



Art by Jonas Gerard/For The Highlands

Above: Forever Young is an acrylic on canvas. Below: Artist Jonas Gerard is pictured in front of one of his paintings. He will conduct a performance painting demonstration at Summit One Gallery at 4 p.m. on Saturday. Bottom: Learn from the Shadows is a mixed media on canvas. An exhibit of Gerard's work will be displayed at Summit One through May 2.

Artist learns to 'let go'

Summit One to feature performance painting Saturday

By Amanda Parmelee
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Half performance, half painting Jonas Gerard will put on a unique show for local art lovers Saturday.

The Asheville-area artist was featured earlier this year on "20/20" for his unique blend of music and public painting, which he calls "performance painting." The event will be free, and it begins at 4 p.m. Saturday at Summit One Gallery.

Summit One Gallery owner Mary Adair Leslie has been a fan of Gerard's work for years. In fact, she owns one of his early pieces that not even he has a copy of. However, she had not had the opportunity to meet him in person until they began planning for the upcoming exhibit.

Gerard said he received a letter from Leslie inviting him to show his art in her gallery and consider a performance here.

He visited the Highlands gallery and was impressed with the place, and with Leslie.

"The quality of work was very high," he said. "Mary Adair had a bubbly personality. We just clicked with each other."

Gerard said performance painting comes naturally.

"I've been painting my whole life starting on the sidewalk in New York City as a teenager," he said. "I've been used to having people watch me."

Gerard said he chooses uptempo music for his painting performances, and the key for him is to "let go." He describes his style as abstract impressionism, and also paints abstract landscapes.

"I love to promote the concept of spontaneous intuitive painting," he said. "When you let go of this mental stuff; when you let go of trying to impress others; when you let go of

being afraid, then miracles happen."

Gerard, who was born in Casablanca, Morocco, in 1941, is an artist whose skills have been nationally recognized, and his works hang in many galleries and museums across the country.

His portrait entitled "We the People" was painted in 1975 and is considered our nation's bicentennial portrait. Accepted at the White House on behalf of the American people by President Gerald R. Ford, it is now a permanent part of the Smithsonian Institute's collection.

Gerard is currently based in the River Arts district of Asheville, having come to western North Carolina from Miami.

His daughter Mira Gerard is a professor at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, and she suggested he look in this region when he grew tired of Miami.

He said he visited Asheville and appreciated the shops, sidewalk cafes and galleries as much as he did the hippies and street musicians.

"It didn't take me long to know this is the town I wanted to be in," he said. "It was a pleasure."

Gerard's 5,000-square-foot Asheville gallery is open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturdays and from 1 to 6 p.m. Sundays.

Gerard's Web site, www.jonasgerard.com, provides pictures, other details about "We the People" and of other paintings and sculptures. Also located on the Web site is a biography of Gerard, along with the members of his gallery.

The site also describes the artist as "a compulsive female hugger," a quality Summit One's owner Mary Adair Leslie knows first-hand.

"Over the course of our first meeting, he [Gerard] must have hugged me five times," said Leslie. "He's so sincere and genuine."



Gerard is also happy, according to the interview conducted by ABC correspondent Bill Weir. The segment, which aired on "20/20" in January, investigated the idea of "flow" and what makes someone happy. It is said that Gerard's paintings have the kind of energy that aids people in finding their own happiness, and most would agree. With the vibrant colors and wide range of mediums used by Gerard in his creations, it is hard to look at one of his paintings and feel sad.

"People say, 'oh, it [performance painting] only takes an hour,' but it's an hour plus 50 years," Leslie said of Gerard's performance painting experience.

The Highlands performance by Jonas Gerard is part of a new "Art and Luxury Weekend." Other activities include a champagne lunch for \$25 and a reception at 5 p.m. to meet Jonas Gerard, both at Summit One Gallery, and an evening performance of "The Ice-Breakers" at the Instant Theatre Company on Main Street. To reserve a ticket for the brunch, call Main Street Inn at 526-2590. Tickets for The Ice-Breakers can be reserved by calling 342-9197.

