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A Light Touch

The appeal of sublime luminosity has fueled Abraxas's approach to painting

BY SUSAN TOWERS | PHOTOGRAPHS BY SCOTT NATHAN

Artist Abraxas Hudson, right, teaches John Orban a painting technique during a class at the Abraxas Studio of Art in Lewes.



When stepping into the Abraxas Studio of Art in Lewes, it isn't unusual to find Abraxas Hudson himself sitting at his easel, with brush in hand, intently working to create just the right effect in one of his colorful oil paintings.

"I am a perfectionist," he says, offering a smile to make his visitor feel welcome. Abraxas — the name by which he is professionally known — wants his studio to create a sense of healing, as he believes painting itself is calming by design. On display in the cozy Second Street space are his realistic paintings of coastal Delaware landscapes. Many feature vast, dramatic skies reminiscent of those seen while walking along the Rehoboth Beach boardwalk or the beach at Cape Henlopen State Park. The photographic — yet almost spiritual — quality of his work is no accident. Abraxas is influenced by the 19th-century American masters known as luminists, and describes himself as such.

Luminists were among the Hudson River School artists; they

interpreted light in a manner that the late American art curator John I.H. Baur described as "pantheistic realism" — meaning that God is all around us. Artists during this period, which lasted from 1848 to 1876, idealized the vast landscapes of the United States, initially focusing on the Catskills and Adirondacks. Their brush strokes were hardly noticeable, which art historians have said creates a sense of silence within the paintings.

"These 19th-century masters are my favorite because they glorified nature and enhanced its beauty through the use of light," Abraxas says.

It is no wonder that this Milford native, who has lived his life surrounded by forests, wetlands and expansive skies, fell under their influence. He attributes his appreciation of nature to his father, Jody Hudson, who spent hours with him in the outdoors, teaching him to sit silently in the woods, and who took him and his brother Joss on many camping trips. Young Abraxas learned to observe coastal Delaware's landscapes and awe-inspiring skies. ➤



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“I set out to understand the whys of the effects you see from a sunrise or sunset,” he recalls, noting that his mother, Sue Moore, has also been “very supportive” of him and his career path.

The artist signs his works using his distinctive first name, which has ancient roots and is believed to have signified mystical — even divine — powers. Abraxas points out that his parents were hippies, which likely influenced them in choosing his name. He sold his first painting at age 14, and was determined to become a painter. He graduated from Cape Henlopen High School and traveled to Washington state to study at the New Renaissance Academy under master artist Libby Berry, whose realistic work also features the special use of light. Berry, who became a good friend, died in 2016. Abraxas teaches the proprietary techniques he studied under her tutelage, and offers sketching and painting classes at his studio several times throughout the year, often taking students to see relevant paintings at museums in Washington, D.C.

“His class has far exceeded my expectations,” says marketing executive and art aficionado John Orban, who lives in Easton, Md. “I’ve begun to see colors I’ve never seen. No one teaches like this.”

Abraxas finds a sense of satisfaction in interacting with students: “I love teaching and to see people learn a new way to observe, and to create something they didn’t know they could do.”

He stresses that observation is critical, and he will spend hours, days or even weeks doing just that as he focuses on a new piece of art. He usually begins painting at the particular outdoor site, and only later will refine and enhance the details in his studio. In fact, Abraxas favors painting in a natural environment over his studio.

“I analyze the light, how it is affected by the atmosphere, and how it appears throughout the day. I take apart the scene I want to paint, and through interpretation, reconstruct it how I want it to be.”

As an example, he points to a painting of small, exposed sandbars near the point of Cape Henlopen State Park. The Harbor of Refuge lighthouse stands in the distance. “You can see how realistic this looks, but it’s not,” he says. “From this vantage point, you would not see that lighthouse.”



Lewes artist Abraxas Hudson, who describes himself as a perfectionist, meticulously applies another layer of oil paint to get just the right effect in his work.

In another realistic painting of an idyllic bay surrounded by mountains, Abraxas says that in real life, the mountains were hidden by buildings. “I paint the spirit of what I see, and do not use photography,” he explains. “I create an image that looks like reality, but in fact, it is an enhanced reality. I can add or subtract elements as I see fit. That’s what is so exciting.”

It’s his meticulous attention to detail that adds to the clarity and realism of his art.

In his 20s, Abraxas traveled the United States, painting many different natural scenes. He still occasionally travels. Today, works depicting the rocky shores of Maine, rugged mountains of Colorado, and a West Coast beach might be found in his studio among the local landscapes.

The latter are what most interest Vince Crognale, a collector of Abraxas’s paintings who has decorated his Landenberg, Pa., home and his offices in Lewes and Greenville with them. “What appeals to me are the scenes of coastal Delaware. I can look at a piece and identify the location,” Crognale says. “It’s easy to lose yourself in one of his paintings. They are inspirational.”

Abraxas opened his first gallery in Milton in 2004, and in 2010 moved it to the present location on Second Street. His studio houses both original work and prints. Occasionally, works in progress are visible. Over the years, his paintings have been exhibited throughout the coastal Delaware area, and have been bought by

“It’s easy to lose yourself in one of his paintings. They are inspirational.”

collectors around the United States. He has also donated works to many different fundraising efforts over the years and, according to Lewes business owner Jen Mason, he has been supportive of other local artists. Today, his work is for sale only at his studio, with prices typically ranging from \$100 for a small print to several thousand dollars for an original oil. (One large, commissioned painting that took several months to complete sold for \$50,000.)

Abraxas’s artistic skill and fascination with light have extended to still lifes, black-and-white pencil sketches, and portraits. In his sketches, he uses graphite pencils to create the same luminist effect through subtle variations in tone and shading. One of his still lifes, of a bright orange-colored peach, has been used on a Nassau Valley Vineyard wine label. Some of his commissioned portraits can be seen in Lewes, including one of Barbara Moon, an early Lewes Public Library supporter and volunteer, which hangs in the library foyer, and one of philanthropist and Lewes native Margaret H. Rollins, which hangs at the Beebe Healthcare school of nursing named after her. A few years ago, the artist painted a portrait of his grandfather, local entrepreneur and philanthropist Joseph Hudson. It hangs in Beebe’s Emergency Department, part of the medical center’s Hudson Wing, which the former board chairman’s generosity helped construct.

In 2011, Abraxas married Kate Fitzgerald, a yoga teacher and massage therapist who has a studio near Lewes.

“I think we are both in the healing arts, and bring positive energy to our environment,” he says with a smile. ■

SUSAN TOWERS is a Lewes-based freelance writer and a lover of the arts, history and the outdoors.

The Luminist Effect

View more of artist Abraxas Hudson’s work at his studio located at 123C Second St. in Lewes. Intrigued by how he reproduces light in each piece? Visit abraxasart.com for class details. ■

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