

PHOTO COURTESY RON PULLIAM

This painting of the Palix River Delta features acrylics on gallery-wrap canvas. Artist Ron Pulliam first painted the canvas a pink-orange before adding detail.

Rediscovering talents

Bay Center artist delights with scenic views

After decades, Pulliam returns to his art; is eager to grow, learn

By PATRICK WEBB
For the Observer

BAY CENTER — Is painting like riding a bicycle — once learned, you never forget?

Perhaps. Ron Pulliam put down his brushes almost half a century ago.

Now the North Pacific County man is delighting fellow residents of Bay Center with attractive artwork of familiar scenery.

He posts his finished art — and sometimes works in progress — on his own Facebook page or on the Bay Center Remembered site.

Positive comments from residents spur him to create more.

“I paint for pleasure for sure, but it’s not all pleasure. Sometimes it causes temporary grief, but I get a lot of satisfaction from it,” he said, when asked to sum up why he does it.

“Nothing else exists except the canvas, the colors and my brush.

It’s like I am in a vacuum or maybe an hour in a warm pool.

It’s a pleasant feeling.”

Pulliam is married to Jane Pulliam, a member of the Chinook Tribal Council. They split their time between their home in Tacoma, where he has a tiny basement studio, and an older property in Bay Center. “We love it there, the town and the people.” They bought the North Pacific County home, which they are restoring, 13 years ago; there his painting is confined to a corner of their dining room.

Rediscovering his talents

One facet of his creative talent has been on hold for almost 50 years.

Pulliam grew up in Ohio and attended Kent State University in 1968. He was drafted into the U.S. Army and served a tour in Vietnam as a surveyor and photographer. “It was a period of prolonged, unrelenting stress and threat,” he shared.

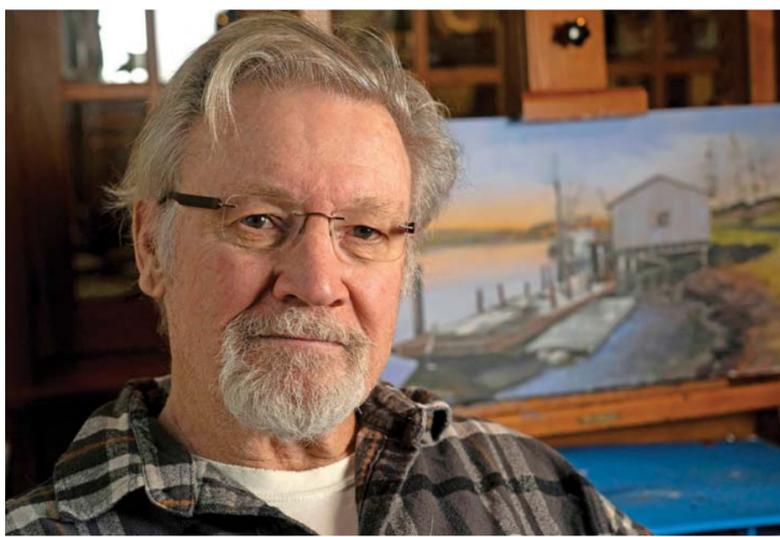


PHOTO BY AMIRAN WHITE

Bay Center artist Ron Pulliam paused in the midst of painting on Dec. 19, 2020.



PHOTO COURTESY RON PULLIAM

This painting of the highway curving into Bay Center elicited positive comments from online viewers. “This makes me feel like I’m actually driving down that road,” wrote Mary Edwards.

*‘NOTHING ELSE EXISTS
EXCEPT THE CANVAS,
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— Ron Pulliam
Bay Center artist

WHERE TO VIEW ONLINE

Facebook: Ron Pulliam-artist

www.facebook.com/nautilusdesign.biz

Remembering Bay Center, Washington

www.facebook.com/groups/446375956155087

He returned changed, and wasn’t keen on resuming his early artistic endeavors. “I painted now and then, but had to go looking for my brushes,” he said. “It was a long period in between paintings.”

In the years that followed, Pulliam had a 32-year career as a graphic designer, including running his own business.

Now retired, he is rediscovering his talents, gaining a considerable local fan base, while remaining cautious about expanding into too much marketing. Years back, he used to turn wooden bowls with considerable skill, but extending art into commerce killed the hobby. “They were more artistic than functional, but because I started thinking about selling, going to arts fairs, I lost interest at that point.”

