



Untitled, pen and ink



"Falling Man," mixed media on wood, 2007

Gaston often will have three pieces going at once, a combination of small works on the drawing board and others on large easels in the studio.

Besides canvas, which Gaston prefers to purchase prepared (thus skipping the process of stretching it over a frame and priming it), he also paints on wood. While he dislikes preparing a canvas, there is an energy he enjoys in preparing and distressing the wood.

If you have the opportunity to meet Gaston at a gallery opening, ask him to share his distressing process. He has been known to pour glue over the wood, set it on fire and leave it outside. "The technique turns it into a found object," he says. "It ties into the imagery of what I am doing, the primitive look."

Gaston, for all he has accomplished as an individual artist, puts the same energy into being an art advocate for the sheer appreciation of creativity.

He has taught classes about the creative process and opening up to creativity at the Dunedin Fine Art Center and the Gulf Coast Museum of Art. "I believe we are all born with the ability to be creative and we exercise it every day in what we wear, how we create our meals. Art is no different."

In his classes, Gaston encourages everyone to rely on their native intelligence and to not be a self critic. "Everyone always tells me, 'I can't draw a straight line.' I tell them straight lines are boring."

He is equally frank when encouraged to move to a larger city such as New York, where his work has been exhibited. "I am often told you need to be in New York or Los Angeles to be an artist. But it is just as easy to starve in New York as it is here. You can be an artist anywhere."

Anywhere for Gaston is firmly in Dunedin. He still lives in the same apartment he moved to more than 20 years ago. It's near his studio space, The Imago Art Colony, where around a dozen artists have studios. Visitors are welcome the first Friday of each month for an open house.

The shared space suits Gaston, who thinks artists should stick together to make a living. "It can be a tough world for an artist. People in the community have to be sold on creative art and its value. But their well-being is increased because of it."

Gaston is firm in his opinion. "For myself and others — it is our job to get the word out."

Denis Gaston is a State of Florida Individual Artist Fellowship Award recipient. Contact him and view his work at www.pava-artists.org (a shared artist Web site) or at local galleries. ■