



The Young Tourist



The Familiar and the Exotic

By Amy Conry Davis | Photography courtesy of Randy Hayes and Suzanne James

An accidental dab of paint on a photograph led Holly Springs artist Randy Hayes to create his signature style.

Artist Randy Hayes likes to begin each day at 5 a.m. with coffee and a stroll in his garden. It's a ritual which invites time for quiet contemplation before getting to work in his Holly Springs studio. Given where his creative life began, it's no surprise that he looks to nature as his daily dose of inspiration.

Hayes grew up in the rural area near Clinton, Miss., surrounded by extended family all living on the same property. This rural upbringing, as well as the "marvelous aesthetic sense" of his grandparents, were his earliest influences and had a lasting effect. It was his grandmother, in fact, who first gave him charcoal and paper and encouraged him to follow art.

"My grandmother insisted that I belong to the junior garden club," says Hayes. "From my grandmother and my grandfather, who raised every kind of bird imaginable, I gained

an appreciation of the natural world. Flowers and birds still bring pleasure to my life."

In his teen years, the family moved to Tupelo where Hayes delved further into the creative world. On the weekends, he and a friend and fellow artist would teach themselves drawing and painting. He went on to earn a degree from the Memphis College of Art, but it could be said that his identity as an artist really began in earnest after graduation.

He spent the following years traveling extensively around the globe and honing his skills in drawing, sculpture, painting, photography, and writing. Foreign travel was such a big influence on Hayes that once, in preparation for a project, he booked a one-way ticket and visited Asia, Africa, India, and Europe to gather source material.



Super Market (Delta)

He worked as a set designer and carpenter in Boston for a time then moved to Seattle to open a used and rare bookstore with a friend. The scope of his art and interests were varied and expansive, which showed in the kinds of projects he tackled. Using all the knowledge and expertise he had gained, his professional portfolio ranged from large-scale public art to a sculpture garden to photographic workbooks.

Hayes returned to his Southern roots and small town living in 2013, and he now works out of his antebellum home in an airy and sunlit studio. In another room, a small gallery of his work is on display and can be seen by appointment.

Hayes also continues to exhibit at museums across the country as well local galleries around the state – most notably, the Mississippi Museum of Art in Jackson and the University of Mississippi Museum in Oxford. Some of his recent work includes commissioned art for a winery and his installation of 30 paintings, *Unwritten Memoir*. He is also focused on, and perhaps best known for, his mixed media work which involves painting over photographs.

Using images taken during his travels, he prints a grid of black-and-white photos onto a canvas and paints in color over them. While this has become something of his signature style, Hayes admits it was brought about by “chance and desire.”

“I always painted from photographs...a photograph in one hand and a paintbrush in the other,” says Hayes. “Throughout my career I [had] tried to figure out ways to incorporate photographs into my paintings. One day I accidentally got paint onto the photograph in my hand. I liked the results and began to figure out ways to advance this accident.”

Before creating a larger piece, Hayes starts small. He works with 17x22-inch studies, which he considers sketches. For Hayes, not every image becomes, or needs to be, large scale but it does have to say something. He chooses the photographs that stand out, the ones that will make the “most complete statement.”

While Hayes’ subjects and settings vary, the scenes all seem to share a relatable human element. Whether it’s young tourists in Morocco or a shopkeeper in the Delta, there’s a sense of the ordinary and universal in the moments and expressions captured.

“Whether I am painting about the South or a foreign country I try to see what is unique to the people and the landscape,” says Hayes. “To paraphrase the novelist Bharati Mukherjee, I try to paint the familiar as the exotic and the exotic as familiar.”

Despite the successes and awards under his belt, Hayes isn’t ready to sit back on his accomplishments and retire. As for the next year, he is focusing on writing again and has “new ideas” for a project combining books, paint, and photographs. For renewed inspiration, he looks to films, music, books, and museums as they make him eager to get back into his studio. Chances are, he’ll start with a walk in his garden first.

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