

At 85, Oxnard artist is still asking questions and moving forward

By Nicole D'Amore Special to The Star

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Oxnard artist Don Fay says his life could be signified by a question mark.

“The question mark is my symbol of keeping alive and vital,” Fay said. “Questions have a vitality in that they are always moving forward so your thinking is oriented creatively when you ask questions.”

Art has been the major thread through Fay’s life and at 85, he isn’t slowing down.

He paints almost every day, sometimes until the early morning hours. On Tuesdays he can be found at local beaches and parks painting with the Ventura County Plein Air Painters.

“Don is a very dynamic part of our group,” said facilitator Chris Weber. “He is so well educated and will share his artistic knowledge freely with anyone who is interested. ... Some of us may not complete a painting in one session but Don always goes home with a beautifully rendered finished work.”

Paintings cover the walls of the home he shares with his wife Fern, a musician. There are those of his mentors and friends: Robert E. Wood, Milford Zornes, Tom Fong and Sergei Bongart, and he eagerly tells stories of times they painted together.

Fay specializes in watercolor, but works in any medium.

“I am eclectic in terms of style,” he said. Categorizing artists with a particular style is self-limiting for the artist, he said.

“It means you have come to the end of your growth if you have one style,” he said. “So I’ll jump all over the place and do anything I am influenced to by the subject matter or by my own whimsies. Whimsy is an important part of the way I think.”

His paintings range from realistic landscapes to colorful abstracts and wild fantasy.

“I am idea oriented,” he said. “All of the art elements are critical, but I am oriented to objectifying, making an object out of ideas.”



In addition to traditional watercolor, painting from light to dark, Fay also paints in the

English or European style, beginning with the darks.

“It’s much more like drawing,” he said. “The danger is, it’s like jumping off a diving board, you have no way back, no repairs... Like engraving, you have to know where you’re going before you go there,” he said. “I not only see things in reverse rather easily, but I see the whole image in my mind.”

Fay’s parents were antique decorators in the Berkeley Piedmont area, so his early memories are of vast collections of antiques: Byzantine, Chinese Renaissance, Persian, Victorian and Etruscan.

“From the time I was a little child, I was surrounded by it,” he said. “My job was to sweep the floors, under the benches of the restorers... My broom had to be careful.”

He studied interior design, graduating from the California College of Arts and Crafts. During and after college, he worked as a musician and entertainer in clubs and on cruise ships.

(View the [Oxnard artist at 85](#) slide show.)

After being discharged from the Navy because of a back injury, he began a 35-year career in commercial art and as a visual information officer for the defense department. He was able to continue his education at the Art Center College of Design and through private classes. He retired at 62.

“I went back to the bench, back to my beginnings as an artist,” he said. He did murals and commissions and was active as a demonstrator.

“The last seven years I have become more precious about only doing exactly what I want,” he said.

Fay has painted with the plein air group for about 15 years.

“It’s prize-winners to amateurs and that’s what I like, that fits in with my idea of diversity and question marks,” he said. “Someone will say, ‘What the heck’s going to happen here, I’ve got a dribble.’ and I’ll say, that’s a beautiful dribble, now turn it into the trunk of a tree and put some leaves on it and you’re all set.”

For the past 25 years Fay has taught a weeklong workshop at Yosemite National Park. He has exhibited extensively and won awards.

Fay is a signature member of the National Watercolor Society, a member of the California Art Club and the Gold Coast and Buena Ventura Art Associations.

His work can be seen on his Web site: <http://www.fayproductions.com>.

To recommend an artist to be profiled in this section, or for more information, contact Nicole D’Amore at ArtProfiles1@gmail.com or 405-0364.



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