



PAINTER
TIMOTHY
MARTIN
FINDS
FODDER IN
NATURE
WITH
WHIMSICAL
CANVASES
THAT
DELIGHT
COLLECTORS
AND DRAW
CROWDS

The
NATURALIST

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It started with a pun. Timothy Martin's wing chair painting had bird's wings for arms and a seat crafted with an egg in a nest. The interpretation tickled the audience at the show; its execution they found enchanting. More followed. There was a tiger lounging on a settee of flowers—tiger lilies of course. A bear slouched lazily on an armchair of honeycombs. And morning glories that became the delicate bell of a horn.

Such plays on nature, a style his collectors continue to admire, have become Timothy Martin's calling card. Martin is a modern-day Thoreau, his paintbrush paying homage to a love for all things that bloom or roam the earth.

His oil paintings earned him an invitation to the 2006 Philadelphia Flower Show, where he was the featured artist. Some 250,000 visitors looked over scores of his works, and watched him paint a new one. Entranced, they observed as the perfectly pressed and well-postured Martin labored over "The Queens Chair".

The shy artist says the experience drew him out. "It was one of the most validating experiences of my life, people coming up to me and sharing their reactions and their stories," he says. "It was not just flower people, I met people from every age group and nationality, visitors from other countries." One boy approached and told him about his own art. Martin was taken by the boy and promised to come see his work someday.

Martin recalls the union workers who groaned while they were carrying his work to different spots on the wall for approval before they were hung. Later, they argued amongst themselves just where each piece would enjoy the best exposure. The men all came back with their families to show them the finished work.

And then there were the beekeepers, who marveled at the authenticity of his honeycombs and explained the insects' caste system and honey-making process to him. One Philadelphia beekeeper he met is preparing to deliver a hive to Martin's home. "I guess I am going to become an amateur beekeeper now, too," he says, apparently delighted at the opportunity.

Martin, in his late 50s, acknowledges that while most of his contemporaries are planning for retirement he is busy painting for about seven hours a day. He might be called a late bloomer, but he still has big plans for the future.

When he was young, he spent summers at his grandparents' farm outside of Ringoes. His father recognized early on that his young son loved to draw. He gave him his first paint box at nine, one Martin still has and uses. While a student at Trenton State (now the College of New Jersey), he studied in Florence, Italy, for a time and added courses at the Art Students League of New York. After teaching elementary school art, he went through a starving





TOP: “Mossphorescence” mirrors its living room inspiration in Martin’s house. **ABOVE:** “The New Jersey Settee” features the symbols of the state—a horse, goldfinch, honeybees, blueberries, violets, and brook trout. Martin wants to do one for each state. **OPPOSITE:** “The Boa Chair” is fitting in the formal dining room. “A Victorian Garden Chair” flanked by master bath bookcases.

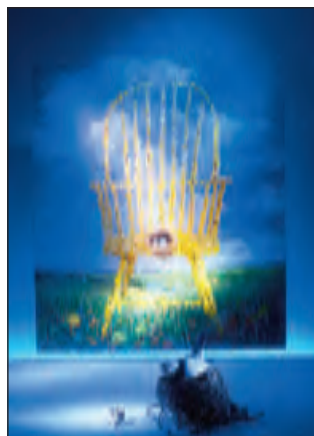
artist phase—digging ditches, working as a carpenter—before deciding to devote himself wholly to his craft. It helped that he received a grant from the New Jersey Council on the Arts.

In 1990, Martin and his wife, Janis Burenga, who owns a public relations firm, bought a centuries-old farmhouse in Stockton, and he began renovating and designing additions and outbuildings. The home serves as a gallery for some of his favorite originals and is just steps from his new studio, positioned perfectly for northern exposures, eastern and southern light, and inspirational views from floor-to-ceiling windows.

Martin got a big break in 1993, when Tiffany & Co. called—thanks to a letter from Burenga—to use his work in its windows. Tiffany Vice President Gene Moore gave Martin free rein to decide what to display on four occasions. Once it was a signature chair painting, and another time it was a canvas filled with floral musical instruments to coincide with

TIFFANY & CO.

GENE MOORE, “FATHER OF MODERN WINDOW DISPLAY”, ASKED MARTIN TO DO PAINTINGS FOR THE FIFTH AVENUE STORE TWICE, ONCE FOR THE OPENING OF THE PHILHARMONIC SEASON



64

STEINWAY & SONS

“THE SUMMERTIME PIANO” WAS COMMISSIONED TO USHER IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM. IT TOOK A FULL YEAR TO PAINT.

the opening of the New York Philharmonic season. Moore, known as the father of modern window display, had given Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg the same opportunity early in their careers.

At the same time, galleries in the United States and England were picking up Martin’s art, and collectors started to notice, including a National Football League owner. Another CEO he met at the show purchased several artists’ pieces, including a couple of Martin’s there. He told Martin, “I like all of the work I’ve selected, but I know that yours will be in a museum someday.” Flattering stuff for the artist, whose dream is just that.

“I may be accused of hubris,” Martin says, “but I hope my work finds itself in museums, preferably in my lifetime.”

Martin says he treasures his experiences as an artist. Take the 12-month painting he did on a canvas of a different shape for the venerable piano company Steinway & Sons, which commissioned him to paint a unique baby grand piano.

The venture required that a special hydraulic lift be built in his studio so the artist could paint the instrument’s underbelly.

Martin’s original oils are now priced at \$15,000 to \$35,000, but he also sells limited-edition giclées for \$250 to \$2,500. He produces note cards and puzzles, which were bestsellers at the flower show, for those who want a less expensive taste of his whimsical work.

Some of his originals are in the Chalk Farm Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and part of a wholesale gallery in Phoenix, Arizona, that distributes worldwide.

The process all starts in Delaware Township near the Wickecheoke Creek. Martin begins each day by walking his terriers Daisy and Duffy along the creek to see what might serve as fodder. “I am so fortunate to live in an environment so conducive to what I do,” he says. “Often an image is so clear in my head I come right back to my studio and sketch it right on the canvas.”

He has started another series of paintings that includes nature but not furniture, and he has been asked to display a new body of work and paint live at the 2008 Philadelphia Flower Show.

There, he hopes to meet up again with a young artist, some discerning union workers, and a beekeeper or two.

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