Remembering the SouthCoast master of marine art, Louis Sylvia
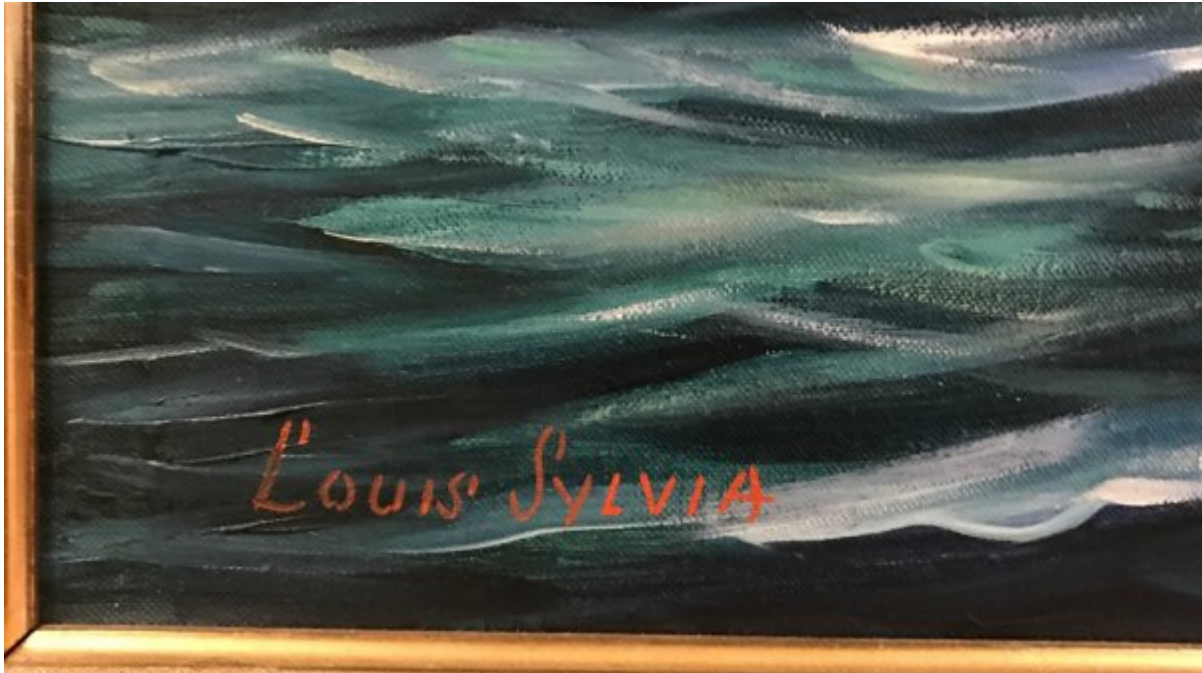
By Jonathan Comey

Ever wonder about the people behind the paintings you see on SouthCoast walls?

One of the things that makes our region special is our sense of history and our embrace of the sea, which mix naturally to create a culture rich with maritime art. Many public buildings are adorned with wonderful art in different styles, from historic structures to new buildings.

The Southcoast Health location in Fairhaven has some nice selections of art to complement the newly built center, but in a stroll through the facility the header image really stood out. The picture doesn't do it justice; the details are crisp and dramatic and pop off the canvas.

Looking at the lower left corner, the artist was identified as Louis Sylvia. Who was he?

Sylvia was a Dartmouth-based painter who specialized in marine scenes and painted for most of his life before passing away in 1987.

We found this clip from the 1975 from "Community," a local New Bedford show hosted by Bob Bassett from 1960-1980.

Louis (pronounced Louie) sketched boats from a young age, studied in New York, taught art in New Bedford and his work lives on 30 years after his death.

"I've always wanted to paint ships," he said in the interview, and for most of his adult life he did so in his studio on Fisher Road North Dartmouth. He shows off some of his work, including a portrait of the Charles W. Morgan whaleship and one from Westport Harbor.

The interviewer, Bob Bassett, was well known in the area before moving onto Baltimore in 1980. He died at 71 in 2000 from complications from ALS.