

By Kathryn Finegan Clark

Stockton's Tim Martin works magic with his brush

It's a long journey from the days of a starving artist picking up odd jobs in Lambertville to the art galleries and elegant salons of Paris.

Timothy Martin, now a renowned and very successful painter, whose imagination flows as wide and deep as the Delaware River he often includes in his paintings, says he never could have imagined his welcome in Paris.

In fact, the Stockton artist said he felt as though he was having "an out-of-body experience" when he and wife, Janis Burenga, attended the opening of an exhibit of 70 of his oil and gouache paintings. With the couple was a party of 30 or so relatives and friends.

Back home now, Martin still strolls along the Wick-echeoke Creek near his studio as he seeks inspiration for his whimsical paintings. He's still working on his Bears in Chairs series, but he's hurrying to get those done and move on to conquer new blossom-strewn worlds.

The one-time art student, teacher and carpenter has taken giant strides into the international art world



Iris Violin.

since a series of his paintings was displayed in the windows of Tiffany's Fifth Avenue store in Manhattan in 1993.

A three-month long exhibit of his fanciful paintings drew more than 30,000 to the gallery at the Mona


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Bismarck Foundation Cultural Center before it closed in July.

Bismarck, an American heiress, married to the grandson of Germany's Iron Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, was a socialite beauty and fashion icon in the 1930s. The countess, who loved flowers, had magnificent gardens at her home on Capri.

She left funds in her will to establish a foundation to promote artistic, musical, literary, scientific and educational activities to encourage Franco-American friendship.

The foundation invited Martin to exhibit after his work was on display during his second year as guest artist at the Philadelphia Flower Show.

The Paris exhibit was titled, "Timothy Martin: The Naturalist," and in its brochure he was called "a modern-day Thoreau." Whimsy is this classically-trained painter's artistic signature.

He says: "I'm imprinting nature on top of classic form, making people question the origin of that shape." The lid of a grand piano, for example, reminds him of a butterfly wing—and he paints it as such.

Many of his paintings show musical instruments composed of flowers—a harp made of lilies, its strings a waterfall, a violin of irises, a trombone of zinnias. Commissioned by Steinway and Sons, he's even painted a series of real grand pianos, with vines and petals climbing the legs and spilling over onto the lids.

Before the exhibit, Martin painted a portrait of



Tim Martin and his wife, Janis Burenga, in Paris.

Mona Bismarck based on a Cecil Beaton photo. Martin's painting shows her in a cloak of delicate yellow petals. "Imagine," he says, "it's now hanging in Paris right next to a Salvador Dali portrait of the countess."

At one pre-exhibit event, Martin says, a French chef designed a menu around the exhibit, topping it off with individual little desserts in the form of framed paintings. Among those attending the opening reception for Martin were couturier Hubert de Givenchy, members of the family of painter Henri Matisse, one of whom was married to painter Marcel du Champs, and members of the American Embassy.

"It was such a high I couldn't sleep for a week," Martin says.

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