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# Artist

Nashville native and former lawyer John Cannon brings his artistic passions to life

By Jessica Walker

Local artist and semi-retired lawyer John Cannon's artistic style involves a mixture of realism and impressionism. "I find that including an element of realism in an impressionistic piece creates a contrast dynamic, making the work more dramatic," he says. He also uses this concept when it comes to creating abstract pieces, where he combines realistic elements and warm, bold colors. Like his art, his life has combined a variety of elements, all of which have made him who he is today.

Cannon chuckles when he says his path wasn't planned out at all. He graduated from Belmont College with a B.A. in English in 1974, studied art at the University of Tennessee at Nashville from 1975 to 1978 and acquired his master's degree in literature from MTSU in 1980. After briefly dabbling in education, he attended the Nashville School of Law, graduating in 1985 and then practicing in Goodlettsville for several years.

"I originally wanted to be the great American novelist, but I realized it didn't suit me," says Cannon. "Law school was a fluke. I realized I wasn't going to teach or write, and the opportunity just appeared, so I went with it."

Cannon didn't pick up a paint brush for 20 years, but his desire to create art never left him. "You can run but you can't hide," he says. "Everyone has that creative spark. Those who let it come out are the happiest." Though he says law and writing have creative elements, he missed producing tangible visual images that others could appreciate.

He let his creative side run free again in the fall of 2001, as he was moving into a new home—a decision modeled after his hero, poet Wallace Stevens. Stevens worked for an insurance company for most of his adult life but quit in order to pursue his creative side.

After turning 50, Cannon knew he had to do the same. Now he can't go more than two days without painting.

"It's like the painting itself compels me to do it," says Cannon. "If I've seen it in my mind, I've got to do it and express it."

He says his art is created when imagination and action combine, describing his personal creative process as seeing the finished painting in his mind's eye before he even gets started. "I know where I want to arrive," he says. "The painting almost creates itself."

In addition to maintaining a healthy lifestyle of running, biking and clean eating, Cannon's creativity keeps him feeling young and inspired. "Trapped inside here is a 6-year-old kid with so much enthusiasm and energy," he says. "When I create a piece of art, I don't feel 56—I feel 6 years old." He also enjoys the instant gratification and incredible sense of accomplishment he feels when producing a painting, emotions he didn't experience when practicing law. "I'm a very visual person," Cannon says. "I like creating something beautiful for everyone else."

For now, his favorite type of art is abstract, but he's sure that will change quickly, as it usually does. "I paint whatever is calling to me at the time," Cannon says. "There isn't anything I don't like to do." His favorite painting is always the one he's most recently completed—however, he's especially fond of "The Arrival," a painting based on a vision he saw in a dream, that a friend said reminded her of him. "Typically, everything is for sale," he says. "But I may keep this one."

He's careful to not get too attached to his work, an issue many artists struggle with. "You can't be too connected to the art," Cannon says. "I'm not my painting. If it's good, I want someone to enjoy it and take it home. If it's bad, I can throw it away—it's just a thing."

Cannon also emphasizes the importance of creativity, which he believes everyone possesses in some form. "When people aren't being creative, it's like their soul is being rubbed out," he says. "It's the idea of finding



whatever satisfies you." While he acknowledges that tapping into this creativity can be frustrating, he also says an individual's true artistic ability should be something that feels simple and effortless. "It's incredibly easy for me to sit down and paint," he says. "It's my creative outlet."

Cannon's work has definitely not gone unnoticed. Recently, he was named Best Local Visual Artist in *The Tennessean's* inaugural Toast of Music City Reader's Choice Awards. In addition, his newest creations were shown on Sept. 5 at his studio in the Row at the Factory in Franklin, located at 230 Franklin Road.

Cannon now resides in East Nashville with his wife, two dogs and four cats. He works four days a week at the Factory, where his art is on display and available for purchase, with prices ranging from \$500 to \$1,500, depending on the size of the piece. He teaches small art classes at the Factory as well as Studio G Photography in Hendersonville, with up to 10 students.

To check out Cannon's art, go to [www.johncannonart.com](http://www.johncannonart.com).