

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2013 - FRIDAY, JANUARY 2, 2014



TimesLedger, Dec. 27, 2013 - Jan. 2, 2014

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Artist Matthew McDonnell in his Kew Gardens studio. Photo courtesy Matthew McDonnell

He draws on his experience to create

Kew Gardens artist Matthew McDonnell uses Japanese ink for pieces based on famous oratorio

BY ALLISON PLITT

While many artists are inspired by the images they see, Kew Gardens resident Matthew McDonnell has created five works

of art based upon what he has heard and researched.

The culmination of his lengthy efforts is currently on display in an exhibit at the Serendipity Micro Gallery, 1585 First

Ave., in Manhattan until Dec. 29.

Titled "Sebastian — Five Works Inspired by 'Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien,'" all the works narrate sequentially a play first performed in Paris in

1911, thanks to the collaboration of three unique artists — Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio, Russian ballet dancer Ida Rubinstein and French composer Claude Debussy.

The play itself was not successful, but the music continues to be played by professional orchestras worldwide due to Debussy's talent and fame.

Described as a musical mystery play, "Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien" was divided into five acts in which McDonnell has configured a highly detailed drawing of each — "The Court of Lilies," "The Magic Chamber," "The Council of the False Gods," "The Wounded Laurel" and "The Paradise."

The plot involves Sebastian, chief archer in the Roman Army and a favorite of Emperor Diocletian, who converts to Christianity. Sebastian's devotion to Jesus Christ drives him to reject the emperor's love, causing the emperor to angrily order Sebastian to be shot with arrows by his fellow archers. After he is executed,

IF YOU GO

Sebastian - Five Works Inspired by "Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien"

Serendipity Micro Gallery
1585 First Ave., Manhattan
Through Sunday, Dec. 29

Sebastian is assumed into heaven as an angel.

McDonnell himself has created his five works on giclée with sumi ink.

"Giclée is a form of print," McDonnell said. "This is a limited edition of prints that are produced in a batch never to exceed 25 prints. They are all black-and-white pen-and-inks. The sumi ink is a very black Japanese type of ink which is often used for Japanese and Chinese calligraphy. When I get the prints back from the printer, I sometimes go back into the black areas and reinforce them to make the color a little stronger for better contrast. Sometimes I also give the paper a

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create

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bit of tint to enhance the appearance of the type.”

The real star of the show is McDonnell and his five compositions that could easily be confused with canvases from a cubist painter in Europe during the early 1900s. McDonnell considers himself a figurative painter, meaning his artwork represents real objects.

On his website, a description of his artwork aptly describes his style: “Matthew’s work is always of the figure. He multiplies figurations using hint and enigma, interlacing the imagery like a puzzle. He suggests the possible without delineating the actual. Hidden and veiled, joined or dispersed, the human figure is always still there.”

Besides the intense detail within each work, McDonnell says he has also inserted pagan and Christian mysticisms into his compositions as D’Annunzio did with his poem.

“In reading the play, I was trying to see if I could do the same type of homage to the mysteries that people often link to their relations to the heavens,” McDonnell said. “For example, I actually have St. Sebastian being pulled into a fiery sun that is divided into three lobes to symbolize the Christian trinity. Also, along the bottom of each of the five compositions, I painted objects to look like shells. Those are the footlights on the edge of a stage that happen to look like a shell. A shell is a symbol of Christian pilgrims.”



“The Court of Lilies” by Matthew McDonnell.

Photo courtesy Matthew McDonnell

Usually creating individual paintings inspired by his own ideas, McDonnell admits the “Sebastian” series is a new concept of creation for him. McDonnell, however, has been interested in art, painting and art history all his life.

Born in Brooklyn and raised in a home across the street from the Brooklyn Museum, McDonnell would take art classes as well as roam the galleries there, “loving it all.” Spending most of his childhood going to the museum on the weekends, he later decided to enroll in Brooklyn College to study art but then changed his major to architecture, and attended New York City Technical College and then the New York Institute of Technology.

In the forthcoming year, McDonnell will display his art in a group show at a new art space in Brooklyn. Since receiving such positive feedback on his “Sebastian” series, he plans to create another series of works, based on James Joyce’s “Ulysses,” which he is reading right now. If he follows his own advice, the admiration and respect of his artwork will continue.

“Try to stay true to your own interests and creative abilities,” he said. “Like what you like and create what you like.”

For more information about Matthew McDonnell, you can visit his website, matthewmcdonnell.com.

Jazz

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The CD, which includes six original songs and two new arrangements of classic pieces “It Could Happen to You,” and the theme from the “I Love Lucy” show.

Bartlett describes his band, which includes Yolchi Uzeki on piano, Dylan Shamat on bass

and Dwayne Broadnax on drums, as utilizing a modern and progressive use of time in its creations.

“Not everything is 4/4 (four beats per measure),” Bartlett said. “We have some 2/5 chord changes like you would hear in swing.”

As he prepares to swing into the new year, he believes the rough patch he experienced this year — including the death of

both his grandmother and grandfather — is behind him. He has big hopes for '14, which just happens to be his age when he first started playing the sax.

“We have a bunch of live bookings, and I’m working on another album that should be out by the tail end of 2014,” he said. “I’m super happy. Jazz is what I always wanted to do.”