

Take Care: One Artist's Vision

Thomas Montanari, a Hopewell resident, attended Paier College of Art in Hamden, Connecticut, and began his career in illustration as a sketch artist in New York City. He received a BFA in painting and art history from Rutgers' Mason Gross School of the Arts. He has been published and exhibited with the Society of Illustrators in New York and his illustrations and paintings hang in corporate collections and the galleries of private collectors throughout the U.S. and Europe.

Below is his artist's statement, which will be included in a brochure Capital Health is publishing about some of the art in the new hospital.

After hearing about the details for the pediatric emergency waiting room mural project from Lin Swensson, the art consultant, I became instantly excited. Naturally I was honored to be given such a worthy opportunity. My primary interest in this project was based upon the fundamental connection between the land and our basic human essence. I truly believe that opening our minds to nature and reconnecting on basic levels can have soothing and healing characteristics, especially for those suffering or recovering from illness. The colors of nature alone can provide some peace and sooth the soul.

Lin described her vision: the concept of hot air balloon scenes; however the viewer's perspective were from extreme eye levels of above and below, therefore purposely creating a sense of weightlessness and floating; in essence to allow viewers to become transported into the scenes. She believed

that given my background as illustrator and my more recent oil landscapes that I could design scenes that would capture this concept and also put families at ease in this space.

As the process unfolded I immersed myself in conducting research to gather visual references on hot air balloons. As for the Delaware River all I had to do was pull from my sensory memories of all the time I've spent along the banks of the river. The equestrian scene is

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based upon horses that reside on a farm just two miles from my studio and they were more than willing to model for me.

Most importantly during the designing and painting process I strived to maintain a level of consciousness that my work needed to sooth, comfort, and heal families, and at the same time allow my natural sensibilities as a painter remain evident. Working on this project has been one of the most challenging and greatest privileges of my career. To know that my work can have such an emotionally healing and spiritually soothing effect on people is the ultimate honor.

"There are moments in a day, when we seem to see beyond the usual. Such are the moments of our greatest happiness. Such are the moments of our greatest wisdom." (Robert Henri, American artist and teacher, 1865-1929).

I find these moments in my memories from the past, as well as in seemingly diverse places and events such as car races, Tuscany, our own Sourland Mountain, and the Delaware River Valley. My influences include Robert Henri, French Impressionists such as Monet and Degas, American Impressionists, and the artists Julian Alden Wier, Winslow Homer, Howard Pyle, N.C. Wyeth, and Andrew Wyeth.

These artists helped shape my interest in landscapes, the connection between the land and people, and the belief that art is not just about what is beautiful but also about how we are intrinsically connected to the land.

Probably my strongest influences, however, are my parents and my upbringing on a farm in the southwestern corner of Connecticut, where my grandfather, an Italian immigrant, was the caretaker of a large estate. I was immersed in pastoral life as well as in the antique car culture because of my father's interest in farm service vehicles and antique cars. The estate was essentially my playground. We were always outside interacting and experiencing the rhythm of nature, the subtle nuance from day to day, and the changes of the seasons.

These multi-sensory memories are indelible. "Part of my spirituality is my connection to the land." This connection is evident in my work but so is my connection to family, both past and present, and to American history and culture.



Lifting Children's Spirits: Hopewell artist Thom Montanari was chosen from among an initial group of 700 artists, whittled down to a final group of 70, to create pieces for the new hospital. His mural is in the pediatric emergency waiting room.