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Artist leaving an 'impression'

Supporters trying to rejuvenate arts in region

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STURBRIDGE — With influences such as Claude Monet and Edward Hopper, it should surprise no one that Paul Grignon "paints in impressionist's style."

Hopper specialized in American realism, Grignon explained, with haunting and bleak-looking cities and landscapes. Monet's work, he added, was not quite as dark.

Growing up near Walker Pond in Sturbridge, Grignon said he always had an interest in art. He graduated from the now-defunct Chamberland Junior College in Boston, receiving his associate's degree in applied science and majoring in illustration and marketing.

In 1982, he said, he moved to Arizona with a former fiancé and moved back to Massachusetts in 1985, setting up shop in Brookline, well known for its bevy of art galleries and studios.

In 1998, he graduated from the Art Institute of Boston, with a bachelor of fine arts degree in illustration and painting.

By 2005, Grignon had come full circle, returning to his roots with his girlfriend, Julie McCarthy, and her children, Jace, 6, and Cam, 14.

His oasis from the grinds of life is a small studio on the bottom floor of his garage, which offers a panoramic view of the wooded area behind the couple's Fiske Hill Road home.

Comfortably outfitted for his work on canvas, the walls are covered with paintings of numerous land and seascapes of many sizes. With one exception, capturing the splendor of nature in acrylic is Grignon's preferred subject.

"I prefer landscapes and the grandeur of nature," he said. "It takes precedence in practically all of my paintings."

The one exception is a portrait of his father, Herb, who also lives in Sturbridge with his wife, Judy, which Grignon completed three years ago.



Bruce Coulter photo
After living in Arizona and Brookline, Paul Grignon has come full circle, returning to his roots in Sturbridge. Behind him is "Weeping Willows in Brookline." ([click for larger version](#))

When not looking at his work with a critical eye, he uses watercolors to create humorous illustrations or to work on a children's book, "Charles T., What Do You See?" which encourages kids to use their imaginations.

Still, over the past decade, Grignon has concentrated on his work with acrylics, primarily in Brookline, where he had some of his most successful years selling his paintings to the public.

"It's been sparse since I moved back to Sturbridge," he said. "I sold 20 to 30 paintings each in Brookline."

With the opening of Sevensgait's Project Space at 12 Crane St. in Southbridge, Grignon hopes to increase his visibility with the art-loving public.

"I'm glad they opened," he said. "They want to revitalize the arts here, similar to the success artists have had in Northampton."

Sevensgait's, Grignon explained, has revolving art shows each month.

"Once the public knows about it, I think it will be fantastic for the area," he said.

Monika Agnello, who co-owns Sevensgait's with Demetri Kasperson, offered some kudos to Grignon for his work and his efforts to bring the arts to life in the region.

"His paintings look really good," she said. "He's a great guy with a lot of energy. He's been coming to the openings and he's a great guy to have around."

When not pondering ways to exhibit nature on canvas, Grignon also offers a collection of hand-painted furniture, including chairs, tables and TV trays, with his trademark sea and landscapes.

Since returning to Sturbridge, Grignon said, he's noticed a number of discouraged artists.

"There's not a lot of cohesion among artists," he explained.

Despite that, Grignon said, there are those who are trying to move the arts forward in the area, including Margaret Morrissey, adult services librarian at the Jacob Edwards Library in Southbridge, and Diane Tuttle, owner of Sturbridge Framemakers.

Tuttle, Grignon said, has displayed not only his work, but that of other area artists as well.

Grignon said he's spent countless hours on some of his larger canvasses, such as "Weeping Willows in Brookline," adding it's easy to do when he's "in the zone."

"It's a fantastic feeling," he said.

While he believes he's never quite done with a painting, Grignon said he was content with that piece.

As with many local artists, Grignon remains hopeful for a resurgence of the art scene in the area.

"Overall, it seems that most residents are not aware of the vibrant art scene that exists within their midst," he said. "The energy and creativity that is teeming in these surrounding towns can only bring a semblance of intimacy and knowledge of art to many local folk of the incredible diversity of artists who wish to bring their own particular slant of art to the world.

"Margaret Morrissey, of the Jacob Edwards Library, and Demetri and Monika of Sevensgaits are doing just that," Grignon said.

For more information and to view Grignon's work, visit www.grignongallery.com.