

Tim Grant | The Long Way Home



"Sages Ravine", acrylic, 46" x 32"

Tim Grant was born in Elgin, Illinois. His parents were from Maine, but his father had relocated to the Chicago suburb for work. In fact, his fathers' career path caused the family to move from city to city. By the time Grant was 10 years old, he had lived in Chicago, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh, where his family finally settled,

and he spent his formative years. Pittsburgh is a city with a vibrant art community. The birthplace of Mary Cassatt, Gertrude Stein, and Andy Warhol; Pittsburgh boasts many art communities and philanthropic organizations which support the arts. While taking courses at Pittsburgh Arts and Crafts Center, Grant crossed paths with artists such as Frank Webb and Keith Haring. His mother was an amateur painter, a member of local art groups, and his father, a businessman by day, was an accomplished pianist by

evening. For Tim Grant, his parents' talent was ever-present. As a child, he enjoyed working on arts and crafts projects inspired by his mom and he often picked up the brush and tried his hand at painting. He painted landscapes and seascapes and made a little extra money by copying rock 'n roll album cover art and selling the paintings for \$5 apiece.



"Landscape with Corncrib", oil, 36" x 44"

Life took an unexpected turn for Grant during his teen years. A typical, rebellious teenager, he got into some untypical trouble. He fell in with the wrong crowd and was taken out of school and placed in a juvenile detention facility at Newcastle Youth Development Center.

When he first arrived at YDC, he was given the GED High School equivalency test which they used as a placement test to put students in appropriate grade levels. Surprisingly, he passed the test, which made him a high school graduate at an early age. There wasn't a plan for post-high school education at this facility, so, not knowing what else to do with him, they placed Grant, by himself, in the art room.

The art teacher was a man named Sylvester, and he tried to demonstrate some art techniques, but Grant stubbornly sat in the studio, arms crossed, and did nothing. Eventually, Sylvester gave up and proceeded to work on his own paintings. Grant watched the way that he manipulated the surface; gliding across the canvas, blending, dabbing, and sliding wet paint strokes into each other. For Grant, it was like watching a performance.

His wall of resistance melted away and soon, he was painting too. That was the moment when he realized he would become a painter. His passion for art had awoken and he painted regularly, thereafter. He helped one of the other YDC residents paint the scene from his window – a visual memory of time spent in incarceration. Grant recalls that his own work at that time was at best, mediocre. But, in hindsight, that was a good thing. He was humble and he knew he had a long journey and a lot of work ahead of him.

With help from Sylvester and a few other counselors at Newcastle YDC, he was awarded a vocational rehabilitation scholarship to attend the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. The curriculum at AIP was an intensive studio program focused on developing technical skills. Students were in the studio six hours per day, five days per week and went home with additional work every night.

At the time of Grant's attendance, the great artist, Henry Koerner, was teaching there. Koerner was an eccentric Austrian Expressionist, one of the true masters of his generation, and an unparalleled colorist.

While Grant never had the privilege of taking his class, he stood outside his studio door and watched Koerner paint almost every day. He watched as he painted masterpieces that are now in the National Portrait Gallery and other prestigious museums around the world. Koerner is Grant's biggest influence.

Watching the creation of brilliant art was an enlightening experience for a young, aspiring art student and it affirmed his commitment to become a painter. "To this day", Grant says, "...as I mix colors, I think of Koerner and his amazing ability to blend patches of clean, chromatic color that magically coalesce to define form."

During this time, Grant began painting landscapes. He experimented with styles, ranging from realism to expressionism. He was particularly interested in the way that a landscape is constantly shifting and changing its shape due to natural, as well as man-made forces. In his series, "Landscape with Corncrib", Grant returned to repaint the scene a year later to find that the corncrib had collapsed, the tree in front of the farmhouse had grown significantly, and the farmhouse itself had partially burned down. This idea of impermanence and constant change has become a recurring theme in Grant's work.

Grant imagined he was on a straight trajectory to becoming a landscape artist. But life never turns out the way you expect and there would be more twists and turns on his journey before he could return to landscape painting.



