

City Art Gallery in Columbia, SC

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mood or project a personal moment. I don't like saying 'Capture A Moment In Time'," adds Byrne. "Painting nature can be very intimidating, because there is so much there. Even though I put in the details, I know where to abbreviate. I try to keep a person's interest and possibly strike an emotional accord with the viewers."

"My 'Abstract Realism', is another story. I have to rely heavily on design. Some of the subjects might be just plain boring to most people. I try to get the viewer to look at things in a different way, by using my choice of cropping and composition, and also my choice of colors, which I often deviate from my reference. These are not Photo Realism paintings. If anything, I would call them 'High Realism'. I know this work is evolving, because of the subject matter that now I'm drawn to. I love Graffiti, and I want to take them more to an abstract level. I like it when my friends while driving, will say, 'Hey, that looks like a Joe Byrne painting', when passing old rusty stuff. Maybe, I'm doing my job?"

"My Abstracts come from another place. I really dream about them, and have for a long time. I also would doodle them on my drawing table or while talking on the phone," say Byrne. "In as much, in my down time, just relaxing, I find my hand making strokes of an image I have in mind. Some of the works in the show, my inspiration becomes obvious, others paintings might have started that way, but I let loose and free associated, and the painting sort of took on a life of its own."

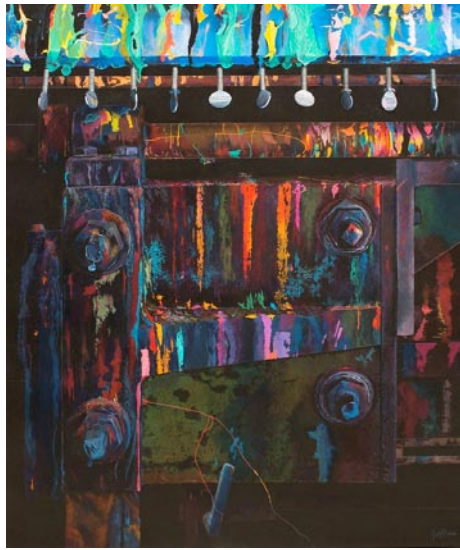
"I hear a lot about free association, one of my favorite Abstract Expressionist artist is Franz Kline. I lived around what inspired him, and to me it's obvious. I'm passionate about the man's work. He would do sketches and then he would proceed to painting. Sort of a road map. I sometimes work this way, but I'm getting better at letting go and discovering."

Byrne continues, "I was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York and later moved to Eastern Long Island. In my formative years, our art classes would take trips to Museums, where we would study the old masters. Then we would copy their works. To me, this was a good start and a wonderful teaching method."

"I loved taking field trips to some of the major New York Museums and I frequently cut classes to visit them on my own, this way I didn't have to contend with all the students getting in my way. I was very fortunate to have a wonderful mentor and teacher, Mr. Maver, who took me under his wing and also introduced me to illustration, graphics and printing. Basically, I would say that I'm a self-taught fine artist, and I continue to study to this day. I was very lucky to be exposed to so much living in New York, which later on came in handy, seeing that some of my early jobs centered around printing and commercial art."

"I met and later married an Austrian girl that lived out on Long Island. Her family then moved to South Carolina, seeing that her Step Father was in the military. A few years later we had a son and my wife was missing her family. We both decided to move to Columbia in the late 60's."

"At the time, not much was happening in the commercial art scene, and the entry level just didn't pay enough. So I took on various jobs to support my family. I worked as a form carpenter, building pre-cast buildings, drove trucks, did hand lettering for a sign shop and worked for a sign manufacturing company. This company produced cast metal works, fabricated signs, neon any type of sign work for all over the world. I knew how to read blue prints and could do drafting and this job fit my inquisitive mind. At the same time, I



Work by Joe Byrne

picked up a regular freelance job illustrating furniture."

"I then landed a job at South Carolina Educational Television as an illustrator and graphic designer. This was fertile ground for me. I worked in a large creative Art Department, and there were no protected boundaries. I could do print and illustration, produce work for television, back drops for sets and whatever artistic demands needed to be done. Plus we did work for other PBS Stations."

"I think designing posters was my favorite assignments because they had content and I could express myself as a visual communicator. A lot of my assignments required research, which I loved. I had freedom to illustrate using many mediums and in many styles, which became quite lucrative when I was contacted by many ad agencies in Columbia and outside of state, for freelance work in my after work hours.. Some of the assignments included illustrations for published books and magazines, to which some won awards and some made it in *Communication Art Magazine* and *Print Annual Magazine*."

