
Local artist starts world-class oil paint company

By Charity Prater

He could have been a lawyer. He could have been an architect. Instead, he chose to be an artist.

As a youngster, Northeast Portland resident Robert Gamblin began teaching himself how to compose oil paintings and create sculptures. He regularly frequented the art section of the library, where he could be found gazing at the art works of Monet and other influential artists.

Gamblin dropped his law school plans when an aptitude test told him that art was his true calling. He transferred to the University of Oregon where, for three years, he pursued his dream of learning how to paint. He then transferred to the San Francisco Art Institute for another two years.

Gamblin's art fills his studio. Paintings depicting Oregon's Sitka forests and the waves of Northwest beaches line the shelves and cover the walls.

"My parents didn't have high expectations for me at that time," Gamblin says. "It wasn't a big deal to switch to a career that wasn't as valued by the business world, since it was cheaper to live back then."

It wasn't until 1980 that Gamblin decided to start his own business making quality oil paints to sell to artists all over North America. He began his small business in a garage. After two years, the business had become so successful that he was able to move it into a two-car garage.

Gamblin used his own money to build the business, Gamblin Artist's Oil Colors. He ran into complications trying to build confidence with other painters. His competition was European companies that had been around for more than 150 years.

"Painting pretty much came from Europe," he says, "I had a hard time gaining trust next to some of those experienced companies."



Robert Gamblin works to bridge the gap between classical and modern landscape paintings.

- Photo by Charity Prater

Eventually, however, he was able to gain loyalty and expand his company to Canada and even Australia. In 1987 his wife, Martha Bergman Gamblin, joined the business.

“Our skills are different,” Gamblin says, “But they complement one another.”

Two years ago, Gamblin sold the business so he could focus on his own painting. Both he and his wife still remain affiliated with the company. Gamblin remains in control of the product sector of Gamblin Artist's Oil Colors.

He spends the rest of his time expanding his painting skills and improving his landscape paintings. While traveling the world he finds places and structures that bring emotion to his art. Since the sale of his business, Gamblin has been working on bridging the gap between classical landscape paintings, which often involve a mythological or religious presence, and modern paintings, which are based on a more realistic view of a landscape.

“There is little that is realistic in classical landscape paintings,” he says. “They used to bring foreign objects into a natural setting, such as temples, horses, ships sailing in the waters, and other imaginary elements. I want to paint the famous dark foreground that frames light background, but in a realistic and believable way.”

Gamblin's art fills his studio. Paintings depicting Oregon's Sitka forests and the waves of Northwest beaches line the shelves and cover the walls. Paintings of lonely farms of Normandy hang in his personal collection.

Gamblin's paintings sell for \$1,000 to \$4,000. He can be contacted at Robert@gamblincolors.com. Gamblin Artist's Oil Colors are available at Columbia Art & Drafting, Art Media, Muse Art & Design and Utrecht. ★



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