



Kent Paulette painting 'Frank Sinatra' outside of Studio 140 at Sorrento's

As the sun rises over Powder Horn Mountain artist Kent Paulette quietly walks to the creek and steps in. "It can be snowing or raining, doesn't much matter," he explains. "I need to be there, I walk in the water, wet my hands, my face and I fill a bucket to bring back."

Nature is Paulette's most influential muse. After this morning ritual he heads up to his deck where he paints barefoot listening to birds, feeling the breeze and responding to his environment. The bucket of water? That almost-holy creek goes into the art itself providing the washes and drips that begin each of his paintings.

For full immersion into the art of Kent Paulette, dine at Sorrento's Italian Bistro or Chef's Table at Sorrento's in downtown Banner Elk. Walls are filled with Paulette's huge, colorful work recognizable by geometric designs and high energy motion, all teased from just three colors. As the eye moves from piece to piece two juxtaposed subjects reveal: na-

Painting the Vibe: Kent Paulette's Canvas

By Cindy Michaud

ture and music personalities. Move in closer and enjoy the brushstroke. Look for patterns and rhythm. Back up and check your memory bank, the art often transports the viewer.

This is all by design. Paulette is an honest painter. He puts it out there. What he is thinking, how he feels, what he struggles with...it's all on the canvas. And he has a reverential respect for the process. When he invites interaction while painting in public he listens. "I realize that people bring their own stories to my work," he explains. "There is a reason they call for a color or decide it is finished. This becomes integral to the piece." Paulette has even invited bystanders to pick up the brush. "I want them to feel it," he continues. "I am learning to give up the expectation of a specific ending and see where the process takes us. I want that art interaction to be a positive experience." Random marks by viewers are as precious as that creek water to his work.

Still a young man at 37, Paulette has been finding his artistic path since he was a child growing up in Hickory. He counts supportive parents and "a neighborhood lady that gave art lessons" as early enablers of his career path. He purposely avoided formal art education other than the basics taught at high school. "I needed to find my own style," he says, "I wanted the challenge of self-teaching to determine where I went."

So where does a self-taught artist turn for inspiration? "Music and nature," he answers. And suddenly Frank Sinatra's portrait hanging next to a gigantic blue bear makes sense. Honest.

The artist elaborates, "Music always inspired me, moved me. If I paint indoors I have something on. It might be experimental-electro or bluegrass but the rhythms, transitions and surprises are all informative." He mentions patterns and uses that word again talking about earth influences. One begins to understand

that music and nature offer different sides of the same coin of inspiration.

Paulette knows he could be content painting alone on his mountain, listening to his creek and responding to the flow of Mother Nature. But he also purposely sets up challenges that cause him to deal with new situations. "That's growth," he says. "It forces you to abandon control, to respond instead to the now."

So six years ago when Sorrento's owner Angelo Accettura offered Paulette studio space near the restaurant and walls on which to hang, the artist started a new venture: Studio 140.

"It's a different vibe," he admits, but one he clearly enjoys. Now it is not the sound of the creek but the energy of the crowd that impacts the canvas. "I let them in, answer questions, respond to their comments. It is entirely different than working with the crickets and birds." And whether he knows it or not he becomes a pied-piper for painting, not just with children who stare fascinated as he slings paint, but with adults who may have had an urge to play with color only to abandon it. Paulette shares his message that the outcome doesn't have to be worth a frame to be worth doing...the process has value.

Paulette is now reaping the fruits of honest dedication via increasing sales and prices. He's at the Banner Elk Winery regularly repainting the mantelpiece elk as it sells off the wall and he just shipped a bear off to Paris. While he believes in the magic of original art he has also made giclees available so that smaller sizes become affordable at various price points. Spend some time at www.KentPaulette.com and his philosophy of art, if not life, will become evident. It's a vibe you will want more of.

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