

Thick with cigarette smoke, stuffed with papers, books, and magazines, the Broadway apartment of Ukrainian artist Alexandre Sasha Kouznetsov is part bat-cave and part Parisian salon, where conventional sensibilities are suspended in favor of creativity. The lack of sustenance and mass of paintings strewn about suggest that it's art, not food, that revives him.

Rising at 3pm and painting until 3am, Kouznetsov's nocturnal habits reveal a stark contrast to Newport's bright streets. The duality amuses him, and he expresses that profound satisfaction in oil paint, with dark scenes on large canvases the size of his curtained Colonial window.

Kouznetsov ignores the superficial aspects of his adopted home, and sees American history staring back at him. Newport's waves aren't just for water sports junkies; they roar with stories of saltier characters involved in pirate ships and slavery. It is this eccentric vision that provides Kouznetsov ample creativity for his painting.

"Newport has secrets and violence in its past and monuments of prosperity and extravagance, the pride and charm of



SASHA KOUZNETSOV

"I live in a dreamworld."

provinciality, a variety of the surviving gardens of various cultures, and all of it is surrounded by an ocean not defeated," he explains.

Kouznetsov saw the ocean for the first time in 1992, when he was a visiting lecturer at the Swinburne School on Pelham Street. "There was no ocean in Kiev, where I grew up," he says. "I only knew how to paint it (from my imagination)." He liked the city so much he decided to relocate, claiming the water "calms him down." His work is displayed all over town, like Broadway haunt Empire Tea.

"I grew up on fairy tales," adds the artist. "I live in a dreamworld."

Kouznetsov expresses himself primarily through illustration and oil painting but he is also an actor, director, and filmmaker. In one film, screened at the Newport Film Festival, he stars as himself. The opening scene depicts Kouznetsov painting to a light-hearted musical refrain, "Sasha can paint and Sasha can draw." There is barely a plot, but the images, music and dialogue create a powerful message: art for the sake of money and status is just silly.