

Featured Artist

ED HATCH

FINDING EXTRAORDINARY IN THE ORDINARY

This RBC alumnus' core beliefs are rooted in simplicity and tranquility, which is embodied in his picturesque artwork.

BY STERLING GILES

It's the summer of 1972. Ed Hatch just graduated from Hopewell High School and landed a job at a local plant unloading liquid fertilizer from train cars. But whenever there was a lull in the day, Hatch whipped out his pen and pad and got to sketching.

Hatch's boss caught wind of this, but his response wasn't what you'd expect.

"He literally picked the phone up and said 'Call Richard Bland College and take art classes, will ya?'" Hatch reminisced with a chuckle.

He obliged—and the decision changed his life forever.

Hatch grew up in Spring Grove, Va., a sleepy town nestled in Prince George County. A stone's throw from his childhood home was his family's general store founded by his great-grandfather in 1912.

As a toddler, he would spend hours upon hours in the store sketching from his treasured bird book. Decades later, Hatch still sketches in the same space. But it's no longer a store. It's home to his art studio, Ed Hatch Fine Art.

Along the interior walls of the century-old building hang dozens of Hatch's creations. He's a disciple of the late Andrew Wyeth, a legendary realist painter who lifted from nature surrounding his home as inspiration for his paintings.

"I remember seeing his wonderful paintings that showed the ordinary things in life," Hatch said. "I saw beauty in that. Nothing grandiose caught my attention—it was just the simple things."

Hatch, much like Wyeth, doesn't venture far from home for his muses. The nearby creeks, mountains, and countryside are all he needs. From

there, his fastidious, delicate strokes craft breath-taking, picturesque snapshots of nature.

You can hear the stream gently trickling over elephant-gray rocks. The faint chirping of plump, petite birds in the autumn sky. The soothing ocean waves crashing on the sandy shore.

Richard Bland College of William & Mary (RBC) is a little under 45 minutes away from Spring Grove. But it might as well have been worlds away because the culture there—particularly within the art department—was nothing like Hatch had ever experienced before. The program featured a motley crew of gifted artists of diverse orientations, races, and ethnicities.

"It was just a lot of variety of people, which was really good for me," Hatch said. "It really exposed me to a lot of different things I wasn't used to."

Susan Brown, associate professor emerita of art, left an indelible mark on Hatch and helped him become a more disciplined artist.

"She was fantastic," he reminisced. "She'd make you work and she didn't put up with any foolishness."

The seeds planted by Brown and Hatch's classmates inspired him to bet on himself and work toward his dream of becoming a full-time artist.

"I didn't know how I was going to make a living at it," Hatch said. "But I felt it in my heart."

In 1974, Hatch received his associate's degree in art and transferred to Old Dominion University. There, he worked under Charles Sibley, the founder and first chair of the university's art department. Three years later, Hatch received his bachelor's in fine art with a concentration in printmaking.

Hatch was finally out of the nest and ready to take flight. But it wasn't smooth sailing out the gate. On one occasion, he presented his portfolio to a museum in Virginia Beach and within three seconds he was told "come back in about five years."

Over the years, the rejection was harsh and at times, the financial strain was harsher. But Hatch refused to quit and stayed the course.

"Never give up on following something that is very rewarding to your heart and soul," he affirmed.

But with the valleys also came the peaks. A memory etched in his mind is when Robert Bateman, one of the most celebrated naturalist painters of all-time, complimented his Big Tumbling Creek painting.



He said, "Gosh, I wish I'd done that," Hatch recalled, smiling cheek to cheek. "I could have exploded. It doesn't get any better than that for me."

Over the course of his decades-long career, Hatch, 70, has received countless regional, state, and national awards and honors. He's also been featured in private and corporate collections around the world, as well as produced hundreds of commissioned paintings.

When pondering his legacy, Hatch wants it to mirror what his art embodies.



"I try to put a small amount of beauty in people's lives," he said. "It's subtle work. But if it's done right, it really hits you."

In 2023, the "5 & Dime" trail—a historic, meandering route along Routes 5 and 10 that carves through Hopewell, Prince George, Charles City, Surry, and James City—was established. Ed's studio is listed as one of the trail's official landmarks.

Ed Hatch Fine Art is located in Spring Grove and is open by appointment only.



Ed Hatch outside his studio in Spring Grove, Va.