



Howell in front of one of his paintings

PHOTO/Stephen Shaner

Inner sight

Troy artist better known elsewhere

This is the second in a series of stories about the arts and Miami County. Part 3 will appear in Tuesday's Troy Daily News.

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TROY — The Miami County landscape is decorated with talented artists who work in a variety of media. Perhaps none is as well kept a secret as Troy's Busser Howell.

Howell has exhibited his paintings in one-person exhibitions across the country in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Florida, Texas, Cincinnati and twice in New York City.

Despite the popularity of his work, few of Howell's works hang in the homes of Miami County residents. There are several theories as to why this is the case.

One theory is that his work may be a little too "racy" for conservative Miami County. A recent show of Howell's at the Peder Bonnier Gallery in New York City featured R-rated political works that parodied everyone from Bill Clinton to Bob Packwood.

Secondly, Howell, 51, said it usually takes 10 years for his work to catch up to the current level of interest. A third reason and perhaps the most deciding factor is the size of his work.

"My work is massive and it takes a large space in order to be viewed," he admits. "Most people don't live in this type of space."

There is good reason his work is a little larger than life. Howell has been legally blind since the age of 16 and has some difficulty working on smaller paintings. Secondary glaucoma took most of his sight in his youth and his vision has slowly degenerated to a point where he has only some peripheral vision and sense of color on the periphery.

While many may view this as a handicap, Howell insists that vision is an activity of the brain, not the eyes.

"The process of seeing is a function of the brain and the eyes are just an extension of the brain," he said. "I still have a strong 'sense' of vision, and in a way I'm still seeing. Until my brain is dead, I'll still see."

Howell currently is displaying some of his work as part of the National Exhibit of Blind Artists showing in Philadelphia. He also will be part of an American Printing House for the Blind exhibit in Louisville.

ART



AND
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Part 2

"It's the blind community saying to the sighted community, 'we see like you, only with different parameters,'" Howell said.

The Troy resident said there never has been a time when he didn't know that he wanted to become an artist. He took formal training in Piqua and at the Dayton Art Institute as a child. He said he'd like to be able to say he's able to make a living through his vocation, but since the 1980s it is hard to make a living in the art market.

Although he does sell some of his work, he has no representation in the area and has most recently connected himself with museum exhibitions.

Former Piqua resident Leonard Rosenberg, a New York art dealer and collector, serves as Howell's agent.

His work changes and does not stay in any set pattern as evidenced from his recent transition from his popular country and western dance series to a new series he's beginning in abstraction, said Howell.

"I have to follow my creativity ... my influences are the things I do in my own life," he said. "I go back and forth between abstraction and figurative work."

His choosing to revert back to abstract expressionism may be a concession to those who question how he can paint figuratively although sight impaired. Howell said he hopes these people see his work for what it is while not necessarily associating it as the work of a "blind" artist.

His new "monument" series will draw on his love of architecture and focus on large geometric forms such as Stonehenge and the large circular formations found in South America and Egypt.

Instead of brushes, Howell will use cardboard and rags to splash the canvas with color in order to get the desired image.

"I see the image as I progress and maintain that image in my mind," he said. Before all is said and done, Howell jokes he may even resort to finger painting.

According to Cynthia Nadelman, a contributing editor to Artnews, in the forward of Howell's exhibition catalog at the Peder Bonnier Gallery: "Howell's paintings are a mixture of concentration and spontaneity, of planning and action, that would be the envy of many an expressionist painter since the beginning of this century."

Now if only those in Miami County will take notice.