

January 2014

An Artist's Unlikely Journey

By Fred Jones

Seldom has the Montgomery Museum in Christiansburg generated as much buzz as with the upcoming exhibit by emerging artist Nick Vitelli running from Jan. 7 through Feb. 28.

Vitelli, of Christiansburg, took both the top prize and the people's choice award in Blacksburg's New River Art Biennial in October, beating out over 70 artists and 211 artworks. There was a time this success was hard for Vitelli to imagine.

Vitelli's first introduction to art was similar to that of many children. "My mom would always color with me and I thought how great that was." However, beyond those early experiences, he showed little aptitude or interest in art. He was home-schooled until he entered high school where he struggled with academics.

"I had some challenges with what people might say were learning disabilities," said Vitelli. Guidance counselors tried to convince him that college was not in his future. Fortunately, he attended Brevard High School in Transylvania County, N.C., where they allowed students a large degree of flexibility in selecting their courses. His sophomore year, on a whim, he took art and discovered he was good at it and enjoyed it. "From that point on I took every art class they would allow me to take all the way to Advanced Placement."



Nick Vitelli with his award-winning portrait entitled "Cuba."

soccer. He had been the starting goalie for the varsity team beginning as a freshman in high school and at one point played on five different teams. "My life revolved around soccer."

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■ Upcoming

January 9

Nick Vitelli Opening Reception
Montgomery Museum and Lewis Miller Regional Art Center, 300 N. Pepper St., Christiansburg, 5–7 p.m.

Meet this award-winning artist and view his large-scale, detailed drawings. Exhibit runs through February.

January 10

BRAA Monthly Lunch and Art Spot
Famous Anthony's, 1353 S. Main St., Blacksburg, 11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.

This month's art spot will be presented by Jennifer Carpenter, who will be talking about the Icarus board she uses in her colored pencil work.

January 16

Artist's Way Discussion Group
Location TBD, 6–8 p.m.

This 12-week discussion group is based on Julia Cameron's book, *The Artist's Way, A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*. Those interested should begin reading the book by the first session. For more information, contact Jon Catherwood-Ginn at rjginn@vt.edu.

January 17

Opening for Joni Pienkowski Exhibit—Landscape: Another Dimension
Ruth C. Horton Gallery at the Virginia Tech Center for the Arts, 6–8 p.m.

Rendered in oil on birch panels with acrylic, charcoal, graphite, and Prismacolor pencil, Pienkowski's abstract paintings evoke the poetic power and life force of nature.

January 22

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony and Whet Your Palette Art Opening
The Artful Lawyer, A Fine Gallery
318 N. Main Street, Blacksburg
4:45 p.m. and 5:30–8:30 p.m.

Ribbon cutting ceremony with the Montgomery Chamber of Commerce followed by "Side by Side" art opening.

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photo: Terri Hoover

These are just a few of the portraits filling Nick Vitelli's studio.

team I probably would have finished school there and never pursued art," said Vitelli. Instead, he left after the first year and moved to the New River Valley to be near his sister and a minister he knew from church camp.

"I took two years off and worked painting houses and doing plumbing," said Vitelli. "In my spare time I continued to draw." Eventually he enrolled at New River Community College with the goal of transferring to another school for an art degree. He was told that if he was serious about art he should apply to high profile art schools. Instead, he visited the art department at Virginia Tech in 2008.

"The day I walked into the VT art department, art professor Robert Graham happened to be there. I talked to him for a while and I got the sense he really cared," recalled Vitelli. "I realized even if they didn't have the greatest funding or facilities, it's really about the teachers and what you get out of it and I'm really happy I went there." It was a good decision. Vitelli graduated magna cum laude from Virginia Tech in 2011 with a B.F.A. in studio arts.

Much of his success as an artist Vitelli attributes directly to his background as an athlete. "Soccer helped me understand about personal growth. I challenge myself in art just as I did on the field. I've learned never to get too comfortable and take the easy road out. If I ask myself 'what if' I don't hesitate to try it." He feels some of his best work has resulted from such experimentation. Sports also taught him the importance of discipline.

His winning piece in the New River Art Biennial, the portrait titled "Cuba," is steeped in discipline. At 26 by 40 inches, it took close to 140 hours to complete. Few artists would attempt a piece this large with even fat pastel sticks or paints. Astoundingly, he employed his favorite medium: colored pencils. "I told myself no one else works this large in colored pencil so why can't I challenge myself to do it? Eventually I want to complete a piece 40 by 60 inches if I can find the right paper that size."

Vitelli's favorite model for his portraits is his beautiful wife of three years, Crystal. "She is my most amazing asset as an artist. Not only is she my muse, she has a brilliant business mind and helps promote my career from that angle." His studio walls are, however, dominated by portraits of old men. "I have looked at a lot of faces and I see them differently than most people. It is more interesting to look at and work on older faces."

