



JASON CARD
Latte and
cappuccino at
Journeyman
Coffee.

Paint locally



ROBERT DEWITT SMITH

Robert Dewitt Smith teaches painting at the Tallahassee Senior Center and has a couple of paintings on display at the upcoming Senior Artist Showcase and reception on Friday.

Tallahassee native brings what he knows to the canvas for Senior Showcase exhibit

AMANDA SIERADZKI
COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS

Robert Dewitt Smith believes “if you’ve never smelled an elephant then you shouldn’t paint one.”

As a Tallahassee-native painter and art educator for the better part of seven decades, Smith is currently an instructor for the Tallahassee Senior Center. In his classes, he engages with students on a wide spectrum of ages and aptitudes, from seasoned artists as young as 90 to aspiring pupils as old as 13.

He emboldens many who are 55 or older to enter shows like the Senior Artist Showcase, which is on display through Sept. 27 at the Senior Center Art Gallery.

Smith’s core belief in a painting’s ability to engage with personal experience and surroundings is ever present in his own work — he jokes it’s why no one would ever find a mountain landscape in his pieces as it’s the one miss-

ing land feature in Florida landscapes. Sites like St. Mark’s Wildlife Refuge invigorate Smith, and though his style is expansive in its array of eclectic subject matter and methods, it remains rooted in genuine and honest explorations of landscape and figures.

“I think somebody ought to have, somewhere in their psyche, an understanding of the things that they paint,” says Smith. “It’s not just copying images, but having some relationship to whatever it is that is your subject matter.”

Smith holds a BFA in art and advertising from Florida State University and a master’s from Syracuse University. Having dual interests in producing work for both utilitarian and fine arts purposes, Smith has held positions in graphics at multiple colleges including, the University of South Florida, Florida Atlantic University, Syracuse University, and the State University of New York at Oswego.

See Senior, Page 6D



Senior

Continued from Page 1D

Painting has also taken him as far as Nigeria with the U.S. Agency for International Development, where he served as an adviser to the country's Minister of Education teaching local artists methods of using art for television and instruction. At the Tallahassee Senior Center, one of his main focuses in oil painting is imparting the importance of value versus color to his beginning art students.

"I like to respect the basic principles of how painting is derived," says Smith. "So often I hear students of mine and other painters saying how much they love color, but color is secondary to value. If I take a picture of the painting in black and white, it should still stand out as a good painting. But if you don't have the values, the darkness and lights, then it will not stand out no matter how good the coloring is."

This ideology can be witnessed in Smith's photorealistic painting, "1911 Downtown Tallahassee," which won first place in the Gadsden Arts Center's annual show. The work captures a historical photo sourced from his late grandmother's photo album, showing

If you go

What: Senior Artist Showcase

When: Reception 6-8 p.m., Friday, Sept. 1, gallery open to view through Sept. 27

Where: Tallahassee Senior Center Art Gallery & Auditorium, 1400 N Monroe St.

Cost: Free, donations accepted

Contact: For more information please visit <http://www.talgov.com/seniors/seniorservices.aspx>.

his great aunt and her two sons seated in a horse and buggy on Monroe Street two years before it was paved. Smith put in extra research to understand the mechanics of

the carriage, and only utilized ivory black and titanium white oils to stay true to the era and highlight the photograph's details.

His process differs however based on any given project, as he has painted colorful subjects ranging from the old cars and boats of Carrabelle to successions of Virginia creeper paintings. In order to avoid "writer's block," he will revisit topics via series as a way of constantly pulling from a "reserve of inspiration." Smith also enjoys plein air painting and uses its on-site and in the moment activity to motivate ideas.

"Plein air paintings make you do something," says Smith. "You load yourself up in your car, go somewhere, set up, find something quick, and get it done."



ROBERT DEWITT SMITH

Firefighter Retired by Robert Dewitt Smith, who teaches art at the Tallahassee Senior Center.

He's always seeking a challenge, however, whether it's starting with a painted canvas in a wildly different color than he's used to, using a palette knife over his preferred brushes, or starting with a blank canvas and no drawing preparation. Smith has never been fond of philosophical explanations on why he makes work, and instead opts for an artist statement that focuses on expanding his "visual vocabulary."

Smith feels honored to have been involved with the Tallahassee Senior Center for 10 years, and wants more people in the community to know about its "high caliber instructional staff." He welcomes anyone open to experiencing a new medium to his class, and thoroughly enjoys the ability to pass along his knowledge of oils to his students. He subscribes to the idea that when it comes to teaching, sometimes it's just best to "turn [students] loose," as he walks a tightrope of encouragement and guidance.

"It's a two-way street, and I wouldn't be painting as well as I do now without my students," says Smith. "It's rewarding to see them producing art, doing well, and getting work in shows."

With the upcoming Senior Artist Showcase and reception on Friday, Sept. 1, Smith is proud of his students who entered into the show; he entered a few works himself titled "Torreya Area Shed" and "WJII at Carrabelle," but wants the focus to remain on his students and their growth.

As he hops around from canvas to canvas over the course of one of his three-hour classes, Smith is delighted to hear from individuals on how art has influenced their perspective. No matter

if they're pursuing it recreationally or professionally, he sees those realizations as greater than any awarded prize or accomplishment.

"A lot of us go through life accepting whatever passes through our corneas, but art causes you to reflect on what

"I think somebody ought to have, somewhere in their psyche, an understanding of the things that they paint. It's not just copying images, but having some relationship to whatever it is that is your subject matter."

ROBERT DEWITT SMITH

you see," remarks Smith. "There's so much that you can gain from trying to express something visually, and a lot of times I have students who say they don't look at trees the same way or they go down the street and look at a building as an art piece. The more you do it, the more you see, and I advise people to get involved with art so that they can see the world better."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).



RUN & WALK for BROOKIE B

for suicide awareness and prevention

Labor Day, September 4, 2017
— at —
J.R. Alford Greenway

1M FUN RUN/WALK over the scenic Lafayette Heritage Trail Canopy Walkway

5K TRAIL RUN/WALK in the J.R. Alford Greenway with chip timing

8:00am
START TIME

8:30am
START TIME

Register. Volunteer. Donate.
BluebirdRun.com



Brought to you by NAMI Tallahassee, the National Alliance on Mental Illness