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Sites & Sounds

Crossroads of artists

Summer Artswalk will feature work of some of Midwest's top creative talents

By Steve Kash/Special to the Tribune-Star

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Translating appearances of nature and life into a painting confined by the four walls of an artist's canvas has been a lifelong fascination for Phil Hale, who will be one of the artists from around the Midwest displaying their work in Terre Haute at the Summer Artswalk 2002.



In the studio: Phil Hale and Tim King discuss their work in a recent conversation. Both are members of the Midwest Paint Group. (Submitted photo)

Virtually everywhere Hale sets up his easel to face the challenge of his craft, he attracts an array of curious spectators.

In Vigo County, Hale is most widely recognized as the earnest fellow who periodically sets up his easel in a parking lot across the street from St. Benedict's Cathedral on South Ninth Street. He has also garnered considerable attention across the river in West Terre Haute, where occasionally he sets his easel along the banks of the Wabash between the Dresser and Dreiser bridges.

There, according to his frequent painting companion, Michael Neary, Hale is a magnet for a variety of people who happen along the riverbank. As Hale grapples with the challenges of condensing the visual impact of water, land and urban imagery, he attracts fishermen, dogs and kids on bikes who cannot resist the impulse to check out the spectacle of an artist hard at work in this setting.

For years, Hale, a native of Wilmington, Ohio, who grew up in a family where there were many painters, has earned most of his living as an agricultural inspector. His agricultural inspection work has taken him throughout the world, from Latvia and Japan to Costa Rica.

Most recently Hale has been painting in Costa Rica. He became acquainted with his wife, Yamile, whom he married this past March, through his agricultural work, and he spends more than half of his time with her in an industrial suburb near San Jose.

"Costa Rica is a good place to paint landscapes. The light and feel of the place are much different than Indiana or Ohio," Hale says. "I can work on the same painting under the same light and sky for several weeks on end because the weather changes very little during the dry season from November through May."

"Life is slower in Costa Rica than in America, which makes it easier to paint because painting takes a lot of time. Also, it is fairly inexpensive there -- about \$150 a month -- which is important to a poor artist like me. I love to take my gear out and do my painting in the streets of some fairly rough barrios. The people are very friendly, and very interested to see how a gringo artist sees their neighborhood; especially the kids are friendly. Some people have never seen a person paint before.

"I am stimulated by the contrasts between beauty and ugliness, natural and artificial, rich and poor, black and white, colors and grays.

"Skies are very hard for me to paint convincingly. I have found over the years that telephone lines help put into a painting a measure of the sky space. I'm amazed at how many electric and telephone lines are everywhere around the

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world."

April Simma, one of Arts Illiana's coordinators of the Summer Artswalk 2002 says, "We expect this year's Artswalk will have one of the most interesting gatherings of artists ever collected in Terre Haute at one time."

The Artswalk is scheduled for 5 to 9 p.m. June 28. Maps will be available at Arts Illiana and other downtown businesses. Downtown Terre Haute's arts corridor will be filled with exciting artists displaying their beautiful artwork.

"Businesses throughout the downtown area will be participating in the Artswalk. Plus a local drawing group will have a drawing session in Indiana State's Fairbanks Hall in the Bare-Montgomery Gallery. Many of these artists have out-of-the-ordinary private lives. One member of the drawing group has been an opera singer; another is a retired creative writing teacher. In addition to artists, there will be all kinds of musicians, writers and other creative people sharing their work in the downtown arts corridor during the evening."

One feature of the Artswalk that promises to be popular will be the live caricatures drawn by local artist Amy Ford at the UPLEFT Gallery on the second floor above Crossroads Cafe at Seventh and Wabash streets. Ford's caricatures are noted for being insightful and amusing.

"I've been drawing since I could hold a crayon, and I have never stopped," Ford says. "I can draw a caricature in 10 to 15 minutes. Creating caricatures of friends and soon-to-be friends keeps me from getting overly serious about myself and my work."

Ford says that one exciting aspect of this year's Artswalk will be sharing space in the UPLEFT gallery with the Midwest Paint Group.

The group, which includes members Hale and Neary, was co-founded by Chicago artist Timothy King, who attended the same art academy in Kansas City as Neary and Hale. Other members are Barbara Lea, Bob Brock and Dave Rich.

According to King, one of the main bonding mechanisms for the group, which is spread out from Minneapolis and Kansas City to Ohio, is their Web site: mpg-gallery.org. The site enables the MPG artists to interact in a more informal and spontaneous way than a traditional Web site. Also, it helps them to display their work for the general public.

"The landscapes I will bring to Terre Haute's Summer Artswalk are all *pleine air*," says King. "I paint with a direct *impasto* style; my palette is keyed high with lots of rich purples and emeralds when I'm in a wooded area.

"In contrast to that, I have a series of beachscape studies from the Oak Street Beach in downtown Chicago, of which I will bring a sample. The colors are about joining the beach to the sky with a chunk of high-rise buildings jutting in from the right side. In these paintings, the color is the most time-shifted of all my work. As the sky changes, the water and beach change, and large cast shadows encroach from overhead due to the unseen skyscrapers behind.

"The still life I will bring is about two tables stretched together as if one. The forms are paradoxical and stretched to the edges of the canvas. The objects painted on the tables are chosen from the standpoint that they enhance the ambiguity and beauty of spatial and scale relationship... . All in all, my work is expressive with realism and abstraction interwoven."

UPLEFT Gallery proprietor Neary says the location of his studio is the perfect place for these talented artists who live scattered a thousand miles apart.

"Think about it: During the night of the Artswalk, a second-floor gallery overlooking the historic Crossroads of America will be a crossroads for artists from throughout the Midwest," he says.

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