Written by CAROL POMEDAY
Wednesday, 16 May 2012 14:30

Grafton artist Matthew Reilly has invented a new way of creating abstract art, and he's inviting the public to learn it

Whether he's installing a custom-designed cabinet in a home or making an abstract painting, Matthew Reilly likes to shop at hardware stores for his supplies.

The materials he's used for 30 years as a custom remodeler through his business Matthew Reilly Carpentry are what he uses for his artwork.

Reilly, who lives in Grafton, will involve the audience in his art when he demonstrates the pulled-painting technique he developed from 6 to 11 p.m. Saturday, May 19, on the third floor of the Arts Mill in Grafton.

There will be live music and beverages available during the free event.

Reilly plans to create the world's largest known pulled painting — 9 feet by 6 feet — and participants can take home a little bit of it if they decide to create an abstract switch plate.

For $10, children and adults can dab, swirl, push or pull a white plastic switch plate into the painting in progress. The switch plate design will dry to a hard enamel finish.

Last week, Reilly tried a small version of what he plans to do, using two sheets of black rubber roofing material for his canvas and cans of enamel acrylic paint from the hardware store.

He poured or dripped different colors onto one of the rubber canvases. When he felt he had enough paint, he folded the rubber material in half, then pulled it apart, letting paint drip as he opened it. The result was an abstract design with a horizon line down the center and almost mirror images on each side.

Reilly placed the blank rubber canvas on top of the first one, pulling it off to reveal two almost identical paintings. He repeated the process several times until somewhat satisfied with the result.

He went back to the painting about 30 minutes later, added some pink paint and was happier with the result.

Using the side of a small paint can, he dabbed at the bottom edge of the painting, further manipulating it.

On Saturday night, participants will manipulate the design when they dab their switch plates into the paint.

He calls the experience inner-action rather than interactive.

“I want to inspire people and show that art can be fun,” Reilly said. “People can work with me or suggest things and I’ll do it. I probably should bring some rubber gloves for people to use. It’s messy work.

“I’m very excited about what is going to happen. To do something that size, I will need four people to help me. It will be anybody’s and everybody’s art.”

Reilly will also exhibit his work to show how he has evolved as an artist from high school through his years at Milwaukee Institute of Art Design to now.

While a student at MIAD, where he obtained a degree in printmaking, Reilly worked for a cabinetmaker who also owned rental properties.

“I trained in the wood shop to make cabinets and fixed up his rentals. I learned to do a lot of things and can fix almost anything,” Reilly said. “That evolved into me designing and building wall units on my own.”

After graduating from MIAD, Reilly lived and worked in Chicago for a time.

Cabinetmaking requires Reilly to meet precise measurements. Perhaps that’s why he enjoys doing abstract and surrealistic art so much.

“My work is very physical. I like building stuff, including paintings,” Reilly said.

“Abstract and surrealistic art is very honest and usually very colorful. It shows emotions more than physical reality.

“I’m not happy painting from a picture. I’m a very internal person and my work, especially my early work, is very surrealistic. The automatic process is one of the basics of surrealism. You try not to over-design it. To do that well takes training.”

Reilly, who has a studio at the Arts Mill, designed the interior spaces for artists who have studios on the second floor of the historic building.

The carpenter-painter developed the pulled painting process in 2000 while creating a rubber

floor cloth to resemble a Persian rug he couldn't afford. When he tried to remove a gob of paint that had dropped onto the design by blotting it, the paint created an effect he liked.

He is in the process of having the technique copyrighted.

Reilly continues to experiment with pulled painting, using both oil and acrylic enamel paints and other materials.

When he uses acrylic board as his canvas, a translucent effect is created, especially when light penetrates it. When the edges are beveled, acrylic provides its own frame.

The paintings he doesn't like, he cuts into coasters or cuzzles. Cuzzles are coaster puzzles, four to six to a set, that can be put together to make a piece of the original painting.

Reilly and five other Art Mills artists were among eight artists chosen to design and paint steel guitar-shaped banners that will hang in Paramount Plaza in Grafton. Reilly's design features jazz and blues musician Blind Blake, who recorded at Paramount Studios in Grafton.

Reilly teaches experimental painting techniques at North Shore Academy of the Arts in Grafton.

The Arts Mill is at 1300 14th Ave.

For more information visit www.theartsmill.org/artists/matthew-reilly. A demonstration of Reilly's pulled painting technique can be found on You Tube at "Pulled Painting"©Matthew Reilly 2000.