

Joel Sloane: Journeys from Corporate Career to Digital Artwork

by Carole Verona for the Chestnut Hill Local, Feb. 13, 2014

Twenty years ago, the idea of expressing something artistically wasn't even on Joel Sloane's radar screen. Today, "Dreamscapes," an exhibit consisting of 40 pieces of his artwork, is hanging in the Kramer Art Gallery at Gratz College, 7605 Old York Rd., Elkins Park. The exhibit runs throughout the month of February.

Joel, 54, a resident of Lafayette Hill, views life as a series of collaborative encounters. He finds relationships and connections everywhere, from his undergraduate studies in psychology and a career in computer sciences to his volunteer work, Judaism and decision to become an artist.

"As technology rolled out into the marketing arena," he said, "graphic artists needed software to do their work. So my first connection to the arts was from a technology perspective. On my own, I began to find offbeat drawing products and worked with them to a certain degree. It became an avocation, and I started to create my own digital artwork."

About eight years ago, Joel left a full-time corporate position to become a computer consultant. This move gave him more time to pursue his interest in the arts. He began taking classes at the Whitemarsh Art Center in Conshohocken. There, he studied the technique of David Stabley, an artist who created three-dimensional ceramic pieces in color.

Stabley applied a wax metallic coating to his images rather than using a glazing technique. "I took to this particular method because I liked the consistency and the vibrancy of the colors I could get. I then found a better approach by using metallic paints," Joel explained.

He deepened his connection with the Whitemarsh Art Center by serving on the board for about four years and subsequently becoming president. He developed connections with other artists who worked in oils, watercolors and acrylics. He appreciates the collaboration that exists among artists. "Artists will share their techniques and methods; sometimes you don't find this level of collaboration in the business world," he observed.

He also visited several other art centers in the area — including those in Wayne, Abington, Wallingford and Cheltenham, to name a few — to exchange ideas on how to strengthen these valuable community resources. He also went down to the Arts & Business Council of Greater Philadelphia to see what he could learn there about how to better run an art center. "All of these experiences opened up the world of the arts to me," he said.

Much of Joel's work is inspired by Judaica, specifically by Kabbalah (ancient Jewish mysticism) and "The Zohar," the canonical text of Kabbalah, which dates back to the 13th century. "Today, we have this fight between what science tells us vs. what religious texts tell us," he said. "I'm trying to bring them closer together, not further apart. I've always been interested in the deeper aspects of what's behind the world. Maybe it comes from the fact that my father is a physician and a radiologist, someone who looks at the human body not from the outside but from what's going on inside."

Instead of using traditional materials to “paint” his pictures, Joel uses computers and iPads. He gains flexibility and speed by using his hand instead of a mouse to engage the computer. “There are dozens of apps on the iPad,” he said, “that don’t cost much money. They can be used to create silhouettes, enhance images, blend two or more images or pull out certain colors.”

At first, he transferred his digital art from the computer onto photographic paper. He then started moving the images onto canvas to get the effect of a watercolor or an oil painting. “What’s nice about digital artwork is that I can make 10 versions of an image — using different filters or different colors — and I will like each version for a particular reason.”

Joel grew up in Media, Pa. He received a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of Rochester in 1982 and a master’s degree in information science from Drexel University in 1984. He is currently studying creative humanities at the Pacifica Graduate Institute in Santa Barbara. Joel and his wife Peggy, a registered nurse, have lived in Lafayette Hill for 17 years. Both of their children are college students.