A ‘recovering perfectionist’

Pulliam teases that he is a “recovering perfectionist.” Some years ago, he immersed himself in elements of Japanese culture. He spent seven years honing his skills in the aikido martial art, nurtured trees in the bonsai style and bred koi fish. He was fascinated by the Japanese trait of exactitude, which extends to perfecting the rear surfaces of a fence which is hidden from view.

He is reflective looking back at that phase. “I didn’t want to be reminded that I had lost an opportunity by not going back to painting,” he said.

The breakthrough moment came after he and Jane were stimulated by Landmark Education personal coaching classes in Portland. “It challenged my way of thinking,” he said.

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JULIA TRIEZENBERG

Cape Disappointment Lighthouse in Ilwaco.

Quick guide to Pacific County’s deceptively depressing names

By JULIA TRIEZENBERG
For EO Media Group

Our area is home to diverse ecosystems and spectacular views — but many of these amazing sites on the Washington state and Oregon coasts are accompanied by downright depressing names. Was everyone on the coast 200 years ago having a bad time?

Despite their bleak histories, each individual niche and cove that dots the coast contributes to a mysterious character, making the area more compelling.

On the northern shore of the Columbia River is Dismal Nitch, east of the Astoria-Megler Bridge. This spot’s bleak title traces back to the Corps of Discovery’s transcontinental journey from 1804 to 1806.

As the corps headed down the Columbia in the winter of 1805, they were anxious to catch a trading ship that would allow

them to resupply and send notes to President Thomas Jefferson that they had taken during their journey.

The group never reached a ship because of the terrible weather conditions they faced while trying to get there. A winter storm on Nov. 10, 1805, blew the group into a north shore cove, where they were stuck for six days.

In his journal, Capt. William Clark described that finally, “about 3 o’clock the wind lulled and the river became calm. I had the canoes loaded in great haste and set out, from this dismal nitch where we had been confined for 6 days ...”

Today, Dismal Nitch is a popular rest stop and scenic overlook that must be quite a departure from what Lewis and Clark faced over 200 years ago.

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PHOTO COURTESY RON PULLIAM

The Weyerhaeuser Mill at Raymond, painted in acrylic on canvas and shown in a temporary frame, was one of Pulliam's earlier pictures.

Pulliam

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Around that time, he connected with artist Lori Beth Chandler who invited him to her Seattle studio. Together they dumped acrylic paint on 4-by-5-foot pieces of heavy canvas in an exercise in process, "without thought toward design or results."

"We squeezed, we splashed, we splotted the paint all over," he recalled with a laugh. "It was kind of cool. Looking back, that was part of the break in my way of thinking."

Surprising success

Once he took out his brushes, his own skills surprised him. "I was flabbergasted by my first paintings," he recalled, noting he was way better than in his youth. "I said, 'Dang, I can do this!' I was fully prepared for a lot of failure — you have to be. You have to be prepared to do a lot of crappy things. It's a skill and it takes practice and work. It usually takes years."

He painted the Weyerhaeuser mill and its Raymond waterfront setting and a street scene showing the town's Park Avenue. As he toyed with choosing a consistent style for his preferred artist's signature, he painted his initials as if they were chalked on the sidewalk.

From those early works, rural landscapes have dominated.

"The area comprising Raymond, South Bend and Bay Center is the source for many of my paintings. There's no end of subject matter and weather to work with," he said.

On journeys between their Tacoma and Bay Center homes, he scouts scenic views. "My wife drives the last 50 miles. I sit with my phone and take pictures out of the window. Sometimes I get her to stop the car."

From these, plus photos he takes on walks around their Bay Center neighborhood, he chooses his subjects and angles. "I see a sunset. I look for composition, contrast and color, and take pictures then review them. I go over 10, 15, 20 and find the one."

Social media reactions

The Palix River Delta and various views of the Niawia-kum River at the mouth and at low tide drew favorable compliments when shared on his Facebook links. With the Palix scene, which almost glows



PHOTO BY AMIRAN WHITE

Bay Center artist Ron Pulliam pays careful attention to the accuracy of his local landscapes featuring Willapa industries.



PHOTO BY AMIRAN WHITE

Bay Center artist Ron Pulliam's brushes.



