

## Stanley Meltzoff, 89, Avid Diver Who Painted Marine Life

By DENNIS HEVESI

Stanley Meltzoff, who dived to great depths to photograph sea life and then, in his studio, transformed those images into vibrant paintings for magazines like *Sports Illustrated* and *Scientific American*, died Thursday in Red Bank, N.J. He was 89 and lived in Fair Haven, N.J.

The death was confirmed by his wife, Diane Pogrunt.

Wandering the world for more than 40 years — from the shores of Montauk and Key West to the atolls of the Pacific and the Mediterranean coast — Mr. Meltzoff spent his days peering at bonefish as they mated six inches below the surface or using scuba gear to photograph sharks, eels or goliath groupers at depths of 100 feet or more.

An artist and art professor earlier in his life, he began to concentrate on fish images in the early 1960s.

In "Bound for Blue Water: Contemporary American Marine Art" (Greenwich Workshop Press, 2003), the marine art historian J. Russell Jinishian called Mr. Meltzoff "the father and founder of the genre."

"To say that water is in Stanley Meltzoff's blood is an understatement," the book said. It also displayed Mr. Meltzoff's detailed depictions of butterflyfish, bluefin tuna, black marlin, bonefish and barracuda — to name a few — in shades of red, green, orange, purple, silver and, of course, blue.

Mr. Meltzoff roamed "in search of many species of fish that he studied, photographed and interacted with in their natural environments," Mr. Jinishian said. "He then put his masterful brushwork on canvas to create images that, for the most part, are



Photographs from stanleymeltzoff.com

Left, a staged photograph of Stanley Meltzoff "painting" underwater off Belize and, above, one of his works.

### *An artist who found his favorite subjects in the deep.*

the only way these beautiful animals can be seen."

Born in Harlem on March 27, 1917, Mr. Meltzoff was a son of Nathan and Sadie Marcus Meltzoff. His father was a cantor at a Manhattan synagogue. Mr. Meltzoff graduated from City College in 1937 and earned a master's degree in fine art from New York University in 1940. During World War II, he was an artist for Stars and Stripes, the military newspaper, in Europe. He taught painting and art history at City College from 1939 to 1941, and taught there again

after the war until 1950, when he began a five-year stint at Pratt Institute.

But even as a child in the 1920s, Mr. Meltzoff had been an avid skin diver, mainly off the New Jersey coast. By the 1940s, he was keen on spear fishing and scuba diving and, starting in 1949, he added underwater photography. He first combined his passions for the sea, photography and art in the 1960s, when he painted several series on particular fish species for *Sports Illustrated*, *National Geographic* and *Field & Stream*.

Mr. Meltzoff's first wife, Alice Forder Meltzoff, died in 1979. Besides his second wife, whom he married in 1999, he is survived by two daughters, Sarah Keene Meltzoff of Miami and Annie Laurie Armistead of Davis, Calif.; three stepchildren, Jessie Dulberger of Boulder, Colo., Stephanie Ritz of Oshkosh, Wis., and Matt

Ritz of Tacoma, Wash.; and a brother, Julian, of San Diego.

Mr. Meltzoff's art was not been limited to marine life. He did illustrations, including landscapes and historical subjects, for *Life*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Colliers*. In 1976, he was commissioned by AT&T to paint a whimsical telephone book cover celebrating the nation's bicentennial and the company's centennial. The cover, on 187 million phone books distributed nationwide, included an American Indian bewildered by smoke signals rising from a telephone receiver.

But Mr. Meltzoff always returned to the sea, "a place without horizons," he once wrote, where he could dive "through the surface into the looking-glass world where I flew down into the deeper blue, until I fell back up into the air, exhausted with delight."