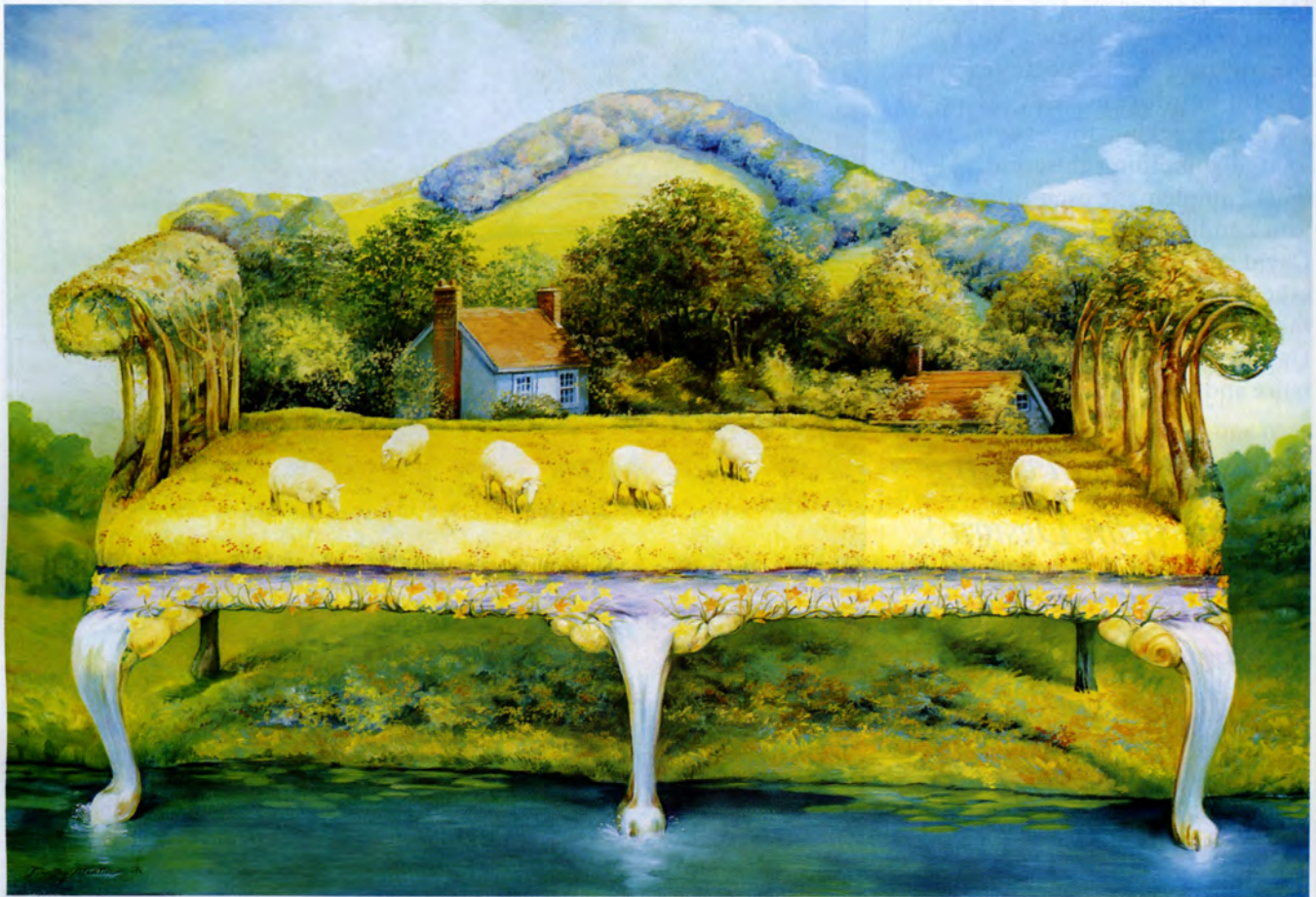


GALLERY



Timothy Martin

by Cathie Viksjo

Timothy Martin's painterly realm really is "a bed of roses." Or at the very least a sofa composed of daffodils. This Hunterdon County artist, a wholesome and affable babyboomer who financed his college education by working in a greenhouse, creates charming paintings, so highly original that they challenge stylistic categories or art historical labels. His exceptionally inventive world, derived from the beauty of nature, particularly in the spring, is delightful.

Mr. Martin takes, for example, an ordinary occasional chair, such as a Hepplewhite, and transforms it into a garden, quite literally, so that it becomes a chair covered with flowers instead of upholstery. His paintings of abundantly

decorated furniture, as well as classical musical instruments, have become a hallmark signature style that is readily identifiable.

"I'm thrilled that people react well to my work," said the 57-year-old artist who once taught art at the East Amwell Elementary School. "That inspires me. I want to think I'm working on someone's favorite right now." He lives in Sergeantsville with his wife, Janis Burenga, who directs the Bailiwick Company, a public relations and advertising agency in Stockton.

