

Picture perfect

Tom Fink

— Patrick Gordon didn't want anyone to make a fuss.

Never mind the fact that he's a nationally recognized painter and is considered by many to be the country's leading watercolor artist, the Claremore native didn't want to be in the spotlight this weekend.

"This wasn't about me — it was about honoring the rich history of Claremore and encouraging its future artists," Gordon said.

New York resident Gordon returned to his hometown of Claremore this weekend to be on-hand for the presentation of a suite of his prints to the Robson Performing Arts Center, at the Saturday evening performance of "Beauty and the Beast." "My family and the Robsons were friends for years, so it's interesting that these prints are being donated to a building that bears Frank's name," Gordon said.

Each of Gordon's prints is a piece originally painted in commemoration of a specific family member.

"'Nell's Bells,' which was a painting I originally created for the Metropolitan Opera, was named in honor of my mother, Janelle Gordon, who taught me how to paint," Gordon said. "She's represented in the painting by a number of things — she had a collection of crystal bells, she was a rug hooker, so there's a rug hook in the painting — there are a number of things I put in that are symbolic of her."

Likewise, the other donated prints are similarly reflective of his family.

"'Better Than a John Grisham Novel' was painted with my brother, Jack, in mind," Gordon said. "There's not a better criminal attorney in Claremore, maybe not in Oklahoma, than my brother Jack, so, in my mind, the work he does is better than a John Grisham novel."

Additionally, "The Well Bred Painting" and "The River Runs Through It, Too," painted in honor of Gordon's other brothers, Todd and Mike, were donated, as well as "The Captain All Vegged Out," in memory of Gordon's father, Jack.

"My dad was a real character — a little odd," Gordon said, a trace of a smile in his voice. "We used to call him 'Captain Jack.'"

While Gordon wasn't wanting attention on himself, he was honored for his donation at Saturday night's performance.

"It's a tremendous gift to the Center for an artist of Mr. Gordon's caliber to donate these prints to the Performing Arts Center," said Robson PAC Executive Director Ruby Quinn. "As the Center is a gift to (Claremore) schools, it will be good for local students to see Mr. Gordon's art, and know that he started here, just like them.

"In seeing these prints on display, we feel it will encourage young people with artistic talents to pursue and nurture those talents, knowing they can achieve great things with them," she added.

Although Gordon is now based in New York, he has never forgotten his Rogers County roots.

"The Gordons were certainly a good family to come from in terms of having brains and talent — I was lucky," he laughed, "and Claremore was a good town to grow up in.

"One thing that was instilled in me growing up was a great Midwestern sensibility," he said. "New York is certainly a far cry from Claremore, Oklahoma, but it's like, you can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy."

As a native of Claremore, Gordon noted he feels proud his prints are among the first to be placed on permanent public display in the city — and he hopes they're not the last.

"Growing up, I never could have imagined there'd be a venue for artists to display their paintings in public art collections," he said, "but times change — in this case, for the better."

In addition to his works being displayed at the Performing Arts Center, Gordon said he'd be in favor of Claremore residents taking it upon themselves to create funding for a building exclusively to display works of art.

“What Frank and Ludmila have done is fantastic and it’s at a time when the city is ready to have its own performing arts center,” Gordon said. “I think they’re ready to have a place where they can go and enjoy art collections, as well. “Having lived in New York for the past few years, I’ve seen first-hand how public art improves the quality of living for people, and I’m hoping that Claremore is open to the idea of having a place to display works of art,” he said. Back in Claremore for the first time in six months, Gordon said he’s looking forward to a time when he can return and find an art museum or other building showcasing works of art. “I think Claremore is ready to have its own public art collection,” he said. “If this community can get behind and support a \$14 million performing arts center, you can, by golly, have a good public arts collection to go with it.” Until then, though, patrons can enjoy the aesthetic of Gordon’s work inside the new Performing Arts Center. “More than anything, I want it to honor Claremore’s history and maybe give people who see them some small introduction to the joy of having a public arts collection,” Gordon said. “Like I said, it’s not about me — it’s about the art.”

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