

Painting Fountain Square

By Tom Lohre



Fountain Square 1989, Oil on canvas, 12" x 16"

Painting Fountain Square started in 1989 when Tom came home for a while from his nomad life as a social portrait painter. While doing maintenance on his family home, he started painting on the second floor of the Weston Hotel looking through the huge glass facade to paint the fountain across the street because this was the best view for Tom. Strange how over the years he only finds one spot he likes to paint the fountain.

Tom started his fountain series using his en plein manner he created while painting a canvas a day outdoors for many years. Not only did he hone his skills he achieved an excellent impressionist manner peaking in 1987.

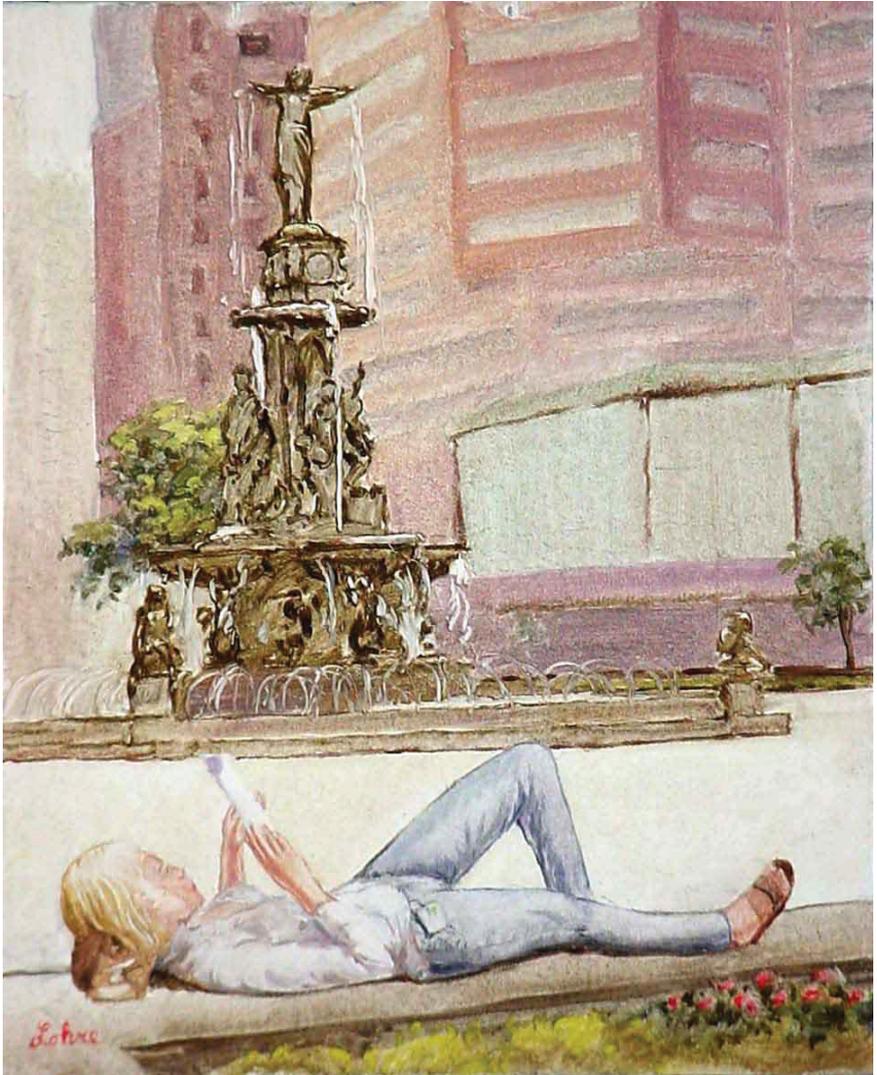
Tom painted Main Street in Nantucket over and over again, and wanted to find just such a scene for Cincinnati. "Fountain Square" filled his qualifications of a very popular & successful image to be painted. In fact, he recommends students paint the Fountain at the Fountain and sell the work there while working on improving their skills while on the job instead Tom took his own advice and painted the fountain over and over.