"Cuba" began as simply a drawing exercise. As Vitelli continued, he recognized its potential and the need for permission to show the work in public. "I contacted the photojournalist, Marlon Krieger, who captured this image while in Cuba," Vitelli recounts. "Krieger was walking down a back street and noticed a man sitting in his

During open tryouts for the Queens soccer team Vitelli met with disaster. "I got sick prior to the tryouts and had a hard time playing." It greatly affected his ability to play and he was not selected for the squad. In hindsight, he feels it was a blessing. "Who's to say, but if I had made the

■ Exhibit Opportunities

Art in 16 Squares May – September 2014

This group project will feature 16 12" square pieces mounted "on point." BRAA exhibiting artists are invited to submit finished pieces for jurying. Entry deadline is **March 1**. The project will debut at the opening of the Alexander Black House on May 1 and will remain until early September. See more information at left, or email Paula Golden at paulacgolden@comcast.net.

■ Other Opportunities

2014 Chilkoot Trail Artist Residency

Feeling fit and adventurous? The Yukon Arts Centre along with Parks Canada and the U.S. Park Service, is sponsoring this cross-border creative journey. Each artist will spend a two-week period hiking the historic trail once traversed by Tlingit First National traders and Klondike Gold Rush Stampeders, spending one to three days at each campsite, making art and interacting with other hikers. Deadline to apply is **February 1**. For more information, email chilkoot@yac.ca.

Steppin' Out Design Contest

Downtown Blacksburg, Inc., is sponsoring a design competition for the Steppin' Out 2014 T-Shirt. For more information, visit <http://www.downtownblacksburg.com/>.

Figure Drawing Schedule

The Artful Place, A Fine Art Studio at 106 Faculty Street offers the following live model drawing opportunities. All sessions are held on Sundays from 6–8 p.m.—**Jan. 19, Feb. 2, and Feb. 16**. Cost is \$10 per session and easels and drawing boards are provided. Reserve your spot by emailing diana@creekmorelaw.com by the Thursday before each session. Space is limited to eight participants.

"Whatever you do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius and power and magic in it."

~ Goethe



photos: Gerri Young

Fariba Shekari



Fariba Shekari (above, right) gave a delightful presentation about her work during the Art Spot at December's monthly lunch gathering. Join the fun on Jan. 10 at 11:30 a.m. at Famous Anthony's in Blacksburg where Jennifer Carpenter will be sharing information about her colored pencil work.

A word from the president

By Gerri Young

Here it is, my second official day in office, and my mind is half "heavens, what have I done?" and half "OK, time to make some good things happen for BRAA." I chose to focus on the OK part!

In the 2013 annual meeting last November, the decent-sized group of members in attendance made the 2014 slate of officers final. One thing very important to me as the new president of BRAA was to have a strong group share the lead. The folks who volunteered to serve with me are just perfect.

We have **Charlotte Chan** and **Teri Hoover** as co-vice presidents. As such, they are in charge of programming and have stepped out smartly with two exciting events already in planning. Charlotte is handling a colored pencil workshop taught by new member, **Jennifer Carpenter**, of Christiansburg. She is a superb artist and experienced teacher. Find her at JPCarpenter on Facebook. The class should take place late February/early March and last two to three days. More information coming soon.

Teri happens to be married to Charles "Chuck" Hoover, president of Hoover Color Corp. in Hiwassee, Va. When I first asked Teri "what does your husband do?" she answered, "makes color." That immediately got my interest and led to his name going on our list of interesting events to plan for this year. Chuck has agreed to do a presentation for us in the next few months and I think his high energy and depth of knowledge about the making of color will be of interest to a large number of artists and anyone handling paint. More details will be coming soon, but you can read about the company at <http://www.hoovercolor.com>.

Jeanette Bowker has taken on the treasurer duties and moved forward smartly with the help of Bill Pulley, soon to be BRAA member and proficient user of Microsoft Excel, and **Nancy Norton**, interim treasurer following the stepping down of **Vikki King**. Bill set up an automated accounting spreadsheet for Jeanette to use and she has jumped right into it. A full treasurer's report will be coming out soon.

Fred Jones is our new secretary. You can see from his wonderful article in this newsletter that Fred is quite comfortable as a writer and will do a fine job with minutes.

Tom Barnhart will continue to do his excellent job as membership chairman and **Lois Stephens** will continue to be our wonderful editor of the newsletter. Charlotte and Jeanette make up the new committee for the community gallery program for 2014.