"Landscape with Fallen Corncrib", gouache, 15" x 17"

Building on his modest success at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation offered financial assistance for Grant to continue his education at Point Park University, also in Pittsburgh. He hit his stride at Point Park, producing more work than ever before and achieving academic excellence. He graduated with a B.A. in Design, Summa Cum Laude, and was honored by the faculty as the top graduate in the Department of Fine, Applied, and Performing Arts.

During this time, he began studying the great master painters. Not only did he copy their works, but he researched their recipes for making paint and made his own paint by grinding pigment and cooking paint mediums such as beeswax, to capture the rich, buttery textures of Rembrandt and Caravaggio, and mastic, to imitate the translucent and soft, feathery edges of Vermeer. Over a period of four years, he copied many of the masters from the late Renaissance to Post-Impressionism. It was an invaluable learning experience.

Having finished his undergraduate work with a strong emphasis on studio work, Grant decided to concentrate on the academic and

intellectual side of art for his graduate work. He felt that he understood the challenges ahead in terms of creating art. But he felt a deficiency when it came to understanding the conceptual and historical legacy of art. For that reason, he began working on an M.A. in Art History from the University of Pittsburgh.

While he did continue painting, his focus at this time of life was on research. He studied foreign languages and passed translation exams in German, French, and Russian so that he would be able to read source materials in their original language.



Grant sought out opportunities to collaborate with the ballet. He designed and painted this scene for, The Nutcracker, performed by Manassas Ballet Theatre

He focused on Modern French and German Art and wrote his master's Thesis on the relationship between Henri Matisse and The Ballet Russe. This collaboration between the fine and performing arts was especially interesting to Grant, and it influenced decisions he made later in life. He sought out opportunities to work in collaboration with theater, ballet, and the special events industry.

While in graduate school, Grant had the opportunity to move to Germany. Although his M.A. degree is from the University of Pittsburgh, he finished his studies while

attending the University of Bamberg. He studied the German language and German Expressionism while working on his own projects. At the time, he was working on a series of cut and pasted paper works, ala Matisse. His efforts led to two solo exhibitions: The Galerie Condor Prell in Juechen, Germany and The Café Am Residenz in Bamberg, Germany. More importantly than the exhibitions, while he was in Germany, he was asked to paint several theatrical backdrops. He had never painted on that scale before and he admits to being, "a little bit terrified, but I've always been willing to take risks and try new things", says Grant. At first, he was hesitant; he tried to plan every stroke. But soon he loosened up, and his work became more intuitive, he approached the surface with more spontaneity and confidence. It was an epiphany! As he delved deeper into the process, he felt that he had a real affinity for large scale painting, and he loved the big, loose brushstrokes.



While in Germany, Grant experimented with works using cut and pasted paper, ala Matisse. Later in life, he returned to that style to design and paint the "Fitness" mural at Providence RECenter.



After two years in Germany, Grant returned to the United States. He could have returned to Pittsburgh, but he felt it was time for a new experience, so he relocated to the Washington DC region. Grant explains, “For me, it is always about creating new adventures, and at the end of the road – having a good story to tell!”

He had no job nor any prospects in Washington DC; he began doing freelance art projects. His newly discovered skill at large scale painting was an employable asset. He connected with several companies involved with the Special Events industry who needed quality, scenic backdrops for stage productions. Eventually, Grant opened his own business in a warehouse-sized studio where he could paint large-scale, scenic backdrops.



"Piazza San Marco", scenic paint, 12' x 36', on display at the Italian Embassy in Washington, DC

Over the next 30 years, he painted hundreds of scenes for prestigious clients ranging from corporations, associations, embassies, and museums. The scenes were used to honor people, places, and events.

Painting scenic backdrops led to work for theater and ballet industries.



"Coastal California", scenic paint, 10' x 24', Commissioned by The National Wildlife Federation and used to honor President Bill Clinton with a lifetime achievement award.



