

Regional

DenHouter concentrates energy on oil paintings

Most people have a very romantic idea of what it takes to become a painter.

Yet, painting requires a lot of training and hard work and one professor who teaches college students the mastery of painting is John DenHouter, an associate professor and chair of the department of art and design at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

DenHouter was born in Ann Arbor, Mich. He received his bachelor's and master's of fine arts from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and another master of fine arts in painting from Eastern Michigan University.

When he was very young, DenHouter discovered that he had an inclination for working with his hands. He started his career as a medical illustrator, but said that he felt that he really wanted to have more of an opportunity for greater artistic expression. He describes his current work as representational.

"It is not quite as detailed and exact as it was when I was doing my illustration work, but it is not as expressive so to speak or as abstract as the work I was doing when I first came to SIUE," DenHouter said. His current work focuses on oil painting.

"Painters will tend to try different types of subject matter. They will become interested in ideas and one idea will feed into the next idea," explained DenHouter. "Sometimes painters will switch directions completely and do something totally

Aldemaro Romero College Talk

different. I think it is all about what their concept is and how that concept is expressed." One of the styles that he practices is landscape painting.

"I think that recently landscape has had a little bit of a resurgence," DenHouter said. "Landscape is a timeless painting form and is an art form that will never, ever vanish. It is something that is a real challenge to go out on location and to try to capture or interpret the quality of light, or weather, or time of year or day, that you are trying to depict."

For DenHouter art education is something that should be started early in life. "I think that to expose children to art is essential," he said. "It opens up their minds to seeing things in different ways. Their imagination is fostered that way. A lot of artists learn in different ways and there are more ways to learn than out of a book, or writing, and the arts are really critical in terms of having students see that they can achieve success learning in a different form."

DenHouter also said that he believes that visiting art museums is something that enhances a person's perception of the world. Everybody, when looking at a painting, should seek out an understanding of the work at different levels, in terms of color and shape and value,



Courtesy of Mariene DenHouter.

Professor DenHouter is seen painting next to the new bike trail looking at the old railroad storage depot in the Brick Street section of Edwardsville.

texture, line, and then how those elements are put together to achieve a particular effect of light or time of day, he said.

"Then, of course, you have the content, what is the image depicting, what are the

meanings of those objects depicted, how do they relate to each other," he added. "Form and content really have to be working together well to result in a painting that has some particular meaning."

Today's students, DenHouter said, love the medium, particularly oil paint because it is a very seductive medium. "It is sort of creating magic with something as elemental as a hairbrush on a piece of canvas. It is something that is really intriguing and it is certainly a challenge and it occupies people for many, many years," he explained.

Yet, DenHouter will be the first to admit that it is not easy to make a living out of painting alone. Only the fortunate few can do that. "Obviously talented painters do well, but it is more than that. It is probably marketing, and being represented by the right gallery, and being able to promote yourself," DenHouter said. "So it is a very fickle field, so to speak, and I think in general you will probably have to depend on another source of income rather than your painting to survive."

Despite his busy schedule at SIUE, DenHouter still finds time to do what he likes the most. "I will go out in Edwardsville and to the surrounding area and set up my wooden planner easel and produce small oil landscapes," he said. "For right now I am very satisfied with that."

Aldemaro Romero is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.