Now with over seventy paintings produced, the endearing appeal may be because the figure on top with arms outstretched water pouring out of the hands may tap into thoughts of Christ on the Cross.



Fountain Square I, Oil on canvas, 30" x 24", Spring 1994

After painting at least 20 works from the balcony of the Weston Hotel, Tom did not come back to the motif until 1994. The series of four works were done during a Cincinnati Art Festival spread around the city. Tom's space was on the second level walkway that connected many buildings. Tom could not see the fountain from his spot but nonetheless he painted what he had memorized. He created the "buildings in the clouds" and "swirling plaza of bricks and skaters" for this series. It was a new low in Tom's career. Commissions had dried up and sales were the lowest in his career as a full time working fine artist.



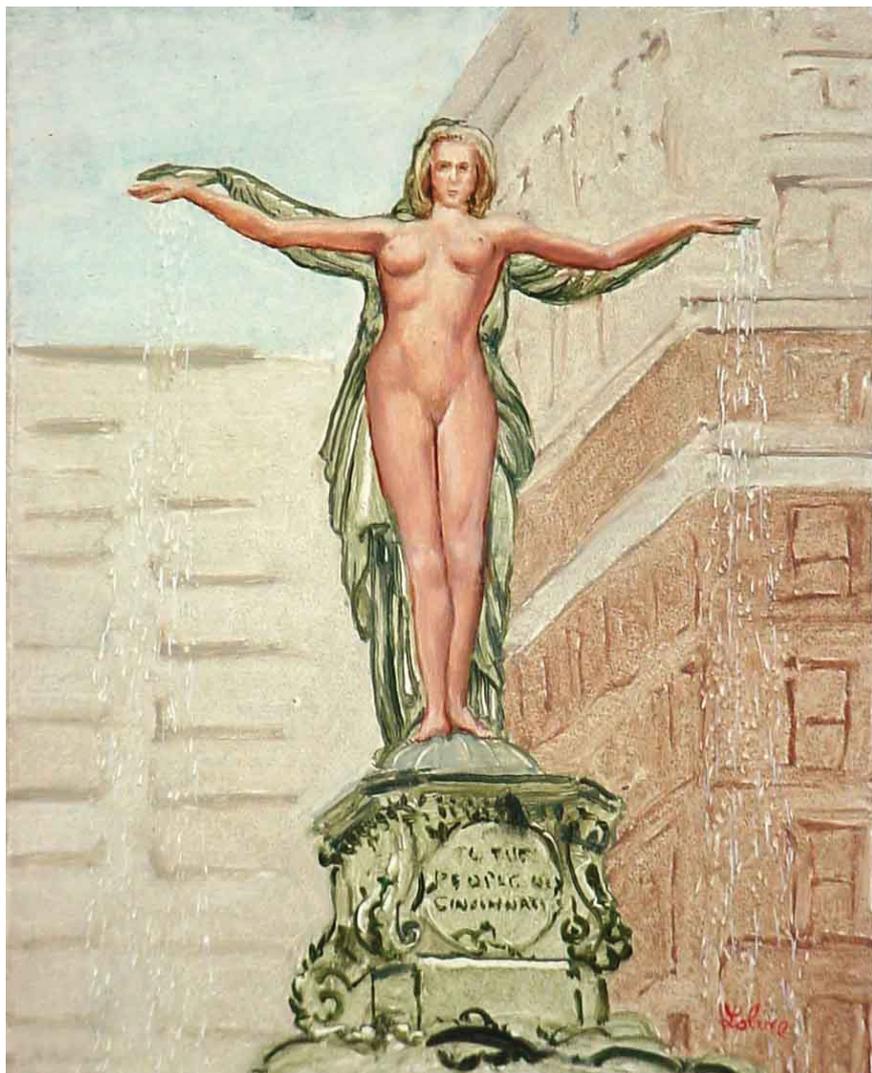
Fountain Square Woman, Oil in canvas, 8" x 10" September 12, 2005

