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Humboldt artist's journey a personal one



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Humboldt-area watercolour painter Bob Pitzel has 25 pieces on display at the gallery at Amy's On Second.

For Bob Pitzel, the artistic process has to be a deeply personal one because the journey never quite ends where you may have hoped.

The Humboldt-area watercolour painter, who has 25 pieces on display at the gallery at Amy's On Second, says as a result an artist has to please their own principles and values first.

"It's such a personal thing that you're doing," Pitzel says. "You know what you want to do so intimately that I don't you'd ever get to the point where you'd finish a piece and say 'Ya, I just explained exactly what I wanted to. You never quite make it."

Even if Pitzel's work is not quite what he envisioned, it's still well worth seeing.

Local art lovers have been able to see his painting in the juried show at the Winter Festival for the past few years, one of the only shows he enters and one he's had some success in.

He hopes to return in mid-January for a meal to see the show, which is his first in Prince Albert.

Pitzel started Graphic Ad Ltd., in Humboldt in 1971 after graduating from the Alberta College of Art in Calgary. He sold the business in 2004 with the idea that it would allow him to spend more time in his home studio, which is located a few kilometres south of Humboldt.

The opportunity to do business consulting part-time mushroomed, which means he only spends a couple of days in the studio painting.

"I'm having fun with both of my careers so no complaints," he says.

"I've got too many things pulling at the heartstrings to totally dedicate myself to anything. I'm kind of like a kid in a candy store. I've got my hand in the jar; what do I let go of?"

Pitzel and his wife bought an old railway station and moved it to their land in the 1970s, sparking what he calls a "30-some-year renovation."

When they built a garage, he added a 16x24 studio in the back, giving him nearly 400 square feet to

work in. He says it's very handy.

"I can lay everything out and just leave it and walk away from it, where before you drag your work out, work on it for a while and then you have to put it all away again," he says.

Pitzel initially took up watercolours in art college.

When he was working acrylics, it brought out the worst in a personality that he says is never quite satisfied. Pitzel says he would invariably work and rework his pieces.

"That's not very successful because you usually end up with mud."

He says that made the move to paper a better fit for him because with watercolours what you paint is what you get.

"It forced myself to sit down and plan my piece out before I ever attacked the paper," he says. "It taught me discipline and I stayed there."

His work focuses on rural Prairie scenes, with an eye for lines and shadows. On his website -- www.bpitzel.com -- you'll find photos of paintings that include elevators, fence lines, trains, tractors and closeups of weathered doors and windows.

"I have to paint what I know," he says. "The idea of me sitting here in my studio doing a mountain scene is just not going to work. You have to be pretty involved with your subject matter to really do a successful piece."

Pitzel says he didn't think that his work had changed a lot but he now recognizes the differences from works that he did 30 years ago.

While he's always focused on moods and colours, his perspective has tightened from broader landscapes to a focus on individual items.

Pitzel admits that it can be a frustrating process.

He says one of the larger pieces on display at Amy's features a tractor. The final piece was the culmination of four paintings that had him try it from different angles, shapes, colours and even seasons.

Finally, he committed to a large piece of paper with the final work in mind.

"It's a little bit almost terrifying," he admits. "You have this huge chunk of watercolour paper in front of you and you spend 30 or 40 hours between the drawing and the execution and you're always saying 'Is this going to work or not?'"

"By the time you're done you don't really like it anymore but give it six months and I can go back and look at it and say 'I guess it's OK.'"