By Michael Wilmering
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Australian-born artist Pete Tillack has always had a deep-rooted connection to the ocean. The tranquil waterscapes he creates evoke such a peaceful mindset in his viewers that his collectors have dubbed him the “Master of Mood.”

“Master of Mood” was titled by many a viewer to express the feelings that my work invoked in them,” Tillack says. “It sets a tone of calmness and serenity that we all need in our lives. Many of them get lost in the work and release their daily frustrations and aspirations [and surrender to] their desire to find that place, whether it be real or their dream destination.”

Water has always played an integral role in Tillack’s life, and that influence has been transferred into his trademark artistic style of detail, light and color composition. “Nothing is more serene than water,” he says. “I love the reflections and the energy.”

Tillack has been an avid surfer since childhood. Although he never considered painting as a career, he always had an urge to be creative and constantly looked for ways to channel his artistic energy. For Tillack, surfing provided that outlet.

“In the surfing community, we use the phrase ‘the wave is like a canvas,’ it allows the surfer to create whatever he wants using the power and energy [of the waves] and the surfboard as a brush,” he says.

In 1993, Tillack abandoned his job as an electrician in Australia to take a seven-year, surf-inspired journey around the world. This exposed Tillack to the raw beauty of nature, which has become his driving artistic inspiration.

When he could come up with materials, Tillack would create works of art and sell them to pay for his travels, or he would give them away to those who showed him hospitality throughout his journey. However, he still wasn’t confident enough to paint full time. Tillack’s trip was mainly influenced by his search for new waves, but the places he traveled and the peace he found would one day serve as a model for his trademark subject matter.

In 2002, Tillack again found himself working as an electrician building trade-show booths for a U.S.-based company called Studio 2. As the job progressed, Tillack went from strictly erecting walls to adding faux finishes and other decorative elements. Eventually he made the jump to street art and murals. Tillack can still remember the day it all clicked while he and two other artists were creating a 16-x-16-foot chalk mural in Valencia, Spain, for a street festival.

“All of a sudden, it was like a math problem that I finally figured out—the contrasts with shadows, mid-tones and highlights,” Tillack explains. “It all made sense to me.”

Tillack had always felt his work was flat up until continued on page xx
Tillack tries to capture the serenity and beauty of nature through his work in the hopes that it might inspire people to better appreciate the environment. His travels made him increasingly aware of the effect the ever-expanding population has on the ecosystem.

“I hope to show the value of the untouched environment, as it is becoming an endangered species,” Tillack says. “With my travels, I’ve seen so much of the environment and the beauty of it. I’ve also seen the growth and the damage of what our footprints are creating. If we lose what we’ve got, we can’t really get it back.”

To raise money and global awareness, Tillack has partnered with the Surf Industry Manufacturers Association (SIMA) and Propaganda (a brand consultant group on youth culture) to create original works of art that are auctioned off to benefit oceanic environmental efforts. In 2006, he created “A Surfer’s Code,” an 11-foot balsa-wood surfboard for the Liquid Nation Foundation, a charity created by The Aguerre Brothers—co-founders of the popular surf company REEF. SIMA organized the auction, and Billabong CEO Paul Naude purchased “A Surfer’s Code” for $20,000. Last year, Naude purchased “Is It Still a Barrel If No One Sees It,” a 9-foot, 6-inch balsa-wood board at the 2007 SIMA event.

Before Tillack starts on a piece for charity, he meets with event planners and officials to determine the theme of the event, who will be in attendance and the major issue the benefit is trying to address. This way, he can deliver a personalized piece with significant impact influenced by the fundraiser.

“It symbolizes much more because it’s a piece that has been created specifically for that cause,” the artist says.

Tillack’s resolve to have a positive environmental impact has been strengthened even more by the birth of his daughter, Chilli.

“I can’t help but see her following along the same lifestyle that my wife and I have chosen—the life of following your own dreams and living healthy,” Tillack says. “To enjoy this, you need to understand the effects of the environment and the changes that are being made. We want her to have as good a life as what we’re having.”

Since his daughter’s birth in March 2007, people have noticed more vibrancy in his art, something the artist didn’t even realize at first. Upon reflection, Tillack says he is aware of a greater presence of love and compassion expressed in his work, which is an obvious indication of the joy he is experiencing as a new parent. Chilli has even had an influence on his constantly evolving color palette.

“She’ll point at one that intrigues her and give a little grunt,” Tillack says. “In a way, it’s so primitive for her to be attracted to those colors, so I figure that [attraction] has to be in everyone.”

For now, Tillack is content to focus on the serenity of water as his primary subject matter and hone his style by experimenting with abstract elements and changing color combinations. He says some of his newer works play off his realistic pieces and use both acrylic and oil. The tranquility he feels when he creates these vivid scenes has an addictive quality.

“The more you do, the more you want to do,” he says.

Tillack currently resides in San Diego with his wife, Lizbeth Garcia, and their daughter, Chilli. Looking back on his past experiences, Tillack was never sure where he would be from week to week during his world adventure, but he never lost sight of what was truly important and feels fortunate to be where he is today.

“Being an artist is always a challenge from the creative side all the way to the business side, and it is an adventure like my travels,” Tillack says. “Nothing beats following your dreams.” ABN

Source
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