

Loves to create

Seeing famous artworks inspired Cambridge man to pursue art

By Zora Jokic

FOR THE RECORD

Raghava (Reg) S. Mani feels incredibly lucky — he has studied firsthand the world's greatest pieces of art.

The Cambridge artist so desired to stand before Da Vinci's Mona Lisa at the Louvre in Paris, Michelangelo's wonderful works in Florence and Rome and Titian's beautiful church murals in Venice, that he took early retirement from his mechanical engineering position.

"I wanted to walk those streets ... I took severance pay to blow it upon my trips," he said laughingly, but with no remorse.

"I consider myself very lucky. I would never have been able to visit those places when I was young — even while in Canada, because of my kids..." So he took his wife and during several months in 1994-95, he toured parts of Europe and India, his homeland.

To say Mani's trip inspired him to pursue art full time is putting it mildly. He already had the background: in 1979, with his band, he produced an Indian pop music album. He won numerous prizes at the Central Ontario Exhibition for his photographic works. He was published as a poet and writer.

In early 1994, his brass sculpture designs won the Bernice Adams Memorial Award (which he designed) design contest held by the City of Cambridge.

This year, Mani won a visual arts award at the Bernice Adams Memorial Awards, held by the Cambridge Arts Theatre. His most recent completed oil paintings, created a l'Andre Derain — in the exploding colors of the Fauvist era — are on display at the Wyndham Gallery in Cambridge.

Mani has been dabbling in art since childhood, when he discovered that it was "something that is more from within. I didn't require anybody to tell me to do this ... no matter what the surrounding opportunities give ... through the arts, I express myself all the time."

The walls of his home are graced with the fruit of his lifelong creativity. There are the amazingly lifelike portraits of his teachers and family, done in everything from color pencils to the "alkyd method."

Watercolor landscapes draw the viewer unwittingly into a breathtaking southern Ontario scene.

His impressionist painting of gondolas leave one strangely homesick for the famous Venice canals.

He shows a genuine respect for depth and composition, and his use of reflection and light are a brilliant trademark life-giving streak throughout his works.

"I love it," he enthused on the subject of creating art. "I really love it!"



MATHEW MCCARTHY, RECORD STAFF

Reg Mani shows off one of his watercolor works at his home in Cambridge.

He has experimented with everything from chalk to acrylic stretch canvas, to his latest venture clayboard.

There's a haunting clayboard watercolor portrait of a Middle Eastern "shepherd" poised with staff in hand upon a rock.

With his downturned countenance in deep contemplation, the shepherd exudes a spirituality which parallels Mani's own reasons for

pursuing art.

"The one thing I don't want is to become famous. Then the hypocrisy comes," he said seriously, adding that one of his priorities is earning enough to buy more art material.

"Artists get trapped in a style. The more I do it, the more I do it for the fun of it," he said, adding with evident satisfaction: "I wanted just to create."