"It's definitely our neighborhood. It is so pretty. Every season offers something new for me to absorb," said Tim, who graduated from Trenton State College. He spent two summers studying Medieval and Renaissance art in Florence, Italy.

This spring, he will make his debut at the perennially popular 2006 Philadelphia Flower Show from March 5-12. This major event, which draws upwards of 25,000 visitors, will spotlight his talent in the Greater Philadelphia area. He is the only artist whose works will be on view, 30 pieces along 200 running feet of wall space in the gallery area. This year, the show will be focused on the theme: "Enchanted Spring." Mr. Martin admits to being understandably nervous, but is grateful for this significant opportunity.

Although it seems an impossible task to find any parallels in modern art, the spirit of his paintings have the characteristics of Rococo art, an 18th-century period of grace and elegance, roughly between 1715-1789. The word itself refers to rocailles and coquilles, the French words for rocks and shells, which were widely used as decorative motifs, according to historian William Fleming.

The decorative arts flourished and palatial Rococo rooms are playful, delicate, light and charming, he wrote. Furniture was richly carved and decorated with Gobelin upholstery, as well as ivory and tortoise shell inlays, according to Carol Strickland, Ph.D. Clothing, silverwork and china were also overwrought with curlicues, flowers, shells and leaves, she wrote.

Timothy Martin's art continues the spirit of this period. The light bulb first went off in his head in the early

1980s when he noticed that everyday objects have their roots in organic forms. "My signature style began as a pun," he related.

"I was mounting a show of paintings and sculpture in New Hope, Pennsylvania, and I hung a painting called "The Wing Chair." The chair's wings were birds' wings and the seat of the chair was a nest," said Mr. Martin, who proceeded to paint an overstuffed Victorian chair and other pieces of intricate floral and fauna furniture. "My eye saw that, and continues to this day. I'm still amazed. I'm always inspired by some new element."

His visual punning was greeted enthusiastically by others, although his cheering section has always been his wife. The artist acknowledges that he has had a lot of lucky breaks, which he owes entirely to his wife's unfailing support. In 1993, he was selected to display his paintings in the Fifth Avenue flagship store of Tiffany & Co. Timothy's floral paintings served as backdrops to rubies, emeralds, sapphires and diamonds as big as the Ritz. Subsequently, he was invited back for the opening of the New York Philharmonic and created a series of classical instruments composed of flowers to decorate Tiffany windows.

This elite metropolitan exposure brought him fame and good fortune. "That marked the start, I think. I've been working hard before that, but this was the first real recognition that I got," said Mr. Martin in an earlier interview.

His career has been rife with opportunities. Another pivotal milestone was the fellowship grant he received from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts in 1994-1995. In the last decade, roughly speaking, he has had paintings on view at Macy's, Art Expo and has had an international exhibit at the Stephanie Hoppen Gallery in London. At that time, the British glossy magazine, *The World of Interiors*, wrote (Timothy) "effortlessly devises more impossibly blooming seating, prompting the question, which comes first, flower or chair?"

"A spring reverie is created by delicate forsythia heads outlining a Windsor chair, while swathes of dogwood, roses and berries are gathering and brought into the studio

to work from," wrote author Annabel Freyberg. "With Mr. Martin's chairs, the phrase 'sitting pretty,' for once, really is apt."

In 2000, he accepted a commission from Steinway & Sons to paint a one-of-a-kind grand piano. It was completed a year later, toured nationally and is now in a private collection. "The keyboard puts me in mind of a waterfall splashing on the piano bench. The open lid may be the spread of a peacock's plumage," said the artist, who has explored the correlation of other classical instruments, like the bell of a French horn, which suggests flowers with bell-shaped blossoms such as amaryllis or morning glory.

Timothy's paintings are not petite, and would surely be the focal point of any interior decorating. Working only in oils, his largest canvas is 4 x 8 feet, and smaller pieces run 32 inches x 44 inches. Limited edition prints and note cards are affordably priced, on the Internet, while his large canvases approximate \$17,000-\$22,000 for such charming scenes as "Hillside Farm," pictured in this department.

Timothy has continued additional studies at New York City's Art Students League and School of Visual Arts, as well as independent studies at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim. He has traveled abroad to see the masterpieces at Monet's Giverny, London's Tate Gallery and British Museum, and the Prado in Madrid.

After the flower show in the City of Brotherly Love, Timothy will set his sights on a series of New York City rooftop gardens. His paintings have been featured periodically in the fashionable Della Femina Restaurant, located on East 54th Street in the Upper East Side. "I will have cows and trees and apple orchards all above the city," said the artist, who maintains an apartment in the city. "We have the best of both worlds."

For more information, call 609-397-4880 or visit Mr. Martin's web site at (www.timothymartin.com).♦

Cathie Viksjo is a regional art critic who holds both undergraduate and graduate degrees in art history from Bryn Mawr College.