Harkening back to his master's thesis and Matisse's work for the Ballet Russe, he enthusiastically built a relationship with Manassas Ballet Theatre, an international ballet company, located in Virginia. Grant is proud to be part of the production, "It is always a thrill for me to see my work on stage during their shows. The collaboration between dance, visual art, and music (always performed with a live orchestra) still sends a shiver down my spine."

Painting for theater and ballet led to painting murals. Grant remembers when he was first asked to paint a public mural more than 20 years ago. The Fairfax County, Virginia, Park Authority had an indoor, Olympic-sized, swimming pool surrounded by concrete block walls. The facility was old and dreary, despite the magnificent pool.

Someone suggested painting a mural to enhance the facility. Grant, along with several other artists, was contacted. “When I met with the Park Authority, they explained that the 24’ high by 110’ long wall would need to be painted in ten days during the annual pool shutdown. When the other artists heard the timeline, they immediately declined the project.



“Paradise Mural at Spring Hill RECenter”, industrial acrylic, Upper photo: jacuzzi wall, 18’ by 40’, Lower photo: interior wall, 18’ by 80’



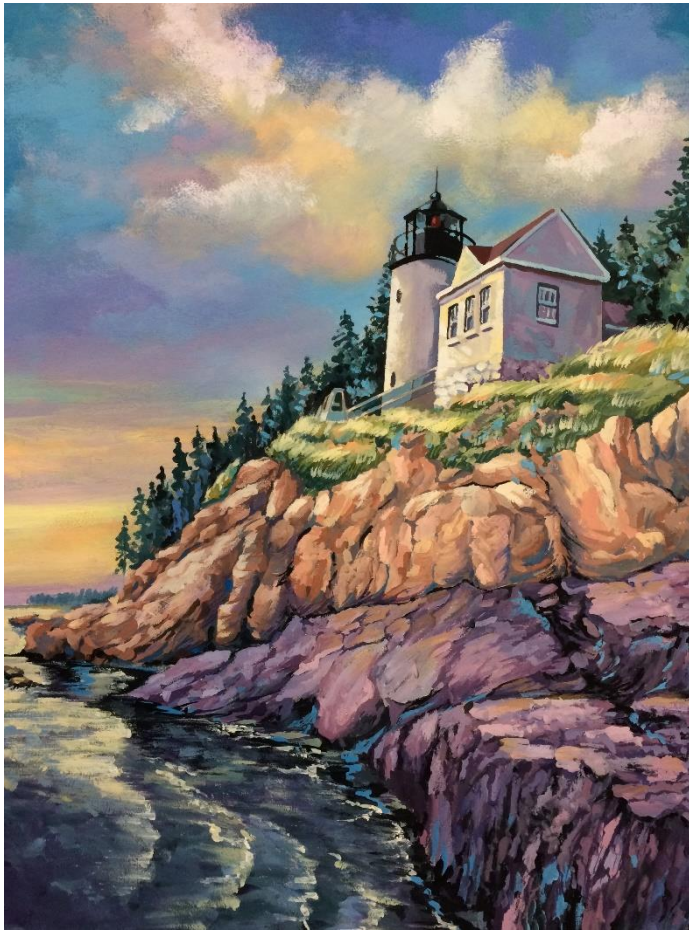
I’ve always said sure, I can do that, and I figure out the details and logistics later”, recalls Grant. He felt that aggressively pursuing projects was an essential part to his growth as an artist.

The benefit to that kind of hustle was that, since he locked himself into a commitment, he was forced into a learning experience. The downside was that he sometimes faced some challenging and stressful circumstances. In this case, he committed to painting 2,640 square feet of wall with a two-inch brush in ten days, without ever having painted a public mural before. Grant recalls, “When I got home that night, I panicked and thought, what did I get myself into this time?”

In hindsight, perhaps ignorance was bliss. He completed the project to rave reviews. Writing for The Washington Post, Eric Wee reported, “The result, say patrons and staff, is a dazzling work of art”. Parktakes magazine wrote, “Thanks to Grant’s fantasy world, lap swimming, water exercise and pool play take on a new dimension. With waves washing over two walls of the big pool area, swimmers can pretend that they’re gliding through the crystal blue waters of the sea instead of an ordinary indoor pool”.

