

Pocono Life

For art's sake: Digital artist reaches out for new audience

MARK A. GENITO/Pocono Record A piece by artist Richard Spezzano titled 'Bench' at the Artspace Gallery in Stroudsburg.



Artist Richard Spezzano in the Artspace Gallery on Seventh Street in Stroudsburg Wednesday.

[Helen Yanulus](#)

Pocono Life Writer

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Richard Spezzano knows that the art world is biased against computer-generated art, and he is working to change that.

Spezzano will hang his first solo show, "Shifted Perception," during July at the Artspace Gallery in Stroudsburg, featuring the fruits of the digital darkroom: abstracts, still lifes, nudes, black and white photography and local painterly scenes.

"There's a snob factor in the art world, such as oils are better than acrylics. To me, it's insane," Spezzano said. "The bottom line is the artist, not the medium."

Traditionally, it has taken generations for each new medium to be accepted. Spezzano plans to hang a timeline with his exhibit to illustrate this point.

In 15th-century Europe, watercolor was used by Albrecht Durer and accepted by the mid-1700s in England. Yet early 19th-century American artists viewed it as a sketching tool. It took Winslow Homer to change American artists' attitude.

Most digital artists are hoping that acceptance of their chosen form doesn't take that long.

"I don't like boundaries. I don't believe there are boundaries in life," Spezzano said.

He focuses on progressive photography, taking a photo and enhancing or changing it; digital painting; and black and white photos with a touch of color.

"Why is painting a certain way art? Why is traditional photography art when that person goes into the darkroom and lightens or darkens it?" he said. "It's art if someone looks at this item and they appreciate what they see."

Printing has evolved, too. "There was a time that when something was printed with a computer, it would fade in a year or so. Not anymore," said Spezzano, who uses giclée, a six-color printing process that lasts a minimum of 70 to 80 years.

Spezzano sees the computer as a tool, just like a brush or palette knife. Tools have always been important to this Brooklyn-born artist from a lower middle class family without a lot of money for art supplies.

"Whatever I could find, I made do with it," he said.

As a youngster, he wrote puppet shows and created the puppets and stage. It got so complicated that this backyard entertainment that drew all the kids in the neighborhood needed pre-taped voices. He later wrote musical for a community center as a teenager, managing to get 60-some kids into each production, and penned comic books.

After high school, Spezzano worked many jobs, finding a home in the retail sector. He once overheard the owners of the company discussing buying a computer. Spezzano made some suggestions. He then worked with the designers of outerwear and T-shirts, training them to use the new technology.

"I found the tool that I could use that worked for me the best, and as time went on, computers got better," said Spezzano, who thirsted to learn it all from graphics and animation to video editing and Web design.

But he never thought to hang any work until his partner encouraged him. "I never thought to say, 'Let me show it.' More, 'Where would I put it?' There are so many walls," he said.

Spezzano then won a photography award and began to take it all seriously. This turn of events all happened as he entered his fifth decade.

"I thrive on it. I'm even looking at everything in different ways, with a different edge and try to capture some mood," Spezzano said. "I'm constantly trying to learn new techniques."

He hopes that visitors will attend the show with an open mind. He said, "I want them to walk away and say, 'That was interesting.' I'd be happy with that. Or walk away inspired to create. I'd be thrilled with either one."

BIOGRAPHY

Name: Richard Spezzano

Age: 52

Town: Cherry Valley

Family: partner of nearly 22 years, Ray Miller; siblings, Grace Spezzano of Queens, N.Y., Tom Spezzano of Brooklyn, N.Y., and Jim Spezzano of Tampa, Fla.; and a mixed breed dog, Skutch.

Education: associate of science in computer programming from Kingsborough College, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Employment: self-employed Web and graphic designer. Previously, he was a senior designer for Jacques Moret in New York and Majestic Athletic in Bangor, and a senior creative director at Pro Player in New York.

Gallery experience: director of Artspace Gallery in Stroudsburg since February.

Memberships: PoconoArts Council and World Artist Directory.

Exhibitions: Stroudsmoor Fine Art Exhibit, Rainbow Mountain Resort, Artspace Gallery, Sherman Theater,

Eastern Monroe Public Library, Red Run Gallery, Ilona Royce Smithkin Onlind Gallery and Richard Spezzano Online Gallery.

Award: photography award from the Monroe County Arts Council's annual Members' Exhibition in 2005.

Classes: teaches his techniques in Photoshop classes at the Artspace Gallery.

Web site: www.Spezmedia.com