Tom did not get back to painting the fountain till 2005 when his partner demanded that he start making some money with his art. Tom spent a lot of time starting in 2003 working on a Lego robot that painted. The robot's work was not successful and everything came to a head after Tom purchased three clip-on-lamps. The rampant spending had to stop. Tom started painting live on the square. He was moving into using figures in his landscapes. Each figure started with a digital image taken on the plaza and a computer mannequin program called Poser. He would recreate the figure in the digital image, enhancing and bettering the composition with the digital mannequin program. Tom would go on to spend lots of time on the square painting leaving his car in the parking lot of Suder's Art Store about seven blocks north. Day after day he would load up his cart and make for the square mingling amongst the poor and disenfranchise while trying to sell the work to the lunchers.



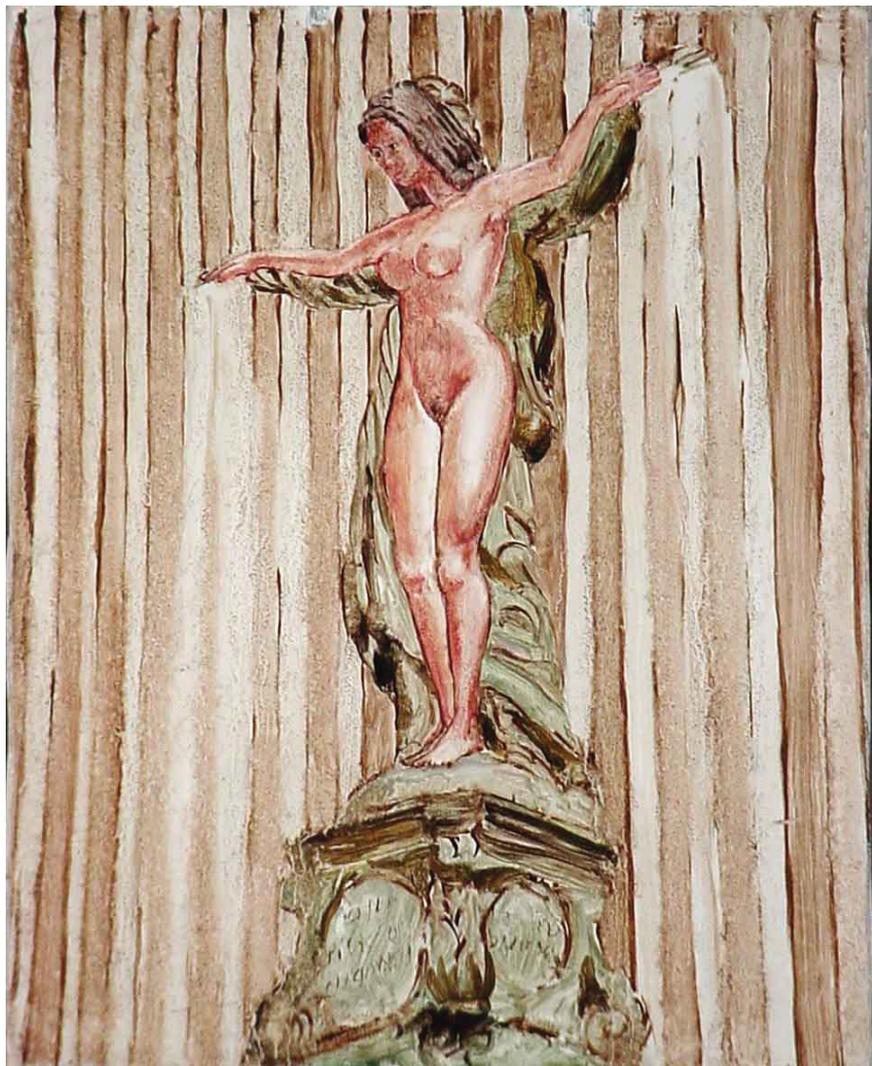
Fountain Square XII, 16" x 12", Oil on canvas, 2005

The series did not turn the corner on making money. It was the beginning of realizing the life of an artist was fraught with toughness and despair all the while creating work that begged a smile of pleasingness. The manner of the new work was thin transparent color like his portraits.



