily I didn't get paint on the deck again." Later one of her paintings would blow overboard.

All her inhibitions left her as quickly as the changing scenes, Dabney says. "When you say it doesn't matter, that's when you have the most fun and that's your best paintings."

The only artist painting while on the ship, Dabney had trouble getting her paintings to dry in her cabin below deck. Her porthole didn't open so she had to leave her



In her studio at Emerson Cultural Center, Susan Dabney paints in bad weather, but she much prefers working outdoors. On the cover: Dabney talks about painting every day while sailing around the tip of South America in high winds, pouring rain and quickly changing landscapes.

cabin door open. That allowed other passengers to stop by each day and see how her work was progressing.

One of the trustees Dabney met from the Metropolitan Museum of Art suggested she have an art show. Removing books from the shelves in the ship's library, Dabney used masking tape to put up her paintings. She had no frames, many of the paintings were still tacky and she had no book for guests to sign. Instead she used her sketch book and sold all of her paintings fifteen minutes before the show was to open.

"It never occurred to me everything would sell," Dabney laughs. "It was so exciting."

Now back home, Dabney is finishing a project close to her heart — and close to home. Since September she has been painting the landscapes of Gallatin Valley on small birch boards. "It's a window into the scenes. I love the Gallatin Valley. I love landscapes."

And these landscapes don't move.

Story by **Barb Smith**
Photography by **Linda Best**
of the Chronicle



'Puerto Montt' is a scene Dabney painted while waiting to board ship.