"I then went to *South Carolina Wildlife* magazine as an illustrator and designer. Wonderful place to use my skills and knowledge for printing. After three years, I was rehired by ETV."

"With all this work, I always found time to paint. Back then I worked mainly in watercolors. I could work loose and tight and when I painted dry brush style, I was told my work resembled Andrew Wyeth. A gallery up North took an interest in my work; they also handled Jamie Wyeth's work: they wanted me to produce work for them, but I had moved on."

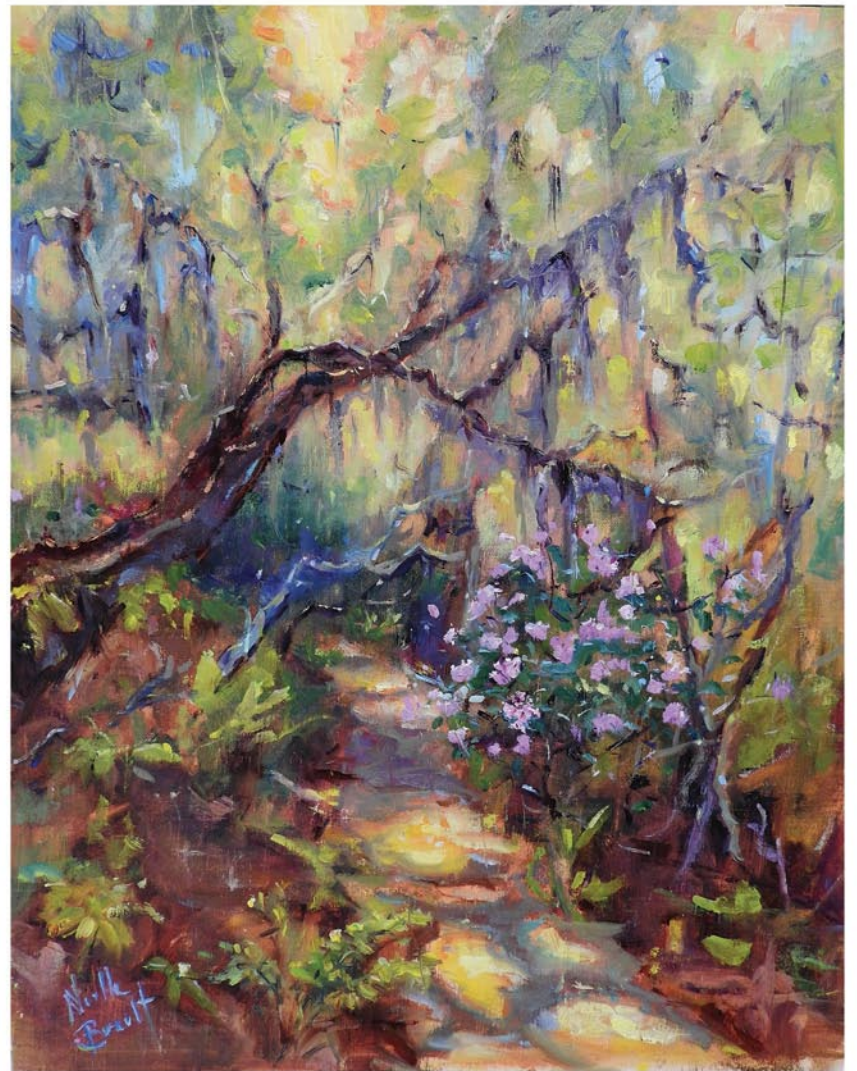
"Some people in Columbia might remember the Illustrated, 3 dimensional Joyful Alternative sign, or the sculptured sign with a Gila Monster busting out of the wall in Five Points, or the internationally known Body Firm and their videos. I was commissioned by their producer to paint twelve 9' x 12' paintings on stretched canvas of cropped sections of the old master's works. Such as 4 sections of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, Titian's *Venus Of Urbino*, Ingre's *La Grand Odalisque*, Raphael's *Michael The Archangel*, and 3 section of the Sistine Chapel, by Leonardo De Vavinci. These were used in their video productions and latter to hang in their various gyms throughout the state. To me, this was a wonderful assignment, it enabled me to learn and to use my big brushes.

All these assignments helped me to hone my skills as a painter, and for me to now, paint what I want, and to be true to myself."

City Art Gallery is located in the historic Congaree Vista area in Columbia.

For further information check our SC Commercial Gallery listings, contact Wendy Wells, City Art Gallery, at 803/252-3613 or visit (www.cityartonline.com).

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