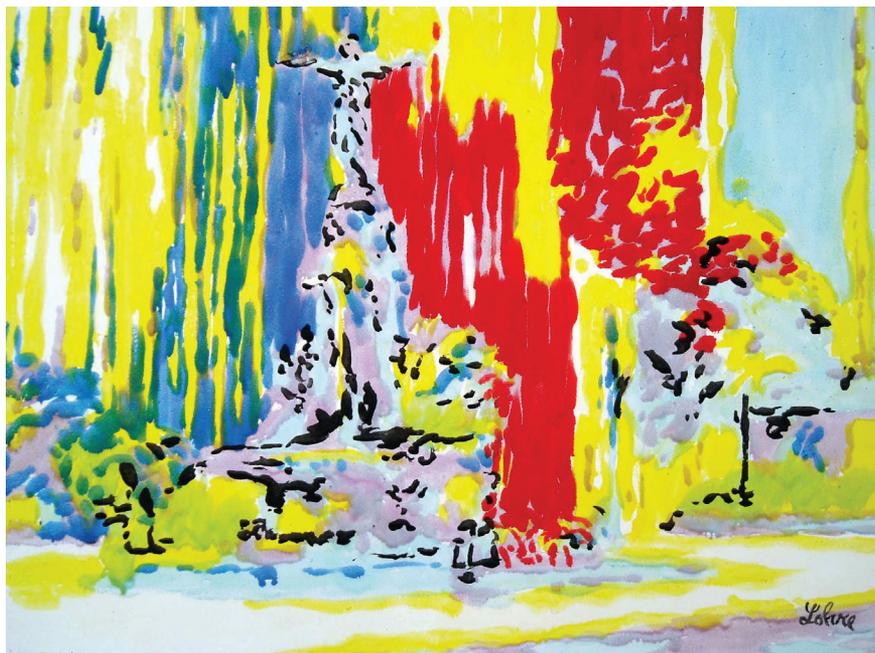
Fountain Square Lady of the Waters I, Oil on canvas, 8" x 10", 2005

After a good number of regular paintings in the thin transparent manner, Tom got the idea to superimpose a nude figure in place of the Lady of the Waters. He used a digital mannequin program to create the figures. Needless to say the paintings went over like a lead balloon with his partner and they were stowed away. Only later when Tom started distilling the fountain down to blobs of select colors were these two images of nudes transposed in front of the Lady of the Waters realized to their fullest extent. Turns out a blurred, simplistic nude is acceptable.



Fountain Square Lady of the Waters II #2, Oil on canvas, 8" x 10", 2005

Though only two of these nudes were painted their derived paintings are significant in number. The subtle nature of the abstract image is core to the success of the derived works. Focusing on just the lady and the top of the pedestal distills the essence and allure of the motif. Distilling down an image like the one above into a few blobs and colors requires a lot of time balancing the amount of canvas each color has. In PhotoShop you create a palette of nine colors then force it on the image using the mode command to switch between index and RGB color.



Fountain II #2, 12" x 16", oil on board, November 20, 2008

In 1980 while painting one impressionist work after another day after day in the open air, Tom thought he could make a machine that painted. In 2003 Tom created that machine out of the Lego Mindstorm Invention System. Much like a x,y printer with eight colors. Tom settled on melting oil pastels on a hot surface creating a beautiful stroke. A 16" x 20" painting had 4163 dots of color and took 18 hours to create. The robot created ten portraits that did not sell. He eventually sold one and the person did not recognize it was a portrait but bought it for the colors. The Lego machine forced Tom to simplify his color pallet. After numerous combinations, Tom started to hone in on a set of nine colors, each color doing double duty as a color and a value going from light to dark.

Tom slowly started using the technique for himself starting with a series of derived oil paintings from his earlier fountain paintings. Using a limited number of colors just like the Lego machine, Tom started to hone the colors into a set group. The initial paintings used strong basic colors like red, yellow, white, light violet, dark violet, light blue and dark blue. He continued to use his current manner of transparent color on a scrapped gessoed surface. Letting the tinted varnish have its full effect on the very smooth surface. His medium was 1/2 stand oil, 1/2 Damar varnish with .5% oil of cloves to retard drying.



