



An artist's perspective

Stephen Scott Mark

Artist Stephen Scott Mark sees beauty where others don't.

By Edell Fiedler

Photos by Dave McCandless

of his wife Barb, who is also an artist, hang on the walls. His voice is quiet and his face thoughtful as he reflects on his work as an artist.

Artist Stephen Scott Mark sits on the couch in his family's living room with his bare feet resting on the floor surrounded by his children Stephan and Eva's toys. The home is cozy, welcoming and warm. His paintings, along with the work

Mark, who has been painting for more than 20 years, holds a master of fine arts degree from Southern Illinois University and a bachelor of fine arts degree from Humboldt State University. Some of his work is inspired by Jackson Pollock and other painters he learned about while in school. While these influences are clear in

some pieces, Mark brings his own unique perspective to his work.

Mark's art process begins simply, yet his work is so much more complex than meets the eye. When he begins a painting, he lays everything out and messes around with the material he has to work with. He arranges items, such as bones, hair and shells. He says he does this consciously, but for the most part doesn't like being conscious about the work. It's the unexpected things that happen while he's working that take his work to a different plane.

"I had arranged some work, and when I left for a job, I accidentally ran into it," Mark says. "I liked the new arrangement."

It's this yearning for natural elements in his pieces that make them so different from others' art. While familiar elements, such as Pow Wow regalia, have influenced his work (this is where he got the idea to use horse hair in his paintings), he also brings in the unfamiliar. Mark sees a lot of beauty in places that others wouldn't even think it exists. He looks for inspiration in what most people see as just dead – carcasses, animal bones, clam shells, tortoise shells, remnants left in tidal pools.

"I see these as beautiful," Mark says. "I feel that in the materials I use there's a sense of life about them. They have a history of having lived – having passed through."

While Mark says he's not trying to be profound, his words are striking and thought-provoking. And so is his work. In a sense, he's bringing the dead to life, mixing the old

with the new. He's found that people have strong mixed reactions to his work. It's never lukewarm. They either like it or they don't. At his first major show at Gallery 13 in Minneapolis, a collector told him how disgusting and ugly his paintings were. The collector could not believe the work that was on display. Mark didn't flinch. Instead, he took the comment as a compliment because the work had affected someone to the extent that he felt he had to say something about the piece he had viewed.

"You're there to make something happen," he says.

His work has also created interest in Springfield, Minn.,

his wife's hometown. Originally from Chicago, he found the small town setting proved to be much different from what he was accustomed to. He says he was under the impression that people here were closed to culture. He was surprised and glad to find out that he was wrong. He had hung his work on the side of his home, sort of like an outdoor exhibit. He found that while he didn't get a lot of comments from passersby, a lot of people did stop to look at his work. The response people had to his work both surprised and intrigued him.

"I expected people to drive by rather than stop and look," Mark says. "People were experiencing instead of

ignoring. You can't prejudice no matter where you're at."

When Mark isn't with his family or studio, one can find him working as a professional painter. He has a lot going on, so he doesn't get to spend as much time in the studio as he would like because he has to focus on life's responsibilities. But he says taking care of those responsibilities doesn't disintegrate his creativity.

"I can work on painting someone's house eight to ten hours a day and think of what I'll be doing in terms of painting [art]," he says. "If you don't take care of little things, you can't focus on your art." [M.M.](#)



Mark uses natural elements in many of his art pieces. Here is a sampling of a project he is working on.