

Bridgeport artist makes Greenwich debut at hospital

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Bridgeport artist Harold Davis poses near his painting "Goldfish" in the Garden Cafe at Greenwich Hospital, Conn., Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2018. Davis is having an exhibition of his work at the cafe, his exhibition runs through to April 2018

GREENWICH — Colors dance in a chaotic swirl. Here, there is a white dot — thick, fat. There, a red streak curves in an elegant but incomplete circle. White, and blue, and black, and red, and yellow and green all run together in an oval knot that represents life.

At Greenwich Hospital's Garden Café, Harold Davis' painting sits in a corner, just above one of the dining tables. Its location is particularly apt. Dedicated to survivors, it testifies to the brave souls who battle breast cancer every day, and who eventually win. In an environment where life and death both seem so near, his positive messaging can offer a pick-me-up.

Davis himself often walked through the halls at Greenwich Hospital while his wife underwent medical treatments. He visited the café many times, and saw at least three other artists exhibited there.

And so he decided to inquire about showing his own canvases on the walls.

Now, his work will be displayed through April to June, dressing the otherwise bare space with splashes of modernity.

A Bridgeport resident and Greenwich Art Society member, Davis has been an artist all his life. Back in grammar school, his teachers showed him the basics of his craft. Eventually, his career took him to New York City, where he studied at Traphagen School of Fashion and Design.

And then, Paris.

“You’d have to travel to see how other people work and create,” he said.

During those years when the ’60s bled into the ’70s, Davis fell in love with painting and sculpture in France. He wandered into churches or the Louvre, taking in the sights. And he jaunted down the same boulevards where Henri Matisse and Salvador Dalí once stretched their legs.

In Paris, he lived only a little ways from Pablo Picasso while the icon still lived and breathed. They never talked, but Davis did once see him cruising down the street.

In Davis’ exhibition at the hospital — his Greenwich debut — there are nods to cubism, surrealism and other modernist techniques. One painting with green, yellow and black slashes billowing like grass in the wind seems a direct reference to Jackson Pollock, a great American who rivaled all the great 20th-century Europeans in skill and ingenuity. But though Davis has even met Pollock’s grandson, he prefers to think of himself as an original.

“It’s more a mixture of Harold, Pablo, Jackson,” he said. “There’s some influence, but I don’t think a lot.”

Though both Paris and New York may have been defining moments for Davis in his youth, he later returned to Bridgeport to raise a family. Now, in Fairfield County, he has found a different kind of artist’s breeding ground.

“It’s one big artsy world,” he said.

At his Greenwich show, he has chosen works that go for \$2,000 or less, because “everything’s not worth \$2,000,” he said.

“I’m just a middle class artist,” he continued earnestly, adding that “everyone should have an original piece of art.”

Davis, who is in his 70s, has seen a lot. He spent 47 years with a day job working on engines for the government in Stratford. He put two children through college without either of them accruing student loans. He has witnessed the birth of his grandchildren, and watched as they've begun to paint like their Pop Pop.

Over seven decades, he has learned two things.

"History and art," he said. "I know history and I know art."

When asked why those two, his answer was simple:

"History is art."