Fountain Square XXIV #24, oil on canvas, 16" x 12", February 23, 2011

This study led to the special nine colors used in the above painting. Tom has been painting with this palette since. He attempts to move away from them but always comes back to this special selection of nine colors. Tom's radically different impressionist manner using nine carefully crafted colors create art that is instantly seen as his own. The combined effect is one of a half-processed image somewhere between the eye and the visual cortex. The colors applied in a tinted manner using special medium of stand oil and Damar varnish not only smells great it looks beautiful with a high gloss finish.

Each of the nine colors selected set off an alarm in Tom's head. After numerous attempts to expand or improve the color set he has not found a better solution. These colors are so important they need introductions. First is white for obvious reasons playing the first in the gray scale, second is light yellow to be the next in the gray scale. All nine colors act as an incremental step through the gray scale. When photographed with a black and white camera the colors act as clear steps from white to a value nine out of ten. There is no color darker than a value nine because it keeps the painting vibrant. Darker colors pull the painting down emotionally. The light yellow highlights the face, creates the sun glinted land and acts as the yellow in clouds. Third is light blue playing a major role



Fountain Square XXXIX, December 5, 2012, 24" x 24", Acrylic on canvas

for sky and light shadow. Fourth is light green holding down the role of young growth and early shadow in the face. Fifth is yellow ochre is the third gray scale in the face as well as burnt grass and light wood. Sixth is Nantucket red, the fourth color in the face gray scale and is unique being the only red in the palette. It is blood, bramble and dark wood. Seventh is dark blue, the third gray scale for the sky, early shadow for the face, periwinkle for clothes and reflections for water. Eighth is dark violet is the first definer of cool shadow, black, hair and deep sky. Ninth is dark evergreen for deepest close shadow, black, dense growth and hair. It is hard to believe that with just these colors you can create full color and exact realism if you stand far enough away from the canvas. Once up close the painting becomes a bouquet of flowers. Most of the artwork were portraits because the mind easily filled in the blanks.



Fountain Square XXVI #26, 16" x 12", Oil on canvas, July 22, 2011

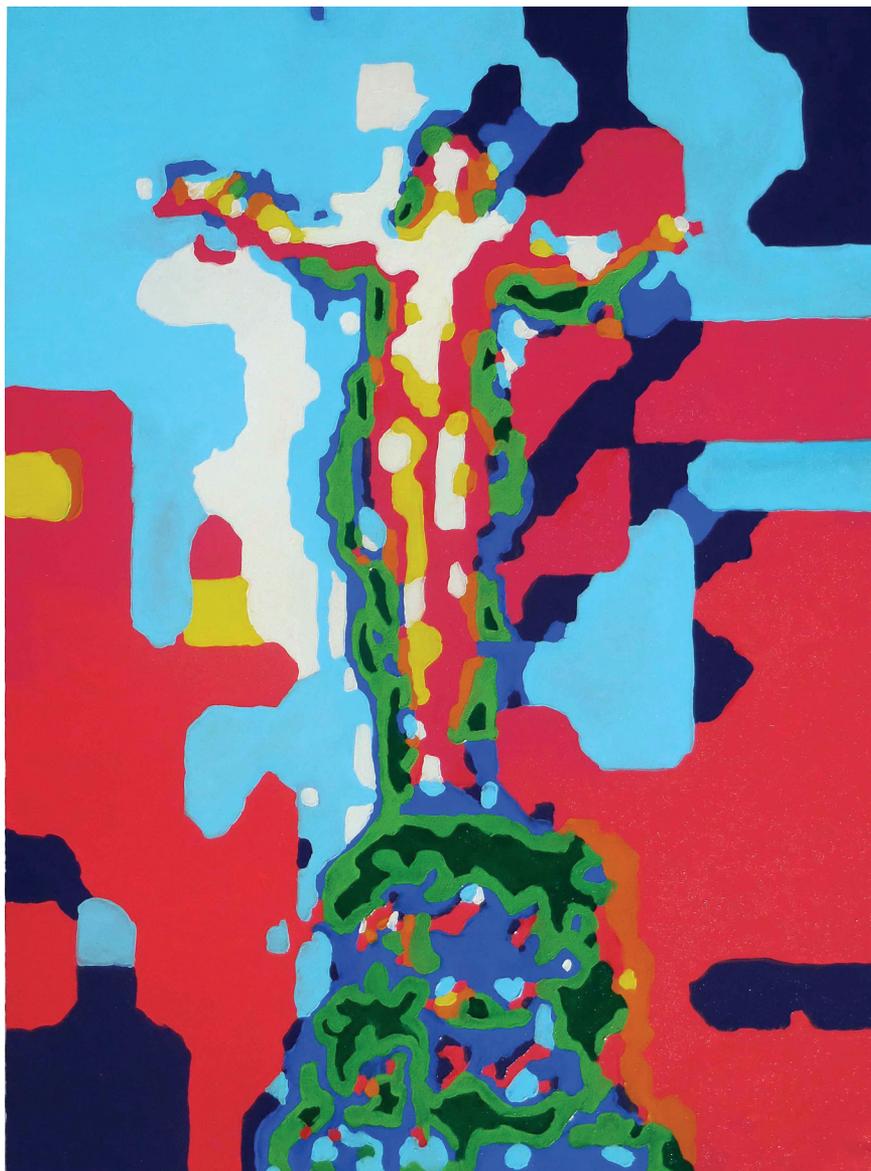
Another in a long line of fountain paintings the above painting was painted from life on the plaza in the spring while his daughter was still in school. The painting was a stepping off point for the next series of abstract colorful paintings done in the varnish nine-color manner. By 2011 the Lady of the Waters had been moved to a new location on the plaza. Tom settled on this view to paint over and over again. Strange that there is only one paintable view for Tom. It turned out to be more a painting of the Crew Tower than the fountain.



