

“Modern-day Thoreau is headed for Paris

Tim Martin’s flowers take shape in myriad of spaces

Kathryn Finegan Clark

A tall man walks along Sergeantsville’s Wickecheoke Creek, a pair of Lakeland terriers prancing ahead, sniffing out the terrain. He looks relaxed but he’s actually at work in what he considers his outdoor laboratory, stopping to examine a fallen leaf, to study a petal or watch a blue jay.

Timothy Martin, an artist whose reputation grew to international levels after his paintings were displayed in Tiffany’s Fifth Avenue store windows in 1993, seemingly holds the artistic world in his hands. Since then honors and exhibits have mushroomed, with his work shown at London and Manhattan galleries, at the Philadelphia Flower Show in the past few years, and major exhibits in Atlanta and Omaha. His works are priced in the \$20,000 to \$45,000 range.

Martin lives just outside Sergeantsville in a century-old house he renovated, has an apartment in New York City and his paintings are in great demand. He and his wife, Janis Burenga, who is also his publicist and North American curator, will soon be heading to Paris for the opening of a three-month exhibit of his fanciful paintings.

The painter looks to his daily walks for inspiration. “I set myself the task of finding something new every day when I walk...,” he says, “... the texture of hickory bark, honeysuckle, how many petals a certain flower has – but I’ll bend it to my whimsy.”

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.” 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.

Fifty oil and gouache paintings, mostly from his musical instruments and furniture series, will be exhibited in Paris from March 27 through July 11 at the Mona Bismarck Foundation’s Paris Cultural Center opposite the Eiffel Tower. The exhibit is titled “Timothy Martin: The Naturalist,” and in its brochure he is called “a modern-day Thoreau.”

He’ll be going to Paris 10 days early for pre-opening events, including a lecture he’ll be giving at the American Embassy.

“I love classical music and I’m



“Fishing’s Hard Work.”

taken with the classic shapes of instruments. Designs proven and recognized everywhere, musical instruments are an international language. Did the person who designed the first grand piano take his inspiration for the propped-up lid from a butterfly wing? I like to take classic forms and bring them back to their organic origins,” he says.

Not only has he done paintings of pianos, he also was commissioned by Steinway & Sons to paint a real baby grand piano for the company’s Art Case Collection. It took him a year to paint the piano and he had to construct a special hoist in his studio to lift it to work on the under parts. Steinway took the “Summertime Piano” on a year-long tour of major American cities in 2000, and it is now in the hands of a private collector. Martin’s completing his series of four Steinway grands, each celebrating a season. Steinway prices them around \$160,000 each.

Martin’s furniture series includes a number of vegetable couches – eggplants, cabbages, cauliflowers, onions. A rural scene covers the back of one couch with sheep grazing on its seat. In another, four bunnies rest on a settee of daffodil petals.

The whimsy is exuberant and endless, and frequently Martin combines flora and fauna. A bear snoozes in a honeycomb chair. Leopards slouch on chairs made of

anemones. A fawn lies on an oak leaf and acorn chair. There’s always water, pooled, a pond, a stream or running wild like the Delaware, and Martin frequently includes architectural and statuary images as well.

Surprises are everywhere. In still lifes, Lilliputian villages are tucked away in the foliage of a vase of flowers, a treat for those who regard the painting with care.

Martin says his signature style came to life years ago. He was doing a show in New Hope, when he “added a few sketches, the kind of thing I would have drawn on the page of a telephone book. They went like hotcakes and I started to do more.” Then everything started to come up roses – and commissions.

Martin has loved nature since his early childhood. He was one of seven children and they spent summers playing cowboys and Indians on his grandparents’ 140-acre farm near Ringoes, N.J., surrounded by fields and woods and all kinds of growing things. Indoors, he was fascinated by the handsome images in his grandmother’s Burpee seed catalogs.

Martin’s energy matches the exuberance of his paintings. Up at 5 a.m., he works out at a gym, is home by 7 and ready to go to work at 8. He paints all day, switching from canvas to canvas as he keeps five paintings going at once, taking a break now and then to walk



Artist Timothy Martin works in his Sergeantsville studio. In his latest series of paintings, he incorporates sculptural objects, such as the classic marble statue heads seen in these chairs.

which is awash with light pouring through skylights and window walls. Standing in a corner are piano lids waiting for his magic touch. He is surrounded by nature and he compares his rural ambiance to city life. “We were in New York the other day and I thought, ‘We’ve gone the entire day and I’ve not touched the ground. I’ve had no contact with nature at all. It’s so limiting.’”

“With my furniture paintings, I can harken back to experience in the natural world. It’s all somehow related. I can’t look at my couches with out smiling.”

Neither can anyone else.

Smiles are free at his web site, timothymartin.com.



“Pear Tree Piano.”