

Glenn Harren's World

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By Brenda Lange

When visiting the Lambertville gallery of painter Glenn Harren, one's first thought may be large—not in relation to the building, but to the canvases that fill it. And if painting is his means of communicating, as he calls it, then Harren has more to say than most.

Much of his work is done on a very large scale: 6' x 6' paintings are commonplace. This vastness is appropriate, and you might say that the Holicong, PA, painter—an “overnight sensation” who has worked for decades to receive the recognition he deserves—likes to depict lives lived large.

Harren is not a portraitist; rather he likes to paint people in their everyday lives. So whether the canvas is filled with tiny tykes playing soccer or waves lapping at female bathers on a sandy shore or a female clerk making coffee at Wawa, it is filled with images of life.

“I paint my world,” he says simply.

Keen observer

Perhaps that is part of the appeal of a Harren painting. He's an avid observer. He sees beauty in the everyday, often mundane, goings-on of the people around him. Their actions speak to him, and he translates that into renderings that, in turn, speak to those who see them.



One of his most recent exhibitions included a painting of Doylestown Hospital nurses at a nursing station as they changed shifts. Another popular piece depicts a clerk at the former Kenny's in Doylestown.

But it's not only people that attract Harren's attention. The Bucks County native loves to paint the landscapes around him from the sun-dappled Delaware River to puffy pink-tinged clouds at sunset. Last winter's record-breaking snowfalls provided fodder for a series of smaller works he's completing now.

Judicious color choices lean toward the bright and invigorating, qualities that drive his work. "My painting is not an intellectual process, but rather an emotional response from what I see," he says. "My primary purpose is the balance and movement of the large shapes and colors. I'm more concerned with those than I am with detail. That comes in later. I like to say as much as possible with few brushstrokes."

A lifelong pursuit

Harren, who was born in New York City in 1952, has had a lifelong love affair with art. He completed his course of study at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1981, and has taken part in dozens of exhibitions and shows since then. He's won prestigious awards, including a fellowship from PAFA, and his work hangs in numerous corporate and private collections.

He opened his gallery on July 4, 2008, proclaiming a personal day of independence for his work. Why Lambertville? "Lots of people come here to look for art, so it's a perfect place for a gallery," he explains. He often brings "resource materials" with him into his studio in Holicong. "I'll bring sketches and photos into the studio with me, but they fall by the wayside as I respond to the painting as it takes shape," he says. "I just bear witness to the painting. As I put down the colors, the painting emerges, and I follow its lead."

Harren also takes commissions, one of the most famous being a line-up of customers at Costco, commissioned by the company's president.

He approaches each painting as a representation of a moment in time, and strives to maintain the integrity of each one of them, whether that depicts a waitress serving coffee, three friends barbecuing on matching grills or almost any other slice-of-life imaginable.

Visit the Glenn Harren Fine Art Gallery, 22 Church Street, Lambertville, NJ, Saturdays and Sundays from 12 to 5 or weekdays by appointment. For more information, call (215) 694-9493 or visit www.harrenfineart.com.

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