

The Honor Roll

For area artists, writers and one choreographer, state fellowships provide more than a pat on the back

BY SUSAN TOWERS | PHOTOGRAPH BY SCOTT NATHAN



Juxta-positioning wood veneers isn't what typically comes to mind when the subject is art forms, but in Robert Bruce Weston's hands it is just that. And what he calls "wood veneer painting" has won him an Established Professional Award from the Delaware Division of the Arts.

"I've always loved veneer, and I've collected them for years," says Weston, a cabinetmaker by trade who retired to Delaware from northern New Jersey nine years ago after working with architects and high-end designers in the New York City area. For him, retirement has meant expanding upon the form of creative expression he loves.

"My art is changing and exploding in different directions," he says. "It's abstract, realistic, and whatever you like."

Weston is one of seven creative people in coastal Delaware — including three writers and a choreographer — who have been recognized for their work by the DDOA. They, along with three artists from Kent County and nine from New Castle County, have received 2020 Individual Artist Fellowship Awards. Weston's Established Professional prize, which comes with \$6,000, is in the category of Visual Arts: Crafts. (Honorees who won Emerging Artist Awards received \$3,000.)

Milton artist Robert Bruce Weston uses a hot razor knife to create delicate lines representing the mast and rigging of the boat in his veneer artwork, "Tempest Tossed." Weston was one of the local winners of a Delaware Division of the Arts 2020 Fellowship Award.

“It’s quite an honor, and has given me credibility as an artist,” says the Milton resident, who submitted work into the DDOA’s annual fellowship program after being encouraged by friends in the local art community. Last year, he exhibited his work at the Carvel State Office Building in Wilmington and looks forward to doing so later this year. He is using the fellowship money to buy additional veneers and to purchase a vacuum press, the machine he uses to adhere veneer to a substrate.

“**There are a lot of talented people in Delaware, and we had a bumper crop from Sussex.**”

To meet DDOA award requirements that winners share their work with the public, Weston plans to exhibit in the Fellows’ group exhibitions at the Biggs Museum of American Art in Dover this month, at CAMP Rehoboth in August, and at Cab Calloway School of the Arts in Wilmington in September and October. (See “To Check Out the Winners,” page 57.) His work also can be seen online at facebook.com/pg/WoodInlayArtist/photos/.

Roxanne Stanulis, the DDOA’s artist programs and services representative, says interest in the fellowships has grown over the years, with the number of 2020 applicants reaching a record 139, some of whom are musicians. “There are a lot of talented people in Delaware, and we had a bumper crop from Sussex,” she notes. The DDOA actively encourages artists to apply each year, and has recruited out-of-state experts to judge the submissions. Likely adding to the program’s appeal is that “we are one of the few states that offer fellowships to all disciplines every year,” Stanulis says.

She attributes the growing number of applicants from southern Delaware in part to the area’s vibrant arts communities and organizations. Stanulis hopes the planned exhibits and performances are able to occur as scheduled, but said postponement, even until 2021, could occur because of the COVID-19 pandemic. >



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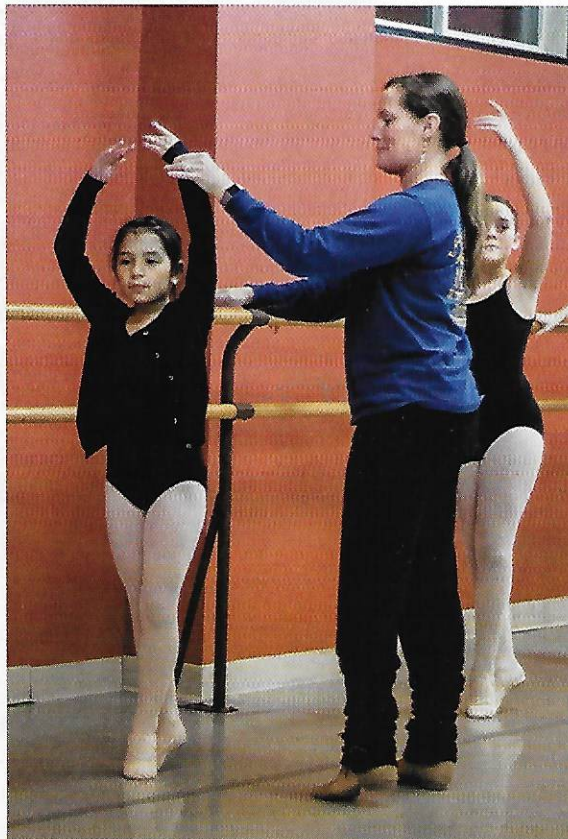
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Pastel artist Nick Serratore, who has been involved in the coastal Delaware art scene since he moved to Lewes in 1996, also earned an Established Professional Award; his is in the Visual Arts: Works on Paper category.

“The fellowship is an affirmation to an artist. I enjoy what I do and being recognized is a wonderful feeling,” Serratore says.

The works he submitted were landscape pastels, which he describes as devoid of detail so the viewer can be immersed in his or her own experience of the image. Serratore, who has a studio in Milton and who also serves as RAL exhibitions director, plans to use his cash award to buy supplies. While his work has been on display at both the RAL and Peninsula Gallery in Lewes, he plans to meet the fellowship requirement in September with an exhibit at Rehoboth Beach City Hall. His work also can be seen at serratoreart.com.