Fountain Square ILIX #49, Oil on canvas, 36" x 48", December 19, 2014

Included in Tom's one man show "Sidewalk Shrines and Noted Icons" at the Clifton Cultural Art Center, March 6 to April 3, 2015.

The simplification and distortion of the buildings, trees and surroundings deliver a bouquet of color. Each color tinted, letting the canvas come through creating the highest visual stimulation.



Fountain Square ILVIII #48, Oil on canvas, 36" x 48", Dec. 11, 2014

It was when Tom started to get more and more abstract with the Lady of the Waters that he started distilling down the previous realistic painting of the Lady with black and white female nudes standing in front of her. You see the woman with a suggestion of nudity. This version of the Lady of the Waters shows the top figure of the Tyler Davidson

Fountain with the Dupont building in the background. Once Tom started deriving his work into simple nine color blobs the motif came to life. Tom has since painted it many times in smaller sizes now in the size it deserves 3 by 4 feet! Both painting in this spread match the paintings on pages 5 & 6.

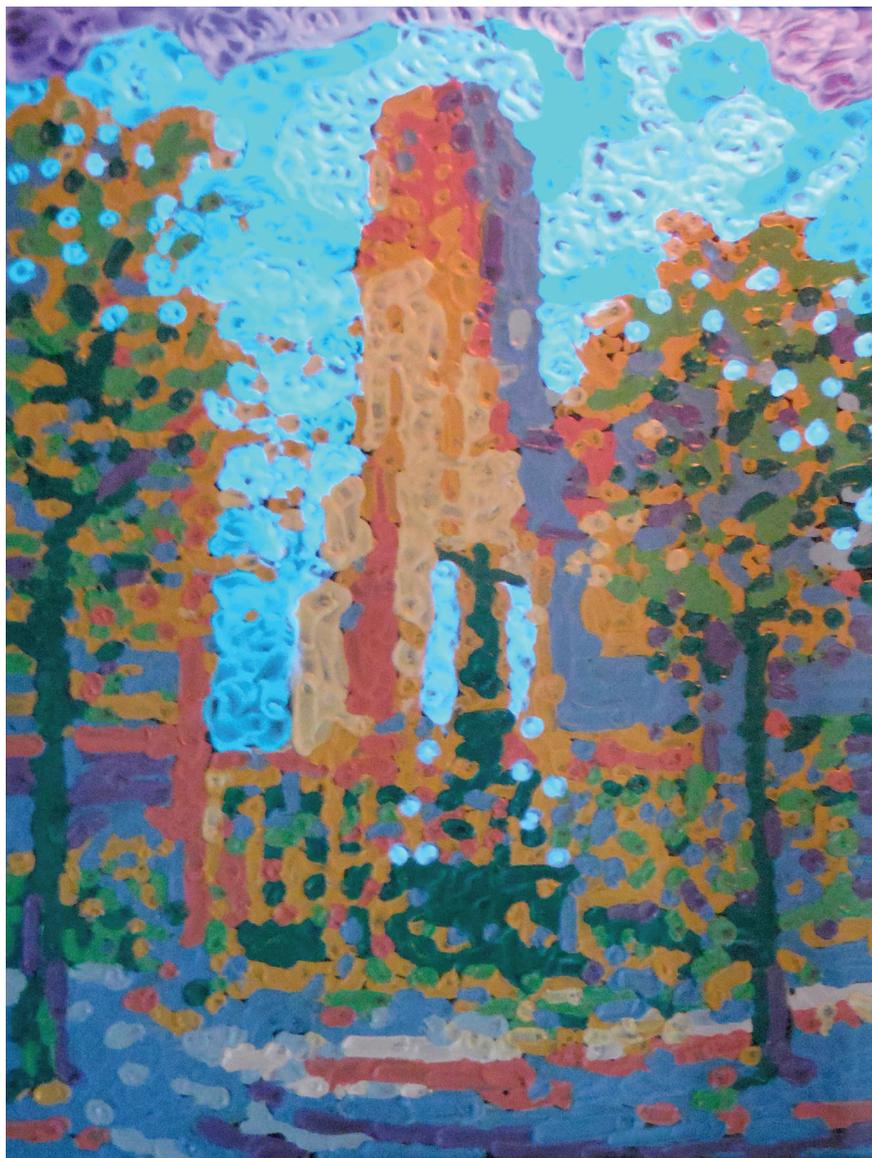


Fountain XXXII #32, 5" x 7", Oil on board, October 25, 2011



Fountain XXXI #31, 5" x 7", Oil on board, October 20, 2011

Tom applies the special palette in various forms, oil paint, acrylic and melting hand crafted oil pastels on metal. He grinds up chalk mixing it with buttermilk and paints with the special nine colors on sidewalks during street festivals especially during CliftonFest.



*Fountain Square LXX #70, Oil pastel on metal, 12" x 16", Wednesday,
January 14, 2015*