It turned into the beginning of a long-term relationship with Fairfax County. Over a 20-year period, Grant painted many murals for Fairfax, and many other clients, both public and residential. The community projects are especially dear to him because he believes public art has a transformative power and loves the accessibility for all people.

After nearly 30 years, Grant closed his business in 2017 and returned to his original roots as a landscape painter. For Grant, this moment felt like coming home. He had been on a long journey from his turbulent youth to art schools in Pittsburgh, to experimentation in Germany, to years of backdrop, mural, and theatrical painting in Washington DC. He had experienced the multi-faceted art world from many differing perspectives, but he was happy to return to his original passion.



"Acadia: Bass Harbor", gouache, 16" x 12"

Since returning to landscape painting, Grant was juried into the Torpedo Factory Artists Association in Alexandria, Virginia and the Workhouse Arts Center in Lorton, Virginia. His studio is currently at the Workhouse in Building #10. He has also had his work juried into shows at the Specto Art Space, the Vienna Arts Society, and the Contemporary Art Gallery Online, where he received an Honorable Mention award. In addition, his work has also been featured in articles: [élan Magazine](#), [Northern Virginia Magazine](#), [The Washington Post](#), [Fitness Management Magazine](#), [Parktakes Magazine](#), and more have written about his work and artistic journey.

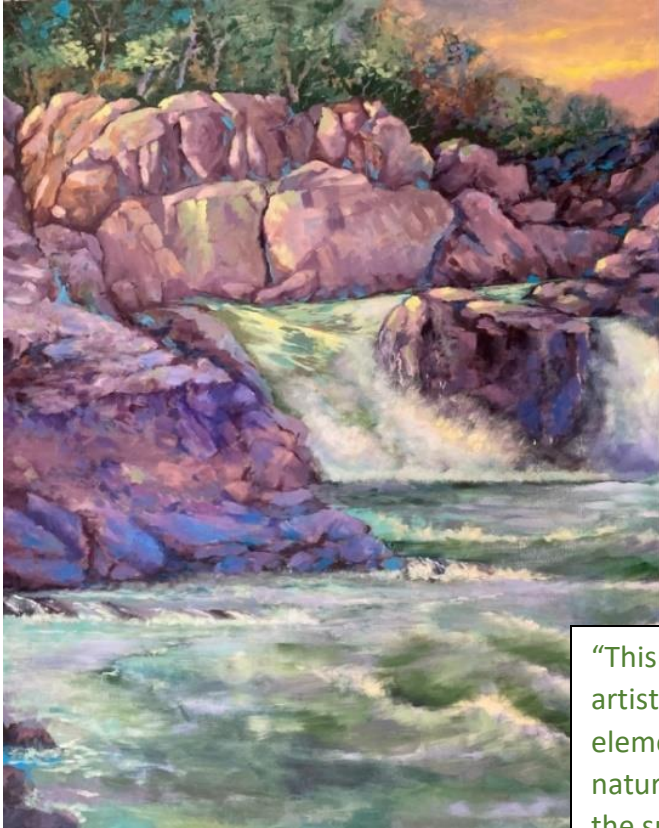
Back in his studio, Grant walks to a corner and shows me an old, wooden walking stick. Etched with names, dates, and places, his hiking stick holds cherished memories from his favorite hiking trails at Acadia, Zion, Bryce, Skyline Drive, Great Falls, and Giant Mountain. These are the places where he gets inspiration for his paintings.



Painting on "Sand Beach" at Acadia National Park

During his hikes, he brings art supplies, takes reference photos, and makes sketches that he will turn into paintings back in the studio.

For Grant, this is home; back in nature, exploring America’s dramatic wilderness and painting landscapes which capture his imagination. And now he is on a new journey: to complete a painting of every national park in America.



“Great Falls #1”, acrylic, 30” x 24”



“Acadia: Sunrise”, acrylic, 8”x10”

“This light-filled landscape painting is by artist Tim Grant. Water is a recurring element in his artwork, acting like nature’s sculptor: carving and re-shaping the surface of the landscape... “

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