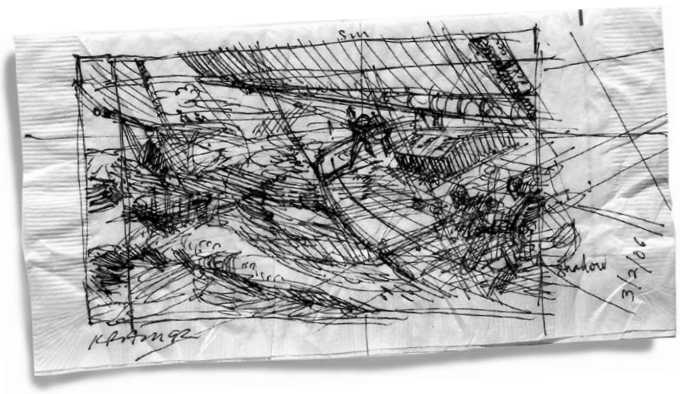
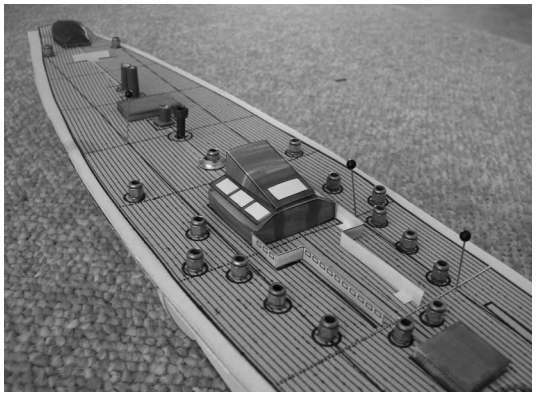
RUSS KRAMER **Process of a Painting**

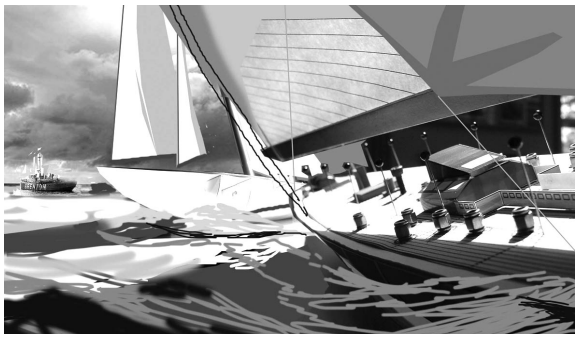
It was quite an honor for me to have been invited to speak to those attending the ASMA Annual Weekend in Cape May, showing my work and describing some of the methods I use to develop my yachting paintings. Here is one example I shared, a start-to-finish look at my painting of the great J-boat RANGER of 1937.



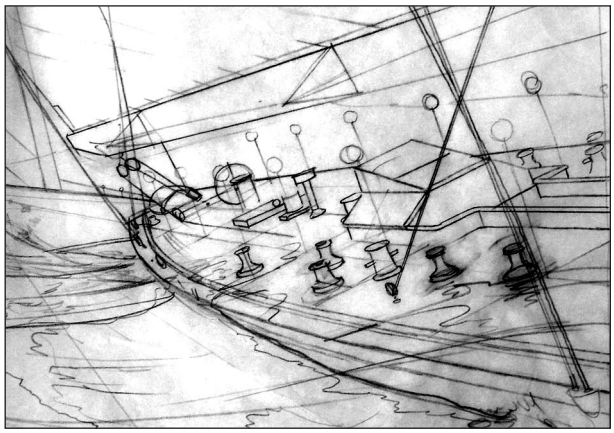
ONE This is my original thumbnail, sketched on a restaurant napkin. It is very gestural – I'm trying just to work out a basic idea and point-of-view for the piece. My goal in this painting will be to create a dynamic composition, with strong light and shadow areas, and show the lee decks awash. I also want a strong human element in the foreground.

TWO I decide to depict RANGER,because I had yet to paint her, and good photographic reference is available from this period. Because I want an unusual point of view, and working out the perspective will be difficult, I decide to build a small-scale card model, just detailed enough for my needs. I print a five-foot scale grid on the decks, and push in pins of the same height to aid my perspective drawing.

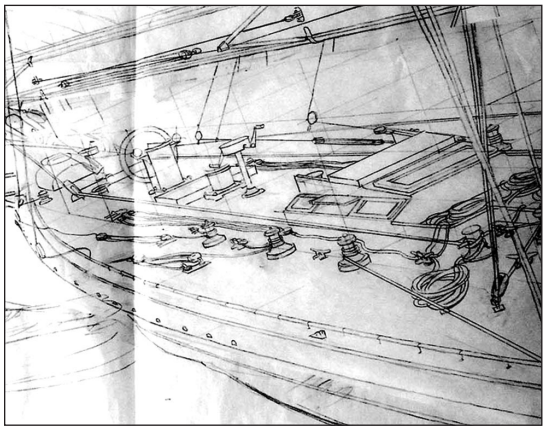




THREE I digitally photograph the model, and in Photoshop, crudely lay in some values for the sails, sky and water. I want the foreground wake to appear in strong shadow, and reflect some of the subtle colors of the sail, which will have a warm back lighting.

