

# Salem Life

## Back to the Drawing Board

May 2018  
COMPLIMENTARY  
Volume 2, Issue 3



*Pencil artist brings fine art to life!*

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# Masterpieces brought to you by a sharp eye & 1,500 sharp pencils

By Steve Whipple  
SalemLife Writer

Stroll around Tina Gagnon's living room or the Coffee Factory in Salem and you'll be taken back by the splendor of her matted and framed photographs of dogs, flowers and an eclectic range of nostalgic baubles like buttons and Christmas ornaments.

But -- and this is a big but -- the colorful, realistic images are not photographs. They are hyper-detailed colored pencil drawings that require as much as 100 hours to complete. Longtime Salem resident Gagnon is a member of several art organizations including the Greater Salem Artists Association and the Arts Institute Group of the Merrimack Valley.

"Tina Gagnon's skill with color pencils is unsurpassed. Approaching her works you are stuck by her ability to use color to define her forms and develop emotional response," praised GSAA President Nancy Pond. "As you get closer the details of fine lines brings you to the object and you will never see a bird, flower, rock or even a gear the same way again."

The pineapple from Mann Orchards in Methuen, Mass., looks like it was just picked. The image of a pair of beagles, Ace and Beau, is as lifelike as the real pups.

"I like the nature and nostalgia -- things that tug at people's heart," says Gagnon, 52. "They are relatable."

Nature sketches include piglets, a peacock, a pineapple, an Eastern screech-owl and a



The drawing of the peacock consists of five layers and more than 100 hours. Salem Life photo by Steve Whipple

great variety of flowers; nostalgia include the interior gears of a pocket watch, old keys and a sketch of four intricate wood carvings from the Methuen Memorial Music Hall.

The sketch of a clump of vintage Christmas ornaments, called "Trimnings," was an especially challenging self-assignment.

"I take hundreds of photos until I get the angle I like," she explains of her subjects. "The ornaments have shadows and reflections."

Gagnon, who is self-taught, says she has always drawn. Her career in the graphics art and pre-press field ended when computers took over. So in 2009, she turned her atten-

tion to her first love: fine arts. After dabbling in sculpting, acrylics, oils and other mediums, she began doodling with colored pencils. That's the medium that really clicked.

Her daughter's former bedroom became her art studio, equipped with desks, special lights and the colored pencil bureau built by her husband Steve to hold 1,500 colored pencils in six drawers, each with three layers.

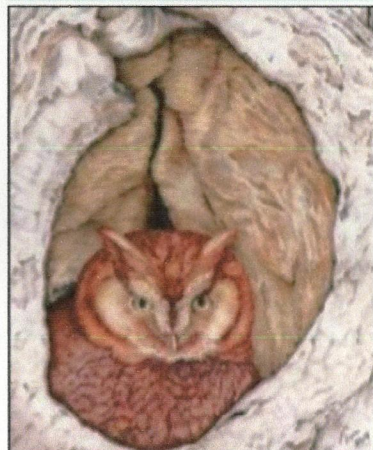
On the drafting table is a rather remarkable sketch of an iridescent blue peacock.

"I went to the Southwick Zoo and took

## CHECK OUT HER WORK!

Find Tina Gagnon's artwork on display for viewing and purchasing here:

- April 21: Lake Street Garden Center's "Spring Fling" from 10am to 4pm; 37 Lake St., Salem.
- May 5-6 -- Mack's Apple Orchard's "Art in Action" from 10am to 4pm; 230 Mammoth Road, Londonderry.
- Ongoing -- The Coffee Factory (formerly Radio Shack) at Salem's Rockingham Mall



Gagnon's sketch of this Eastern screech-owl won first place at an Arts Institute Group of the Merrimack Valley competition. The judge liked it so much that she bought the \$450 work.



**Artist,** continued from 3

pictures of the peacock, then laid them out for a rough sketch. That took four or five hours. Then I'd tweak it. It takes about five to six layers to make the colors pop," she explained.

That tweaking is at a pace of about an inch an hour, working from left to right so as not to smudge what she's drawn. The \$600 finished drawing illustrates how pencils have earned a place in the art world.

