

Creating a home for art in the community



Sarah Johnson
Pictures from Home

When you walk into Paris in Plantsville and take in all the art, your initial instinct might feel more like you're in someone's living room than an art gallery. I did. This aesthetic was no accident.

Sean Michanczyk, the owner of Paris in Plantsville, wanted the atmosphere to be homey. "People can relate the displays in here to how it might look in their home," he said.

Paris in Plantsville opened in January of 2010. Eric Stegmaier and Clinton Deckert, both regular artists at the gallery, didn't know Sean yet at that point. According to Sean, everyone seemed to know Clinton, however, and he began to regularly attend and contribute to shows, sharing tips and connections from the art world. "The shows became more frequent and the work submitted became better each time," Eric said.

Clinton explained that a good camaraderie developed between the trio and a small cast of various other

artists who have come and gone from the PIP community. He had his first solo show at the gallery shortly thereafter. "Clint's show drew in artists with common ideas and thoughts," Sean said. "People started pitching in and helped us grow from business aspects to lighting."

"We even learned lessons on how to behave around guests and create friendly dialogue," Eric said.

The three men all had different experiences with art growing up, but shared the common habit of conspicuous doodling behavior – getting in trouble in class and on report cards for spending more time drawing on desks than answering questions.

"My family gave me some resistance as I got older and gravitated toward art as a business," said Eric, who is now a conservation assistant at the Yale Center for British Art. "We lived in rentals a lot when I was growing up, so there was never really fine art hung in our home."

Clinton's full-time job is as a quoting manager in the aerospace industry for Har-Conn, but his passion for creativity started young. "There wasn't really any art in our home growing up



Eric Steigmaier's 'The Duet' was painted for his wife to commemorate their engagement.

but there was music ... my mom still plays piano. My dad taught me woodworking. Later on when I realized I could do painting, I got involved with ArtWorks and created pieces inspired by surrealism and Dada. There was definitely some overlap between music and art. I was always a creative force, I just didn't know it."

Sean works part-time for Dean's Stove and Spa when he's not managing PIP. But the gallery really is like a full-time job for him. It's not surprising considering his upbringing. "I was always engulfed in the arts growing up. My mother played string bass and we had books of classical art

on the coffee table. My mother's great aunt was a painter and I was drawn to her work that hung in our home. My mom took me to private art classes too."

These days, art in the home takes on some very different forms for Sean, Eric and Clinton. "My wife and I moved in to our home two years ago and have been remodeling a lot," Eric said. "There's one piece that I painted, a portrait of my wife with her flute that I did around the time we got married. It hangs above our piano. It means a lot to her."

Clinton has turned his own dining room into a small museum of sorts. "There aren't too many empty nails in there," he laughed. "I like to rotate what I have hanging up. One piece that always stays up in my home though, is a painting that looks over my shoulder in my studio. My brother who passed away 20 years ago painted it... a jester. It really embodied his spirit."

For Sean, owning PIP has offered a unique ability to slowly curate his own home collection. "I have art in my home from many of the artists who have shown at the gallery. One really special piece is by my



'The Jester' by Clinton Deckert's late brother, Lane. Deckert said, 'He was five years younger than myself and he passed away in 1993 from a motorcycle accident at the age of 29. 'The Jester' is a fun piece that I find amusing... It seems to embody Lane and his weird sense of humor. It's not perfect, but neither was he, and that's why this painting remains near and dear to me.'

friend Jordan who passed away a couple years ago. Every time I sit down to work, I see it. It's his very unique style of surreal illustration."

Sean says that owning local art doesn't just have a curator's value but that it's also like owning a small

piece of history. Artists evolve and change and original art is always special. "Art in the home somehow all fits," Clinton said. "Even if it's an eclectic collection, it says something about you the way it comes together."

It's fair to say that Paris in Plantsville has evolved into its own community and home for local artists. At this point in its history, people are even coming from out of state to show work there.

"We can be the catalyst for a good vibe," Clinton said. "If it's good and it speaks to you, that really strikes a chord."

"And it has the ability to become more widespread, even regional," Eric added.

"Art has the ability to really bring like-minded and even new people together to create diversity," Sean said, getting ready to head to another meeting. "It takes away the cookie-cutter." "Artists are a product of their environment. It can affect what they do," Eric added. "If one artist or a group develops, it could change a whole community."



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