



David Wells Roth's paintings capture the silent drama of color at play

By John Hilliard

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FRAMINGHAM -

It has been a long, winding road for artist and Sudbury native David Wells Roth, one that took him from a student's life in suburban Boston, eking out a life in New York as a starving painter, and spending 15 years chasing Europe's sunlight.

Now the painter, who works out of the town's Fountain Street Studios, is being shown at New York City's Allan Stone Gallery, in its "Talent 2008 Emerging Artists Salon" through Oct. 16. The gallery has spotted top talent in the past: It hosted early shows for artists Andy Warhol, William de Kooning and Wayne Tebo.

Roth keeps his feet on the ground.

"I don't think about success. It's fleeting. I just try to enjoy it" and focus on the work, said Roth, who called it an honor to be shown by the gallery. "A little recognition is nice," he said.

His mother, a painter in college, encouraged him to pursue art, and his father gave Roth his earliest lessons in perspective. He was mesmerized that a line could enter a two-dimensional surface to depict three-dimensional space.

He attended Lincoln-Sudbury High School, then attended Boston University on a scholarship. He left school and spent three years in New York.

One could say Roth has paid his dues: After attending Boston University, he spent some time living in New York City scratching out a living as an artist. He lived in a small apartment, then in his own car, then with family - and covered his expenses by selling his paintings on the street. He eventually ended up living in a storage space owned by another artist, but through a bit of luck, made a connection from a French traveler that helped changed the course of his life in 1982.

The man viewed Roth's in progress painting of Rockefeller Square, and offered Roth four months of housing in his family's home in exchange for the painting. Roth didn't hesitate.

"I would have said yes before he asked the question," said Roth.

An expressive, approachable man, Roth leans forward on his elbows while listening to questions, leans back to consider his answer, then offers a response that can mix his work habits as a painter, his family history and his youth spent in

New York and Europe. An observer of light and atmosphere, upon seeing the "thick, heavy light" of Amsterdam, the hometown of one of Roth's favorites, Rembrandt, Roth recalled exclaiming "I'm home!"

He's keen on light and atmosphere, and sees the difference in areas of the world - Holland's thick sky, for example - while, say, France has the feeling of lower clouds and sky, while America has generally clearer, crisper and more expansive skies, he said.

In the late 1990s, he returned to Boston and worked as a hired illustrator. He refocused himself on painting, returning to the urban scenes that he'd painted in the past.

Some of his work captures the mundane world of the 9-to-5 commuter: The linear path of roads, green overpasses and traffic. But with his brush, Roth pulls out the silent drama of color at play as sunlight reacts to each surface.

"I'm not painting an underpass necessarily, I'm painting the shapes... with the light reacting off of it," he said.

His other landscapes include rough-hewn strokes, patches of color that seem to glow from the canvas and isn't locked down to finite detail. The result recreates that feeling of shimmering sunlight on everyday scenes: A setting sun highlighting a glowing green overpass, the orange crags of a rocky Narragansett shoreline while the deeper blues of the ocean fade into the distance.

He also has show at Framingham State College's Mazmanian Gallery that will run from Nov. 24 - Dec. 12, plus a Provincetown show next year. Being shown in New York, after his early struggles there as a young painter, has him coming full circle.

"I kind of don't believe it - at the same time, it's happening. I'm just going with the flow. I'm just reacting to it," Roth said.

"Talent 2008: Emerging Artists Salon" runs through Oct. 16 at the Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th St., New York. Visit www.allanstonegallery.com for more information. To learn more about David Wells Roth and his work, visit

www.davidwellsroth.com.