Painter maps inner world

Dan Mills stands by an untitled "map morph" of the United States. The final stage in the series is that of a 19th century version of the American Liberty Eagle.

About the artist
Name: Dan Mills
Age: 49
Born: Waterloo, N.Y.
Family: Wife, Gail Sklar
Works: Samnek Art Studio, Gallery, Lancaster Center, Bucknell University
Profession: Artist/Curator
Education: BFA, Rochester Institute of Technology; MFA, Northern Illinois University
Upcoming exhibit at Out of the Blue Gallery, Lewisburg.


This painting, an abstract of Iceland, is one of the many paintings hanging on Dan Mills' studio walls.

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And he looks for shifts in science or culture that affect human relationships.
Dealing with ideas and concepts that are both too big and too small for the average person to see is a theme in his work, evoking Picasso's phrase: "Art is a lie that enables us to realize the truth."

One of his paintings featured at Northern Illinois University in Chicago might be a perfect example. "Beacon" examines a world with changing national boundaries, a visual interpretation of world imperialism. The 62-inch painting is layered. The bottom section is an early 20th century map and appears as a transparent checkered game board.

Three chess pieces are centered at the top of the map, heads jutting in separate directions.

"The king represents monarchy, the bishop, religion, and the rook is military," Mr. Mills explained, "the powers that covet other lands."

Another piece titled "Abstract painting" focuses on the minute aspects of human existence. His interest in double meanings and word placement are evident in this painting, "Portrait" is written at the top of the page and a series of names hug the edge of an unreadable map. The surface is covered with near exact representations of human DNA.

"Many things are just accepted," says Mr. Mills. "Like the shape of DNA. It can be in the shape of a spiral, a bunch of grapes or a ladder. Which is the real shape?"

As a contemporary artist he is interested in posing questions, looking for ambiguity in accepted facts and then focusing on that particular point, allowing the viewer to freely interpret the work.

As a curator he says it is his job to bring great national and international art to Bucknell and the surrounding community and says it was the institution that brought him to this "culturally rich area."

He also acknowledges the benefits of working around other creative people.

"Art is a fairly solitary endeavor but when you come up for air it's nice to know there are people there you can converse with," says Mr. Mills. "You can be in a small place and if you are around serious people, it fosters and feeds you."

Mr. Mills is showing a four-piece collage series now through July 31 at Out of the Blue Art Gallery, 229 Market St., Lewisburg. Gallery hours are Wednesday and Thursday, noon to 5 p.m.; Friday, noon to 7 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

For more information call 570-723-7320.