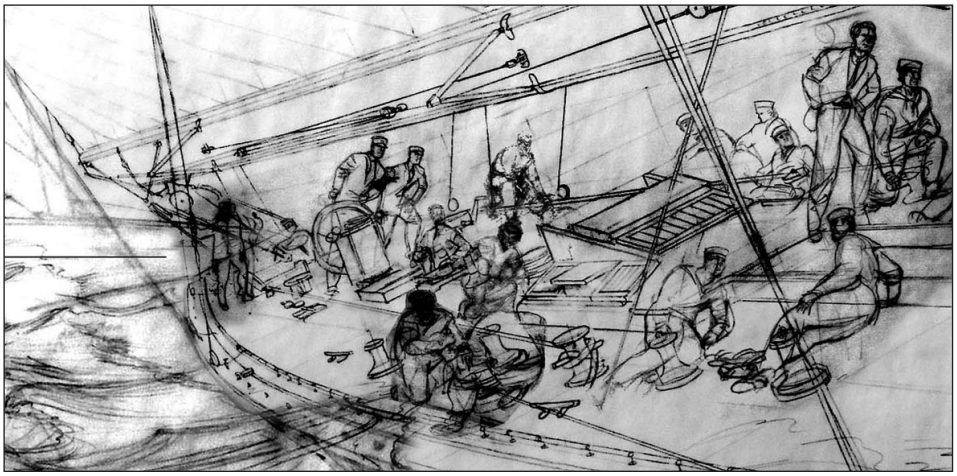


FOUR I trace over a printout of the image, refining the accuracy and detail through a series of larger and larger pencil sketches. The deck is the "stage" on which my "actors" will appear and knowing where all the gear is placed and the lines fall is critical. I have also preserved my five-foot grid to help place the figures in proportion, foreground to background.



FIVE Next, I did a series of thumbnails of crew in action, paying little attention to getting the anatomy perfect. What I'll be trying to do is place the figures on the deck in such a way as to guide your eye around the painting and create a sense of action and excitement.

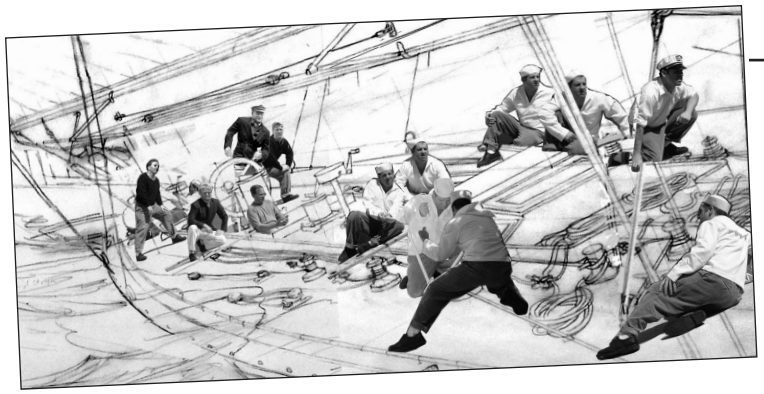
Showing a winch crew in the foreground shadows trimming a jib will create interest there, and help direct your eye (I hope). I can't tell you the principles of good composition, I guess I just know when it feels right to me.



SIX Here's a pretty finished sketch, which combines my deck drawing with my crew thumbnails, layering them over by cutting out tracing paper. At this stage, there's a lot of trial and error, moving figures around to find the best composition. You'll see I have a couple of extra characters in here who don't appear in the final piece, because I thought it was just too crowded, and led your eye away from the focal point.

SEVEN Next, I take my sketch and, in Photoshop, add some rough values in grayscale only. I decide not to do a color sketch, but instead spend a fair amount of time establishing the proper range of values, which to this painting I consider more important. Originally, I was going to depict the background boat crossing RANGER's wake, but never was satisfied with the composition. In the end, I decided to show her coming almost directly bow on, and found a good reference shot of another J-boat to use for the basis of ENDEAVOUR II, the 1937 challenger (below).

EIGHT When I'm happy with the composition, I'll use my thumbnail figures as a guide to shoot a live model in the appropriate clothing and position. Here's my buddy James posing for the wincher in the foreground and as helmsman Mike Vanderbilt. I've shot him on a canted board and in sun or shadow to help guide the proper values. Vanderbilt was considerably taller than James, so I stretch him out in Photoshop, and drop the background. I also found a good mugshot of Vanderbilt pretty close to the expression and angle I need and so composited his face onto James' body in the computer. That's me in the foreground bottom right, standing in for navigator Zenas Bliss



NINE Now I've taken the sketch with the thumbnai figures, shown above, and substituted the photographic models in their place. Finally, I'll do a full-size pencil outline of all the deck gear, figures, rigging, etc., and transfer this to canvas, which I have primed with a warm tinted gesso. As you can see, quite a bit of preparation has gone into this piece well before the brushes get wet. By now, I'm thinking the actual painting of it will be the easy part!

RUSS KRAMER **Process of a Painting**

TEN I started with the sky and sails, and, in the past, have generally worked "ala prima". For this painting, however, I decide to do a pretty complete underpainting, filling the canvas completely with rough color and value, which I found most helpful.. Once that was in place, I gradually refined the detaill bit by bit. I experimented for the first time with some glazing here and there, to darken values or alter a hue. Nearing completion, I have a tendency to say "it's finished" then go right back and work on it a few more sessions. I always manage to find something else I think will improve it.

My favorite part of the Annual Weekend, besides meeting so many nice folks, was the "secret stuff" workshop where we swapped ideas and methods. I learned so much, and made new friends whom I know I can call with a question anytime. The same is true here – please feel free to e-mail me at russ@russkramer.com if you think I can lend you an idea or insight.

Below is the finished painting "A Million Dollar Breeze" which appeared on the cover of the 2006 Mystic International Marine Art Exhibition catalog and sold on opening night, I am happy to say. You can see the full color version, as well as the rest of my work, on **www.russkramer.com.**

"A Million Dollar Breeze" 27" x 44" Oil on canvas, 2006.