Tom used the larger ¼" sticks of custom made oil pastels for this work because the glow in the dark colors do not lend themselves to being made in smaller sizes. While formulating the special oil pastel sticks he realized you could take a clear oil pastel, mix it with powdered glow in the dark colors. This painting uses opaque and glow in the dark colors.



Eventually Tom started using the “melted oil pastels on hot metal” manner in his own work. The Lego painting machine used $\frac{1}{4}$ ” custom made sticks of color. Tom reduced the size of the stick to $\frac{1}{8}$ ” and used a simple twist holder from the art store to hold them. Metal is the best material to melt on because the surface heats up fast and preserves the lustre and quality of the oil pastel. In the old days while perfecting the manner he would heat up the whole canvas with a hot plate. The canvas would be attached and you could set the temperature. Eventually he realized heating up just the area you wanted with an off the shelf heat gun was the way to go. He turns it on via a foot switch since turning the gun on and off many times with your finger is excruciating after the first thousand times.

He adapted the manner for painting in hotel rooms since you could paint a lively impasto impressionist work without the smell. At first he heated plastic sheets of Lexan on a hot plate. Through a mishap the sheet of ceramic he laid on top of a hot plate to heat the plastic evenly broke and he came back to a five foot blue flame. Freaked out since he was preforming this exhibition in a public theater, he came to his senses and carefully picked up the hot plate with the five foot blue flame and carried it outside. It is a miracle the smoke alarms did not go off. The plastic burned with such rocket nozzle purity he took it to be an omen.

