

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

A Portrait of the Physician as an Artist

When an uncle of Dr. Peter G. Tuteur gave him his first camera at the age of 10, one of the first images he captured was shards of light beaming parallel to a gangway in his native Chicago neighborhood.

The angle of light “put a strong shadow on any kind of rough surface like bricks or stones,” recalled Dr. Tuteur, an internist who directs the pulmonary function laboratory at Washington University, St. Louis.

Today, he still snaps photos of abstract images, some of which hang in the university’s pulmonary function laboratory. “I favor taking images in junkyards or back streets. My goal is to depict on film what anybody could have seen if they were in the mind-set to look for it. You frequently find me crouching down in gutters looking at broken windows or walking through empty lots or defunct or closed factories.”

Dr. Tuteur uses a medium format camera so he can enlarge images to 4-by-4 feet. He works with only a normal lens and available light. “I set limitations, but those limitations are kind of fun for me,” he said. “I did have a darkroom, but my time is limited and I prefer to shoot rather than to develop.”

He recently spoke to a group of inner-city middle school students about his hobby and told them that a photograph “is an example of what the photographer decides to include and decides to exclude. Then you put a tone or twist on it to emphasize your message. That’s what I try to do.”

Dr. Tuteur estimates that he spends the equivalent of 1-4 days a month taking photos. He considers the hobby a healthy outlet to his medical practice. “Medicine is very comfortable after you’ve done it for awhile, because you know what the rules are; you feel comfortable in making decisions,” he said. “If you start something new, you lose that comfort. So it takes some energy to make the decision to go ahead and do something else.”

Galleries in St. Louis, Chicago, and Breckenridge, Colo., have shown and sold Dr. Tuteur’s work. “I love not only showing my images, but I love to be in the galleries to discuss them with the viewers as well,” he said. During a gallery showing in Chicago, a man was admiring one of his sepia tone images depicting a sunrise over a lake in eastern Missouri. Dr. Tuteur introduced himself to the man, who said, “You’ve made my day. This is where I spent my youth.”

The man used to camp along the lake’s shoreline as a child. “That evoked all sorts of historical memories for him,” Dr. Tuteur said.

In one future project, Dr. Tuteur plans to spotlight one aspect of medicine. He hopes “to photograph what the patient sees in a physician-patient encounter,” he said. “Most often if you look at the publicity shots, they’re either two shots or shots of the doctor in a favorable light. That isn’t necessarily what the patient sees. I have that on the back burner.”

Symbols of Resiliency

As a youngster, Dr. Carl C. Bell aspired to be a cartoonist. “I wasn’t that good, though,” said Dr. Bell, chief executive officer and president of Community Mental Health Council Inc. in Chicago. “That was the problem.”

But that didn’t stop him from taking up a hobby of replicating drawings of Marvel comic book characters and making collages of cutout comic book characters and superheroes. “I can replicate but I can’t create,” he said.

In medical school, he drew an image of Captain America on the wall of his apartment. Today, three murals of cutout comic book characters hang in his home. “It’s a cheap escape,” he said.

He’s also dabbled in other art forms over the years, including animated film and sculptures made of soapstone.

Last summer, he created a mural of Spider-Man on the wall of his back porch. He found a Spider-Man comic book cover, drew a grid of the image on the wall, then filled in the grid with felt-tipped marker, and then painted the image.

“It’s a good feeling to do something concrete, because my work as a CEO does not give me the opportunity to see tangible ‘oh, look what I did’ outcomes of my work,” he explained. “For me, the Marvel comic themes represent turning learned hopelessness into learned helpfulness. Daredevil was blind, Spider-Man had relationship problems, and the X-Men are mutants, so they’re freaks. Hulk has a temper problem; the Fantastic Four got irradiated by cosmic rays, so they’re messed up; [and] poor Ben Grimm [of the Fantastic Four] is the Thing, this ugly monster.”

He especially identifies with Spider-Man because “I want images of power, and models, and helpfulness, and winning, and a goal to live for,” said Dr. Bell, who is also director of public and community psychiatry at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Works of Glass

Five years ago, Dr. Natalie Semchyshyn took an 8-week evening class on leaded glass at a community college. She was in the middle of her dermatology residency at Washington University in St. Louis, and she initially worried what impact the class would have on her busy schedule.

“It’s really easy to ignore your own needs when you’re in training because it’s all about learning and studying,” said Dr. Semchyshyn, who recently returned to St. Louis after training in California for 3



Dr. Peter G. Tuteur titled this photograph “Rust Hook.”

COURTESY DR. PETER G. TUTEUR

Trading the Scalpel for a Paintbrush

Dr. David S. Sumner of Springfield, Ill., hadn’t used a paintbrush for 28 years, until he retired from surgical practice in 1998 at the age of 65.

He started painting while in high school, did some in college, medical school, and the Army. But he stopped in 1970 because of the demands of his clinical and academic career.

He began his golden years by using both oils and watercolors to paint everything from still lifes and landscapes to farms and urban scenes, both locally and in Europe.

“My wife thinks I do the best job on architectural things like cabins and churches in Europe,” said Dr. Sumner, who retired as professor of surgery and chief of the section of peripheral

vascular surgery at Southern Illinois University in Springfield, a position he had held since 1975. The paintings “give me some recognition around the art circles in town,” he said. “It has brought me into contact with a whole different group of people than I had when I was in active practice.”

These days, he devotes a couple of hours each day to painting. “If you do have some artistic talent, keep working at it so there is something to fill in the gaps that occur when you leave practice,” he advised. “Painting is something you can do by yourself or with a group, any time of the day. It’s a very versatile avocation.”

To view his works, visit www.sumnerart.com/index2.htm.



Watercolor of “Vernazza” shown here. Dr. David S. Sumner rediscovered his passion for art after retirement and spends time each day painting.

COURTESY DR. DAVID S. SUMNER

years. “Ultimately, it was so nurturing to me, just to be taking care of that little part of myself that is something other than medicine and other than concentrating on learning and working really hard and trying to push myself that way. It’s kind of hard when you first start to take the time [for an art hobby], but I’m sure it’s the same with people who have kids and really devote time to their family. I think it makes you a well-rounded person.”

In a home studio, she creates one-of-a-kind leaded glass designs intended for hanging as sun catchers or ornaments. She usually incorporates organic elements such as sliced polished geodes, rocks, and minerals but has also started to add pieces of wood and stone beads. “I usually get inspired to do a piece by a person, someone that I’m close to, their personality,” she said. “I feel I want to make a nice piece for them, and I go where that takes me.”

Each piece takes about 2 weeks to make and ranges in size from 8.5-by-11 inches to 4-by-4 feet. Making the design consumes the biggest chunk of time. She makes designs on paper and uses special scissors to cut a pattern for where the glass will be placed. “Once I have that down, I decide what glass is going to go where, what color, what kind of glass,” said Dr. Semchyshyn, who does not sell her work.

Finishing the creations brings her a sense of fulfillment. “There’s a lot of thinking involved, and having a hand in making something that I think is really beautiful” is very satisfying, she said. “My favorite part is polishing it off at the end, holding it up, and seeing the final product. You’re never 100% sure what it looks like until everything is all soldered together. You have to work with how the glass looks with light shining on it and also with light shining through it, which can be a totally different look.”

By Doug Brunk, San Diego Bureau