I would like to thank all the outgoing officers: **Robi Sallee, Nancy Norton, Danie**

Now Showing

January 15 – April 15

(except where indicated otherwise)

David Pearce, VTLS, Corporate Research Center, Blacksburg

Teri Hoover, Mill Mountain Coffee and Tea, Blacksburg

Vikki King, StellarOne, Christiansburg

Susan Lockwood, ICTAS, Virginia Tech Campus (until mid-May)

Fred Jones, Zeppoli's

Larry Mitchell, ICTAS, Virginia Tech Campus (until mid-May)

Gerri Young, Real Life Dental Care

Robi Sallee, Brown Insurance, Blacksburg

Jeanette Bowker, See Mark Optical, Blacksburg

Diane Relf, Virginia Tech Women's Center, Blacksburg

Paint Parties!

January 8

Chic Chicken with Sarah Mason

7-9 p.m. • The Artful Place, A Fine Studio • \$25/person • 12 person limit

February 5

Tuscan Landscape with Brennan Crowder

7-10 p.m. • The Artful Place, A Fine Studio • 10 couple limit

Pre-Valentine's Day Date Night! Couples Paint Party for \$40/couple Painting, wine and beer tastings along with gourmet chocolate pairings!

Email diana@creekmorelaw.com to reserve your spot. Please pay in advance.

reminder

Membership Renewal

January is renewal month for BRAA membership dues.

Membership information and a downloadable form are available at www.blacksburgart.org. Please send your form and check to: BRAA, PO Box 525, Blacksburg, VA 24063.

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door stoop. The photographer gestured to his camera and the man nodded consent. After the photo the man nodded and smiled. No words were ever spoken and the encounter took just seconds." Just as the unknown man granted Krieger permission, so did Krieger give Vitelli all rights to use the photo for artistic reference.

Vitelli has set two goals for his career. The first he calls his practical goal—to teach art at the college level. "I would love to help people with art because I have seen how it can change lives; particularly for people who might struggle with academics." To reach that goal he will apply to graduate programs next year. The second goal he terms his lofty goal—to become an artist represented in museums. With the discipline he applies to every challenge he sets for himself, this goal appears not so lofty at all.

His prize-winning "Cuba" has been entered in an international exhibit. Should it not be accepted it will be included in Vitelli's upcoming show at the Montgomery Museum and the public is invited to meet the artist at a reception, Thursday, Jan. 9 from 5 to 7 p.m.

If a walk through Nick Vitelli's studio is any indication, this is an exhibit not to be missed, with or without "Cuba." ■

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Janov and **Vikki King** for their dedication and service. I will be calling on their experience as I feel my way as your new president.

On my agenda as president, you will find some changes. First of all, board meetings will be held outside of the monthly luncheons to give them both the attention they deserve. Our bylaws require board meetings to be held a minimum of bi-monthly or more frequently at the president's discretion. For starters, I envision one a month for several months and, as things settle down, move to bi-monthly. Meeting announcements will be made to the general membership by email and any interested parties are welcome to attend.

The monthly luncheons will stay on schedule at Famous Anthony's where they take good care of us. They recently installed a monitor to which we can hook laptops for use in presentations and Art Spots, so the room has turned out to be a good location. The Art Spot feature, suggested by Danie Janov, is very successful so we will definitely continue them. If you are interested in presenting one, just let me know.

The board will be looking at all aspects of BRAA with an eye toward improving, streamlining and examining ways to increase revenue, attract new members and increase visibility and name recognition.

BRAA has made some forward strides in the last couple of years. It is my hope to continue that trend. To do that, I need your help. I encourage you to invest your energy and ideas to the good of BRAA to make it the best it has ever been. Together we can do great things!

Your partner in art,
Gerri Young, President ■

Upcoming continued from page 1

January 31 – March 29

12th Annual New Works Exhibit
Jacksonville Center for the Arts, Floyd

This yearly exhibit is a continuing reflection of the artistic growth in our community. All work has been created within the past year.

The art featured in this month's nameplate is "Vienna, Austria" (right, photograph) by Teri Hoover. This and more of her work can be viewed at Mill Mountain Coffee and Tea through the middle of April.



BRAA Officers

Gerri Young, president
Charlotte Chan, co-vice president
Teri Hoover, co-vice president
Jeanette Bowker, treasurer
Fred Jones, secretary
Tom Barnhart, membership



www.facebook.com/BlacksburgArt

Send Facebook news postings to:
Gerri Young at
younggerri@googlemail.com
or **Nancy Norton**
nancynorton@comcast.net

Twitter @BlacksburgArt1

<http://www.blacksburgart.org/>

Send news, photos, comments, or newsletter suggestions to Lois Stephens (stephens1@pemtel.net)

Thanks to Mish Mish for providing printed versions of this newsletter. Please support our local art supply store!

