



OUR
20
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Portrait of the Artist: Ami and Paul Ray

Text by Theresa Brown
Photos by Bart Blumberg

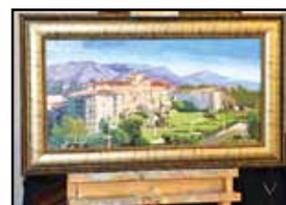
Portrait of the Artist is a series of interviews to introduce members of Hull Artists to the community and offer a glimpse into their creative lives.

When speaking of artistic ability, we often call it “a gift,” even though we all know that any ability or skill requires much discipline and effort to perfect. In the case of watercolorist Ami Ray and his son, Paul, an oil painter, “the gift” has multilayered meaning.



Carousel Dreamer,
by Ami Ray

Ami began painting as a child growing up in India, where he later earned a BFA degree before coming to the U.S. and completing an MFA at Boston University. He has also earned a degree in photography from the Art Institute, Boston, and has taken continuing education courses in various art media.



Langham Huntington Hotel,
by Paul Ray

Although Ami clearly loves honing his own talent, he has an even greater purpose: the gift of art education to his son, Paul. In spite of limited verbal communication ability since childhood,



Artists Ami Ray [L] and Paul Ray.

Paul demonstrates exceptional visual communication skills. His award-winning oil paintings are clear evidence of the gift inherited from his father and carefully nurtured through ongoing education at the Boston School of the MFA and by years of companionship in their home studio in Rockland.

An award-winning artist himself, Ami devotes most of his work to a special watercolor technique he learned in India. The painstaking process that can take weeks to complete involves up to eight steps of water washes, application of tempera, inks, and masking fluids, and dry brushing techniques.

Equally important to the complicated process is the mood he wants the piece to communicate through the right balance of dark or light washes of indigo, burnt sienna, and burnt umber. Ami, who also has a passion for abstracts, has recently begun transforming one work into another by fan-folding a printed copy of a completed watercolor and using the bifurcated image to paint an entirely new abstracted piece.

Paul’s oil paintings range from local plein-air scenes to still-life works that tap the muses of Matisse and Cezanne. He is currently shifting his focus to producing large-scale oil paintings for potential exhibition at the Northeastern University Gallery 360, whose director saw Paul’s work exhibited elsewhere and encouraged him to submit larger pieces for consideration.

When we recently visited the studio, Paul had a gorgeous painting of the Langham Huntington Hotel, nestled in California’s San Gabriel Mountains, on the easel. The just finished painting of this historic Pasadena landmark (originally the Hotel Wentworth, built by Civil War veteran General Marshall C. Wentworth in 1907) was about to become a present to his sister, who would be celebrating her wedding reception there the following weekend. Here the cycle of “the gift” came full circle. The gift of talent, handed down from father to son, was incarnated on canvas and then bequeathed to mark a most precious family milestone.

Ami answered our questions this week:

How did you become an artist?

From childhood I loved to draw and sketch from art books and nature. After high school in India, I started college, majoring in science and biology. Within a year and a half, I was struggling and found it boring. The only part I liked and did very well was sketching illustrations as part of the lab work. I decided to switch to a government college of arts & crafts, where I studied traditional Indian painting, fine arts, and applied arts.

Paul started sketching with colored markers in class and in the cafeteria during high school. His teachers took notice of his talent and mentioned it to us in a parent-teacher meeting. So we gave him Apple drawing software on an early Macintosh desk computer for him to explore and practice. During a summer arts & crafts program he really became interested in art. A painting class the next summer at Massasoit College led to a two-year certificate program in graphic design, followed by an additional two-year course of studies in fine arts.

What do you feel makes your work unique and truly our own?

I use a special watercolor technique I learned in India that is a complicated and time-consuming process.

What is your first memory of creating art?

I painted two large panels of two-foot by six-foot female dancing figures for a festival in India even before attending college. It received recognition and appreciation from a famous movie director.

Do you have a muse or other source of inspiration?

A famous watercolor painter in India, Bose, inspires me. Also the classic French painters: Gauguin, Matisse, Cezanne, Renoir, Monet, Manet, and Picasso.

How do you begin a creative day in your studio or on location?

I think of an action-oriented theme or some activity involving people and then I start to create.

When and where are you the most creative?

My professional experience in graphic design and marketing for a major supermarket chain taught me one thing whatever you produce: “If it does not sell, it’s not creative.” So when I start a painting, I experiment with one subject on a small scale, in various media, and do a marketing test. Once the same subject sells several times at different places, I mark it as a signature piece. Strangely enough, based on that theory, producing the same painting in the original colors but different sizes sells again and again, too. It also works for my son, Paul.

What is the most challenging part about being an artist?

The ongoing research and experimentation with my work so I can become more specialized is a challenge.

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Joan Connors
Eccles
781-223-7102
jeccles@jackconway.com



Polly Hanlon
617-967-3226
phanlon@jackconway.com



Viginia Mills
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