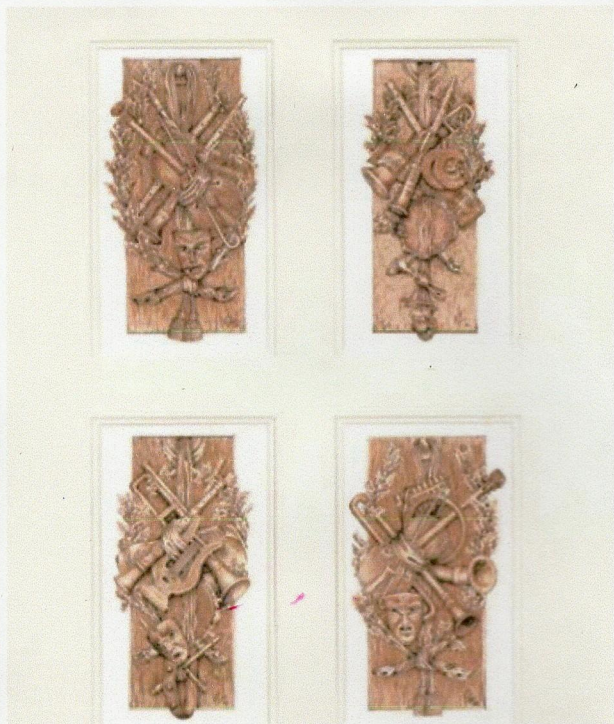
"Color pencils, watercolors, inks, pastels and acrylics have all improved color fastness to permanent," notes Pond. "These mediums have become the choice of many skilled artists because they get amazing and interesting effects that collectors are finding compelling. Fine art for a long time was limited to oil and sculpture because other mediums broke down too quickly, (but) nowadays artists have a wonderful variety."

And while Gagnon can draw just about anything, there's one subject she avoids.

"I don't do people; the expectation is very high," she explains. "If I do a flower and make a mistake, I can add a petal. If I mess up a person, I can't add another ear."



Gagnon is often commissioned to draw sketches of people's pets, like these two, Ace and Beau. Courtesy photos



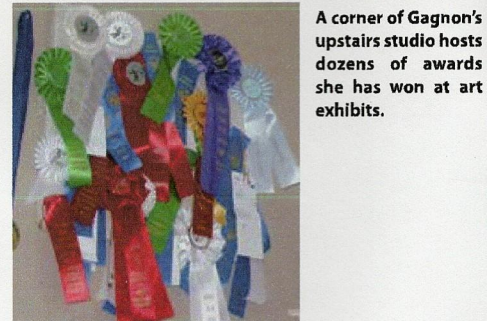
One of Gagnon's most difficult sketches is of four wood carvings at the Methuen Memorial Music Hall. She wanted her accuracy to pay homage to the original artist.



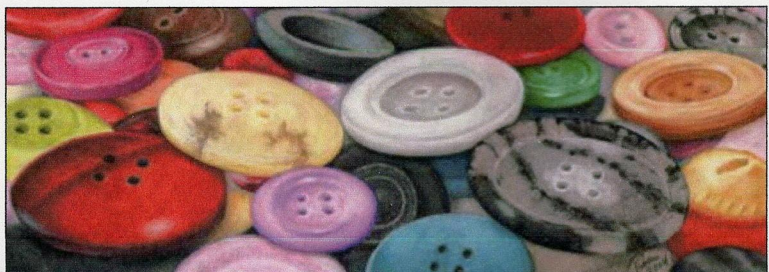
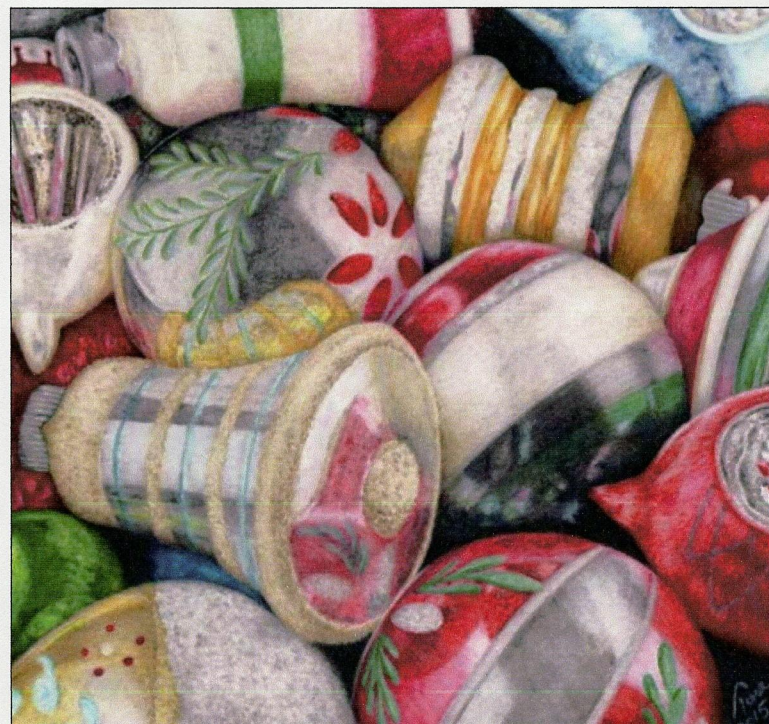
Gagnon's favorite drawing is "We, Wee, Oui" of five piglets at the Deerfield Fair.



Gagnon photographed this pineapple at Mann Orchards, then sketched it with amazing accuracy.



A corner of Gagnon's upstairs studio hosts dozens of awards she has won at art exhibits.



Nostalgic items like vintage Christmas ornaments and buttons are among Gagnon's favorites because people often have good memories associated with them.