

Still finding his focus



Novosad creates art from his art



By Matt Harris

When it comes to his art, Dennis Novosad lives life by a simple rule — always find a way to grow and develop, otherwise you grow stale and stop developing.

The Fergus-based Novosad dedicates as much time as he can to his passion for painting, and he also has a sharp eye for photography. One look around his small St. Patrick Street studio will show his visitors that the two are

connected — he will often snap pictures of things that catch his eye, and then the pictures become a sort of visual sounding board for him. Ideas will bounce around inside his head while he looks at a photograph — what works, what doesn't, and how he wants to see it.

"I would say I'm an artist first and a photographer second," he said. "I took a picture of some boats moored to a dock when my wife and I were in Australia, and that became a painting of mine. I changed a few things because I just felt it would look better the way I saw it

in my mind."

The hue of the water changed and the dock disappeared, and Novosad came up with a work that he found to be more visually pleasing than the original photo. That's not uncommon in his overall process, and it holds true to that basic principle — grow and develop.

Novosad first discovered his interest in art at a young age, starting out by drawing various pictures of animals. Once he reached high school in Kitchener, he didn't find a good art program but did wind up in draft-

ing. After spending his career as a draftsman, Novosad wound up taking visual arts classes in painting and drawing at the University of Guelph while working there. It was while he was there that a co-worker got him into watercolours.

From there, his passion took off.

“I would take pictures of things I liked and then try to replicate them to a certain degree with my painting,” he said. “I seem to have an eye for composition, and that helps with the end result of a painting. I start with the picture and crop down for a painting.”

Since retiring from Guelph, Novosad gets to spend more time with his art. And if he lets it, that passion can consume him. The choice has to make some sense to him, hold some sort of attraction — whether it’s a particular colour or the image itself.

“Something about my subject has to make me want to do something more with it,” he said. “The image in my mind has to call out to me, ‘Hey, do something with me!’”

While it is only a secondary tool in his primary drive as an artist, Novosad has a number of stunning pictures hanging around his studio. One such picture shows a truck caravan heading across a highway in the Australian outback during a sunrise that blends several alluring colours. He says that picture was just a happy accident, being in the right place at the right time to capture that very image ... but then again, Novosad believes there is art in pretty much every corner of day-to-day life that just gets overlooked because people don’t take the time to appreciate what decorates their lives.

And it doesn’t have to be in some far-off place where the romantic notion of art sometimes finds itself relegated. The back yard, an open spot in the park or the side view of a building can all offer a chance to become something more.

“I took some shots here in Fergus one morning when I got up early and the frost was still in the trees,” he said. “I found one with good light on it and I got a picture of that. From there, I went to work and painted how I really saw that tree. Travel is good for things like that, but people sometimes forget what’s going on around them.”

Pictures are fine on their own, but Novosad wants something more when he’s creating art. A picture can be worth a thousand words, but at times that’s not enough for Novosad.

“A picture can be a good thing, but it doesn’t always allow forms to stand out on their own — that’s where I sometimes will take some artistic licence and start to change things,” he said.

Novosad prefers to work with watercolours, mostly because they’re easier to manipulate. He says it can also be trickier than some people think — a common association he hears is that watercolour painting is for school children and not as challenging. He’ll then take great pleasure in pointing out that a lot of painting masters used watercolours to create their works. And like those masters, Novosad is hoping to find something to pull you into his work — a way to express his passion, if you will.

“This is where you get some shared principles with photography — you’re trying to get the eye drawn into a third of the painting, and then you work from there,” he said. “Contrasts give a painting life, and you can mix colours in to complement each other throughout the whole piece. Intensity of colour is important as well — it has to blend together. In all, you want your work to stop someone and keep someone’s eye so they don’t exit the piece.”

As an artist, Novosad finds copious amounts of energy when it comes to working on his paintings. Not only does he crave the challenge of keeping his own enthusiasm running high, he wants to know he’s reached someone when they look at what he’s done.

“I admit that I get a certain satisfaction from creating something that someone else sees and enjoys,” he said. “People can see a painting at times and just walk by unaffected, but when they see something of mine ... an image I’ve taken and they stop to really see it, I hope they gain a new appreciation for what they’ve seen. Art allows people to stop and see what they sometimes miss.”