Anne Colwell, a poet, writer and English professor at the University of

Michele Xiques, owner of First State Dance Academy in Milford, works with her young students Verity Seelbach, 9, left, and Peyton Humphreys, 10. Xiques won a Delaware Division of the Arts Fellowship Award in the Dance: Choreography category.

Delaware’s Georgetown campus, received the Established Professional Award in the Literature: Creative Nonfiction category.

“I was inspired by my students to write creative nonfiction. It’s a new genre for me,” says the Milton resident, who has taught at UD since 1991 and was recently promoted to full professor. The piece she submitted was an experimental essay that moves in segments across time. Colwell, who has previously received DDOA awards, encourages her students to apply. “You get excellent feedback from experts, which helps you improve your art,” she explains.

The educator plans to use the cash prize to give her more time to write. She will share her work at a public reading in the fall.

Michele Xiques, a professional dancer, choreographer and owner of First State Dance Academy in Milford, won an Established Professional Award in the category of Dance: Choreography after sub-

mitting videos of her students performing her ballets. One of those works, “Nutcracker Express,” combines elements of the traditional “Nutcracker Suite” and the animated Christmas movie “The Polar Express.”

“I like to combine new with old,” Xiques says, who notes that her inspiration comes from movies and books. She previously won an Emerging Artist Award, and plans to use her winnings this time toward the creation of a new ballet based on the first Harry Potter movie, “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone.”

“This award gives credibility to an artist,” Xiques says. “It is a huge honor to be recognized in this way.”

To Check Out the Winners

The prize-winning works of the 2020 Delaware Division of the Arts Fellows will be featured in a group exhibition at the Biggs Museum in Dover from June 5 to July 23, viewable via YouTube if state coronavirus restrictions remain in place or in person if they have been lifted. An awards ceremony and reception scheduled for Wednesday, June 10, at 5 p.m. is similarly dependent on restrictions being eased. (Included in the show will be videos of the dance and music honorees' works.) Selections from the exhibit are scheduled to travel to CAMP Rehoboth for the entire month of August, and then to the Cab Calloway School of the Arts in Wilmington from Sept. 4 to Oct. 25. Opening receptions, scheduled for June 5, Aug. 1 and Oct. 2, respectively, are free and open to the public (dates are subject to change). ■

Sarah Barnett, who is active in the local writing community and serves as vice president of Rehoboth Beach Writers Guild, received the Emerging Artist Award in the Literature: Creative Non-fiction category. Two pieces she submitted were on reflections of motherhood.

"We all want to be perfect, and there is no such thing," Barnett says of the themes in her work. She includes humor in her writing because it "is helpful in dealing with difficult subjects." One of the Rehoboth-area writer's essays compared her mothering style with that of her daughter, who died five years ago. "The award gives me the inspiration to keep going," Barnett says.

It will also help fund the writing classes she takes and purchase a new computer. Barnett plans to share her work in a reading, with accompanying music, this fall.

Kim DeCicco, also a member of the writers guild, received an Emerging Arts Award for the category of Literature: Fiction. "I walked around with a smile on my face for two weeks" after learning

the news, says the Lewes-area resident. "It gave me affirmation that I should keep going. I am so grateful."

DeCicco, who has also written poetry and nonfiction, has been delving into magical realism. Her submitted short story was in a genre she describes as folklore. Like fellow winner Barnett, DeCicco plans to buy a computer with her prize money and will share her work at a reading later in the year.

To Michael Fleishman, who has had a long career as a professor, illustrator, art teacher and author of illustration/drawing books, "cardboard is a wonderful surface on which to draw." The judges apparently agreed: They honored the Milford artist, who moved to coastal Delaware from Ohio in 2015, for his latest experimentation with the medium. His Emerging Artist Award is in the Visual Arts: Works on Paper category. (See the July 2019 edition of *Delaware Beach Life* for a profile on Fleishman and his work.)

Fleishman paints and draws on cardboard, then bends and manipulates it to create three-dimensional works. He also uses Velcro to attach some pieces to wood. "I guess they call it mixed media, or collage," he says of his latest efforts.

The artist is pleased with the recognition, noting that "the award gives the opportunity for my work to be seen by a larger audience." Fleishman plans exhibits later this year at Gallery 37 in Milford and at the Carvel State Office Building in Wilmington. As for what use the money will be put to, he cites better studio lighting and his "obsession for more scissors, markers and glue sticks." Examples of his work can be seen at michaelfleishman.com.

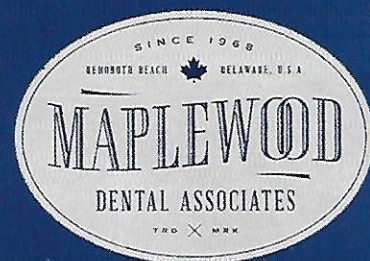
Coastal Delaware had one other award winner: Crystal Heidel, who lives in the Milton area and is a member of the writers guild, received an honorable mention in the Literature: Fiction category. ■

Susan Towers is a Lewes-based freelance writer and a lover of the arts, history and the outdoors.



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