PHOTO BY AMIRAN WHITE

His palette reflects some of Ron Pulliam's taste in colors.



PHOTO COURTESY RON PULLIAM

This scene shows the landmark Rose Ranch in northern Pacific County. "Most people take their pictures from the highway side. I like this one," Ron Pulliam noted.

Names

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Just a few miles west of Dismal Nitch is the iconic Cape Disappointment State Park. It's a name that might go unnoticed by locals, but newcomers never fail to ask — "Wait a second, 'disappointment?'"

The native Chinook people first referred to Cape Disappointment as Ka'heese. The first known European to have explored the area is Bruno de Heceta, a Spaniard who traveled along the coast in the late 1700s.

Credit for Cape Disappointment's name, however, goes to the Englishman John Meares. Meares sailed by the cape in 1788 while looking for the entrance to



JANE WINCKLER WEBB



JULIA TRIEZENBERG

LEFT: The surf at Waikiki Beach in Cape Disappointment State Park. MIDDLE: A view of Dismal Nitch and the Columbia River. RIGHT: A derelict ship near Dismal Nitch in Washington.

the Columbia River. Visibility was so poor that day that Meares couldn't manage to locate the entrance. Assuming that the cape would only take him to the interior of a large bay, he named it after his predominant emotion at the time.

Just a few years later,

Capt. Robert Gray took credit for the official first European entrance into the Columbia River in 1792 aboard the ship that gave the river its current name, the *Columbia Rediviva*. Gray originally named the area north of the river Cape Hancock but changed it back to

"Disappointment" after learning that Meares had already branded it.

Within Cape Disappointment is a popular photo-op en route to Cape Disappointment Lighthouse: Dead Man's Cove. Contrary to its name, Dead Man's Cove isn't known to be a reference

to any specific person.

One common story is that the cove's label is an ominous homage to the wreck of the *Vandalia*, which sunk at the mouth of the river in 1853. The victims' bodies washed ashore along the area and the name stuck.

Today, Dead Man's Cove

is closed for the safety of the park's visitors and to protect the area from erosion — but it's still a beautiful landmark along Washington's southwest coast.

As the coast is plunged into the depths of wet winter weather again, it becomes easier to see how some of these places may have earned themselves such dismal titles. Thankfully, tourists and locals alike can appreciate the full spectrum of emotions that the Pacific Northwest inspires. Even with a soggy raincoat and battered boots, it's impossible to say that the people and places that surround the coast are anything close to disappointing.

Julia Triezenberg is an educator at the Columbia River Maritime Museum.

with pinks and light blues, he first painted the entire canvas a pinky orange. "It helps me be freer with color."

"Of all the work you've shared, this one is my favorite. The colors really are lovely," wrote Lilli Cuevas.

A sweeping view of the highway curving toward Bay Center was almost photographic. "Oh, this makes me feel like I'm actually driving down that road. Great job, Ron," wrote Mary Edwards.

Another, of the landmark Rose Ranch, was intentionally from an unusual angle. "Most people take their pictures from the highway side. I like this one."

Still learning

His progress still amazes him, as he shares online. "Some days I'll walk into the studio, and stop dead and think, 'Did I paint that last night?' It's a weird feeling."

But Pulliam is down-to-Earth, too. He shuns watercolors or oils, preferring the more forgiving medium of acrylic paint. "I am still learning, I learn from just about every painting I do. I have 'happy accidents' — most mistakes that can be corrected."

If not happy with a perspective, color or other element, he takes a break. "If I get to that part where it is as much as I can do, I set it down and pick it up later when I can see what it needs."

"That happens when I think, 'This is good enough' or if somebody says, 'Put down your brush and step away from the painting.' There is a danger of overworking."

Occasionally Pulliam selects unexpected topics for variety and fun. One was of pop icon Freddie Mercury, originally seen in a black and white photo but painted in color to resemble stage lighting. Another was a set of four still lifes of pears which he posted online seeking votes; just about every respondent agreed with his own favorite.

Generating emotions

But at 73, he is in no rush to cash in on his revived talents. His pleasure comes from others enjoying his work. "I don't want it to become a business; it's a love," he said.

"I want something that generates emotions in a person at first glance or else something they can identify with."

Masti-Denise Mayrand is among those captivated. "Your painting is so good for the soul," she posted.