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The White Mountains, truly an artist's retreat

By Barbara Bruce Staff Writer

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Deciding on a career as a college art professor, Colin Lynch retreated to the White Mountains to prepare his application and portfolio for submission to The American College of the Mediterranean in Aix-en-Provence, France, for a master of fine arts degree.

Barbara Bruce/The Independent

SHOW LOW — Someone once said that whatever you wanted to be before the age of 6 or 7 is the dream that lays dormant in your heart. Though Colin Lynch recalls that around the age of five he knew he could draw, he took a detour from that realization during his teen years. Having done a legal u-turn, he returned to that latent knowledge.

Today, with a sabbatical of sorts, due to the pandemic, Lynch has retreated to the White Mountains to prepare for the next step in his plan to become a college art professor.

Throughout his youth, over and over, Lynch had it confirmed that he was an artist.

“I was usually the better one in the class, the one that other students would ask questions,” said Lynch.

He also had encouragement from his parents and his best friend’s family for whom he did a lot of artwork over the years.

High school and the teenage years began to turn his head in another artistic direction. Playing the guitar and the lure of being in a band sent Lynch and a friend to New York to find their place in the music world. Ironically, the band that was the catalyst for Lynch’s musical direction, The Strokes, were also the ones partially responsible for sending him back to art. The band’s singer, Julian Casablancas, spoke often about artist Samuel Adoquei and his influence on the band. Adoquei just happens to be Casablancas’ stepfather, and what Lynch read about him piqued his interest.

New York did not fulfill their music dreams. So, when Lynch’s friend decided to leave New York for L.A., Lynch headed back to Arizona — re-focused. He graduated from Mesa Community College with an Associate in Arts degree and got a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Arizona State University (ASU). But, it was finally the pull to The National Academy School of Fine Arts (Academy) on the upper east side of New York that brought him back to The Big Apple where Sam Adoquei became his mentor.

Adoquei, a South African artist who penetrated the art community in New York, and has graced the covers of magazines and newspapers with his realistic art, teaches Academy students to look beyond the physical appearance when painting, to capture the unseen.

Unlike college and the traditional Masters in Fine Arts programs, the Academy caps out their classes at 12 people to keep them small and personal. Everything centers around the artists’ work with their hands. They have no lecture courses but get to meet and learn from established members of New York’s art world.

“It is more of an in studio environment than in school,” said Lynch, who spent four years studying there. “Other schools do not have the one-on-one with students. It’s tough love — criticism, and you take it.”

Lynch said that sometimes he thought his work was good and he would be so angry when Adoquei critiqued it and pushed him to go deeper.

The Atelier method taught at the school is more like an apprenticeship with the master teacher guiding the student toward his/her own mastership of personal style.

Lynch says his own work is realism and impressionism.

It was four hard years at the Academy, but through that extensive experience Lynch learned many things.

“It is more like I do not want to live like one painting at a time. At 32 I want a steady job. I have been in that situation where I had only 50 cents to buy toilet paper. I want structure in my life. It is always fun talking about art. When you start teaching somebody, you realize how much you know,” said Lynch.

Regrouping after having worked as a bartender at an improv club for quite some time, and with COVID-19 essentially closing that venue, Lynch researched some 50 schools to find the one that had a curriculum that would enable him to meet his goals.

Lynch finally decided on applying to The American College of the Mediterranean in Aix-en-Provence, France, the degree-granting branch of the Institute for American Universities (IAU). Their master’s level art program teaches the Atelier method where they focus on the traditional and realistic, Lynch’s passion.

The mission of their school of fine arts, known as The Marchutz School, is to develop the student’s capacity to see, which is what Lynch embraced through Adoquei — sight and insight. “The human imagination, memory, perception and craft are interwoven throughout the curriculum” which also includes excursions to Paris, Vaucluse, Venice and Giverny where Monet’s garden is located. The overall goal is to develop the student’s full potential.

Americans applying for acceptance must submit a 20-piece portfolio, essays, two letters of recommendation and a statement as to why they would like to attend the school. Lynch has submitted his letters, and though he chose some of the paintings he had already done, he took advantage of his respite on the Mountain to create some new ones for the portfolio.

Now it's a wait and see for Lynch. And, as his mentor Adoquei said, "I have about 12 questions I test the people who come to me for mentorship — believe it or not 10 out of 10 fails the test. Everyone wants to go to the top but no one wants to use a ladder."

Obviously, Lynch originally passed his mentor's questions and now it seems he learned well because he is one who is still climbing the ladder.

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