

Learning About Art

By Liz Gibbons

I do not have a favorite artist. I have only a general knowledge about the vast world of art. Some of what I know I have learned from my son, Dave, and his wife, Rose. Rose has worked in the PR department at the Denver Art Museum since 1994. As a benefit she can get a few free tickets to each new exhibit, so I get to see the new exhibits free. I have been impressed with the quality of these exhibits. They are always a grand learning experience.

Dave and Rose celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary by spending two weeks in Italy and France in 2014. Starting in northern Italy they worked their way south through the large cities seeing the sights and visiting the art museums and then on to Paris for four days visiting more museums and other sights.

Dave indicated that the piece of art that touched him the most deeply among all the famous works they saw was Michelangelo's Pieta. He was overcome with emotion when he saw it as it was such a masterpiece. At the Sistine Chapel Michelangelo's scenes on the ceiling were hard to see as the lights are kept dim in the chapel to preserve the art. Dave said you get a better view of the ceiling from art books. When you consider the difficulty Michelangelo had painting a ceiling above him while standing on scaffolding, that he had to consider the perspective of working on a curved ceiling, and that they had to mix their own paints, it makes that art even more amazing.

An apprentice could not yell "Hey, Michel, we are running out of paint. Send someone over to Sherman Williams to get some more." Making paints was a time consuming task. They had to grind the pigments from plants, minerals, or certain insects and then mix them into the material being used as the base for the paint.

Dave educated me that until 1841 all artists had to mix their own paints or have the pigment mixed at an apothecary shop. The paints were usually stored in pig bladders tied with a string. A tack was inserted to get the paint out to use, but there was no good way to plug the hole. Paints often dried up, and the bladders sometimes broke. A little known portrait painter, John Rand, a Charleston native who was living in London, thought of using a tin tube capped with a screw to store paints. They did not leak, could be opened and closed many times, had a long shelf life, and were easily portable. Paintings could now be finished on site, not in a studio. This was the key to the beginning of the Impressionist movement. Renoir said "Without paint tubes there would have been no Cezanne, no Monet, no Pissarro, and no Impressionism."

Art has great power. It is a form of communication. It can uplift and connect us to the divine. It can touch our emotions and aid in healing. It wakes us up to the beauty of nature. Art can give us insight. It can be humorous. It can also be shocking and confrontational, so that we perceive the world differently. It is sad that art has been almost eliminated in our schools. There is too much emphasis on left brain learning. Art is a doorway to open the right brain hemisphere, and I think this is badly needed in our society.