

MyWorld

A VISIT WITH DENNIS ZIEMIENSKI AT HIS STUDIO IN GLEN ELLEN, CA

Interview by Bonnie Gangelhoff, Photos by Paul O'Valle

Describe your studio. I designed and built my home and studio in the Italian country style. It was initially completed in 1997, but my wife, Anne, and I are always adding or revising something. We are both Italophiles. I'm half Italian—Sicilian—and she attended school in Rome. As a result, we have very close Italian friends. And we honeymooned in Rome. Anne is a mosaic artist who works in the Roman classical style. We are both happy being surrounded by lush gardens, old walls, shady pergolas, and dripping fountains. If we ever found it difficult

to return to Italy, we could pretend we were there while at home.

What about the surroundings? Our home and studios are situated on 11 wooded acres in a canyon in the Sonoma Valley wine country. We are surrounded by oaks and madrones, but we don't have any vineyards.

What kinds of things do you keep in your studio? Paintings, prints, books, frames, easels, paints, tools, antiques, and sometimes bicycles.

Do you have artwork by other artists? Yes. I have works by Edward Hopper, Maynard Dixon, Frank Brangwyn, Ludwig Hohlwein, Rube Goldberg, and Richard Cole.

What attracts you to your subject matter? The magic of discovery—when I've unearthed something unusual that may have been lost or wasn't recorded properly in history. For example, I had no idea that there were once rodeos where horses jumped over vehicles. The imagery I have uncovered from the past is so unusual. I am interested in the period between 1900 and 1960, when people started exploring and settling the West in covered wagons. But automobiles were coming in at about the same time. It's so much fun to depict cowboys and cowgirls riding on the front grilles of Cadillacs or cowboys shooting at big metal sheets with rifles and making portraits of Abraham Lincoln from the patterns of the bullet holes.

What music do you play in the studio? Mostly jazz—Stéphane Grappelli, Django Reinhardt, Stan Getz, and Paul

Desmond. Also classical music, including Italian operas.

Where do you find models for your figurative pieces? Locally. I use my family, friends, neighbors, and now and then a professional model. But all my models must have acting abilities.

What impresses you about other artists' works? I enjoy masterful compositions





that have been well-executed technically.

What artists inspire you? Maynard Dixon, Frank Brangwyn, Maurice Logan, and Edward Hopper.

What is your pet peeve? When someone doubts my ability and sincerity to deliver work.

If your studio was on fire, what is the one thing you would save? A selection

representation

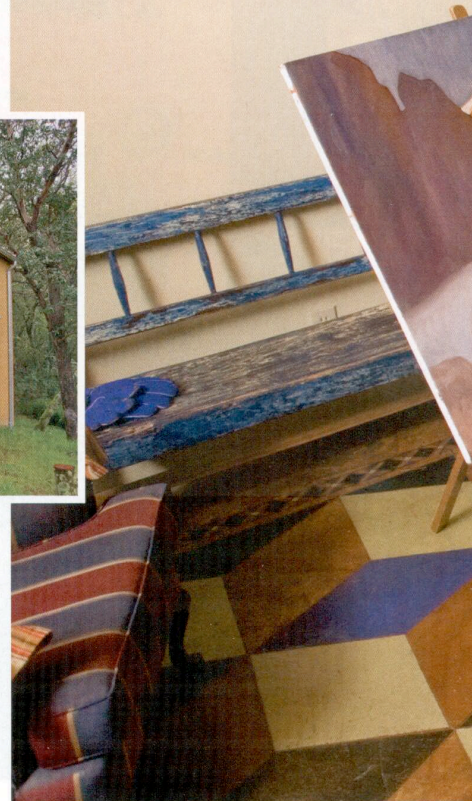
Altamira Fine Art, Jackson, WY; **Medicine Man Gallery**, Tucson, AZ, and Santa Fe, NM; **Knowlton Gallery**, Lodi, CA; **J. Willott Gallery**, Palm Desert, CA; **Michael Hollis Fine Art**, Pasadena, CA; www.ziemski.com.

upcoming shows

Two-person show, **Altamira Fine Art**, through June 12.

Solo show, **Medicine Man Gallery**, Santa Fe, NM, July 29-August 12.

Solo show, **Michael Hollis Fine Art**, October 1-29.



of art books like the one on Ludwig Hohlwein, which is signed by the artist. He was an early influence on me during my commercial illustration days.

Describe yourself in one word. I can't.

What's the best advice you have ever received? "Go out and do what you love doing right now. You need not rely on anyone but yourself." I am paraphrasing something Dick Cole, a watercolorist, told me when I showed him my portfolio upon graduating from college with the hope of seeking steady employment.

People would be surprised to learn that... I was a qualified U.S. Navy submariner.

What is the biggest misconception about the artist's life? To the average person, the artist's life may appear to be filled with hours of carefree leisure time,

dabbling with materials in a wonderful space. However, with art as a profession, one must spend serious time developing it and maintaining its success.

What is the one place people will never find you? Walmart.

What are you working on right now? I am working on three upcoming shows



for this year. Right now I am finishing work for a show at Altamira Fine Art that has imagery inspired by the Rocky Mountains and the Continental Divide. I'm painting figures, trains, and even a Wyoming license plate from 1939 that has a bucking bronco. I also have a show in Santa Fe at Medicine Man Gallery, and for that I'm painting Route 66 imagery. The third show is at Michael Hollis Fine Art, and I am doing im-

ages inspired by orange-crate labels.

When you are not painting, what do you enjoy doing? Hanging out with my fabulous family and friends and also traveling.

When people come to visit, where do you take them? To the table under the pergola in the courtyard, for a glass of wine and a plate of pasta. ❖