Now when he travels he paints “en plien air” with the “hot” technique since there are now electric outlets everywhere.

Tom pretty much stopped painting on location at Fountain Square. The clientele he meets want the painting for peanuts and commissions are far and few between on the square. In fact Tom has never gotten a commission painting on the square. But it is still a good place to learn, hang out and rub elbows with the masses.



*Fountain Square LXXII #72, 8 " x 10", Oil pastel melted on metal,
February 1, 2021*

Thank you Megan for commissioning this work for a friend's present. It was a pleasure to create it and get all my ducks in a row, producing this booklet, getting the web site updated and the general herding of cats when it comes to keeping track of hundreds of paintings done and being done.

Brief History of the Artist

Tom Lohre learned by studying under master portrait painter, Ralph Wolf Cowan. He lived with his master for a year as his apprentice. After seven years of study he mastered the old school manner of portrait painting.

Searching for new subjects, he painted the eruption of Mount Saint Helens while it erupted from life, twenty miles to the south on Tum Tum Mountain. He also painted the first space shuttle from life, 200 feet from it, under armed guard, the day before it took off. What Tom learned was a great painting does not need a great event.

Tom invented the painting technique of melting oil pastels on metal by heating the metal though the art of using wax “encaustic” in an ancient manner. Once cooled the work will stay in place unless heated to 255 degrees, at 155 degrees you can manipulate the oil pastel without having the oil pastel move towards gravity. Run warm water over to clean, do not rub or brush, let dry and replace in frame. Do not touch the surface. The work should last for hundreds if not thousands of years if undisturbed not heated above 175 F and lit by indirect light.

These colorful artworks are painted with blobs. Tom’s blob painting started in 1980 when Tom explored the possibility of a machine that painted. He was painting impressionistic works one right after another and thought he could make a machine to do this. In 2003 he discovered Lego MindStorm Invention System and spent four years learning the software. On January 5th, 2007 at 9 p.m. he cracked the code to write a program that took information from an image in the computer and fed it to a painting machine. The painting machine was a classical assistant. It laid one of eight colors in generally the correct spot.

The painting machine needed a great stroke to be successful. Tom cannot remember the exact time he thought of melting wax on hot metal to make a stroke. It was a beautiful stroke with a velvety surface and heavy impasto. Sakura oil pastels are melted and mixed into a certain color in a dish on a hot plate then sucked into a brass tube, cooled and extruded. The Lego MindStorm Invention System painting machine did ten works. The next painting machine will surf the Web for a paintable image then paint it.

Eventually he discovered you could heat up the metal with a hot air gun used to melt paint or a kitchen butane torch by heating the surface from the front, heating without moving the canvas. The painting machine heated the metal from behind and he developed three variations using hot plates and electric pancake skillets with magnets embedded in it to hold

the metal. It was a nuisance to move the metal to the heated area since heating the whole surface for a long time deteriorated the wax pigment. Now the only restriction to larger works was the weight of the metal, a four by three foot piece of 28 gauge flashing metal weights fifteen pounds.

Tom is currently cutting canvases off a three by fifty foot roll of roof flashing metal. Earlier he used aluminum. The shiny surface made an alluring addition to the canvas since it reflects light at the proper angle from the small spots not covered by pigment. The future is shinny aluminum cut from four by eight sheets.

Painting with blobs is reality. Composition and time of day establishes the painting. This new manner cannot change the situation. The gross manner lends itself to familiarity. The visceral manner guided by natural illustration makes everyone there. Each stroke takes on more significance. Reality reduced to something a printer would do but when the artist reduces the scene to a few blobs that still have the scene then now that's painting. Each round edged blob means more. The blob represents the reality of painting in the classical manner. Strike while the iron is hot. Why do anything unless you are ready? The same is true with painting.





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For any restoration and repair work, please call the artist,
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Send an e-mail to be added to the database as owner.

Sign up for timely notices of new work and shows by sending an e-mail to tom@tomlohre.com or thoslohre49@gmail.com

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