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Pam Rosenblatt

Robert "Bobby" Gallagher: An abstract artist drawing from the past



On a hot summer Saturday, July 20, 2013 afternoon at 1 p.m., Wilderness House Literary Review's arts editor Pam Rosenblatt drove west of Boston to a plush suburb to interview a longtime friend, Robert "Bobby" Gallagher, an abstract painter who enjoys creating diverse artworks in his art studio, based out of a cellar, or outside in the backyard of his house. The following article is about Gallagher's love, his artistic creations.

BRIGHT ORANGES, REDS, BLUES, GREENS, YELLOWS often mix tastefully though sometimes chaotically with muted oranges, reds, blues, greens, yellows upon a large canvas.

The abstractly painted canvas may be reminiscent of a Jackson Pollack (1912-1959), a Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), a Willem de Kooning (1904-1997), or a Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988). But each painting is a total Gallagher in style.

"I've done stuff like de Kooning, Basquiat, and handmade paper cuttings that look like Henri Matisse (1869-1954). Most of my paintings are extremely colorful and vibrant: purples, blue, red orange, yellow, etc. Lately, I've been trying to use more green," he said, sitting at a table in the house's music room.

A self-taught visual artist who has been painting for the past twenty years, Gallagher calls himself 'an outside artist' because he has never been formally trained. He has no mentor, only the renowned artists whose works that he studies during his visits to art museums once every two weeks.

He has created a total of 2,015 paintings and has placed 1,300 of them in hospitals, veterans' clinics, non-profit organizations, and friends and families' houses.



To say Gallagher is a prolific abstract artist is pretty accurate. He creates two to three paintings a week and works between 35 to 40 hours a week. In fact, he has placed at least one painting in every state in the United States, except Alaska.

It has only been for the past three years that he has sold his paintings; he has donated most of them to causes that he supports. Gallagher's paintings are of significant size. They tend to be 32" x 48".

"I just want my artwork to cheer up a room in a hospital or a veteran's clinic or a university,"

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he said. "Roosevelt University in Chicago just built the second largest dormitory in the country. They just put up about seven of my paintings. That's my alma mater! It was nice."

A lot of his artworks were made at the Walter E. Fernald State School where he volunteered for ten years. "That's where I did mostly Pollack and Mondrian. We painted on the floor just the way Pollack did."



"When I got to the Fernald, they had 400 clients living there. When I left, they had 30 clients. We did ceramics, painting, and music. I painted at the Fernald in a gigantic greenhouse attached to the activities center. People would drop in and help pick out colors and where brush strokes were needed. I really loved working with them. It taught me patience and respect.

"I really enjoyed working with mentally challenged at the Fernald State School in Waltham, Massachusetts. I never thought I'd use my social services degree from Roosevelt for anything. But it turned out perfect for this venue," Gallagher said.

While his artworks blend together uniquely, Gallagher acknowledges that he draws concepts from previous artists. "Most good artists develop their works from other artists' works throughout history."

Gallagher's artistic process begins after he hauls the canvases home from Boston." He said, "Then I'll work on about seven or eight paintings at once – starting with the backgrounds and adding different colors as the weeks go on. I'll use a ruler, special tape, recycled paint, and expensive acrylics to make each one." He works either indoors or outdoors.

His acrylics are very strong primary colors. "Lately, I've using volcanic pumice, mixing it with the paints and layering it kind of like Stuart Davis (1892-1964), except much larger and spread out," he said.

Besides using a lot of pumice recently, Gallagher has been developing his style in the path of Basquiat; and he's been working with oil sticks, something that he finds difficult to use.



Gallagher does not usually name his paintings. "I just number my paintings. I did do a series of paintings that I call 'Ladder Paintings' around 2005-2006. I did 108 of those and gave them to Fire Stations around the area. They have very bright colors," he said.

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Gallagher's art studio is called Iowa Genesis Studios, a name developed from his childhood memories. He had resided in Iowa until the age of ten because his father was a traveling salesman whose territories included Iowa, North Dakota, and Nebraska.

His passion for painting began in 1995. Creating art helped him confront an alcoholism problem. "I had bounced around to a

lot of colleges. And then I found painting. I'm married to my art and find that, throughout my early life, I found it difficult to finish things. But with my art, I was able to start and complete the painting which gave me a great feeling of satisfaction. When you complete one painting, you get to complete it and move on," Gallagher said.



Gallagher suggests "[Novice] artists find two or three artists whose artworks bring you enjoyment and then you should take in their styles and colors and try to mix them and do something semi-original.

Maybe mixing individual colors that are not in those pieces."



He said, "Lately, I've been trying to get people to try modern art themselves because everybody has a heck of a lot more talent than they think they do. All they have to do is get up off the couch and throw a little paint onto the canvas because art is forever!"