

VISUAL ARTS

PREVIEW: Thomas Paquette exhibit

Celebrating nature

By Karen Rene Merkle
Contributing writer

Thomas Paquette is a northwestern Pennsylvanian by choice rather than birth. Having been raised in Minneapolis and then attending college even farther north in Bemidji, Minn., you understand why he considers our snowy corner of the state “the sunny South.”



Thomas Paquette

It's not just the weather that appeals to him. The renowned nature and landscape painter is vice president of the board of directors at the Crary Art Gallery in Warren (where he lives), and he's found oodles of artistic inspiration here as well as in wilderness areas across



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Thomas Paquette's "Rising Tide of Fog."

the country.

Those locales inform the spirit of his one-man show, “On Nature’s Terms: Paintings by Thomas Paquette,” at St. Bonaventure University. It originally exhibited in Santa Barbara, Calif., earlier in 2014 and moves to the Evansville Museum of Art in Evansville, Ind., for a December to March run.

Q How did art become your career?

Since deciding as an undergrad that art was worth spending my life on, I have been fortunate to do it full time. It all started just after earning my MFA from Southern Illinois Uni-

versity. Not knowing what my next step should be in life, I dropped off my work at a reputable gallery in Minneapolis. Surprise was, they sold them. That provided enough money for me to rent a warehouse studio that I lived in illegally down the street a couple blocks from Prince’s club on First Avenue. I was almost immediately out of there, however, after being awarded a three-year residency-fellowship in Miami Beach — which to a Minnesotan in January was not a thinking decision. And every so often, things would open up like that, allowing me to do my work all these years.

Q What will visitors in St. Bonaventure, and how they responded?

The paintings are the result of about three years of dedicated work on a project aimed to celebrate one of my favorite aspects of our country’s heritage. There are 65 paintings in the show, all focused on

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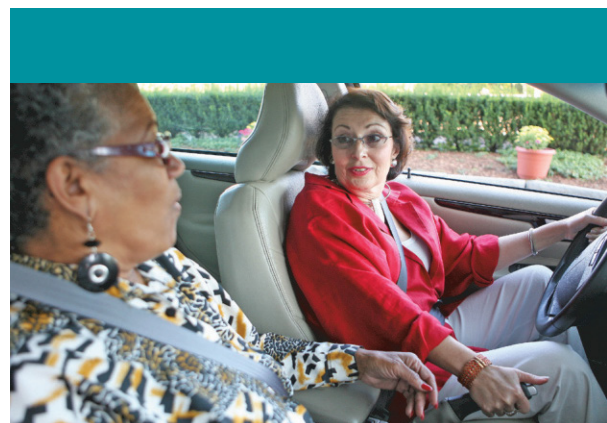
federally designated wilderness areas that I visited in the last few years. This year is the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, and so I took that as license to paint my favorite subject, the land in its most natural state. I wanted to show the greatest range possible, from southern swamps to Rocky Mountain peaks, from deserts to northern lakes, from east to west coast wildernesses. So I drove 24,000 miles getting material, and visited 32 wilderness areas. There are about 20 represented in the show.

I can’t begin to tell you how much favorable response I have gotten. It

has been very gratifying. Warren County schools are bringing busloads of students in on four days this month, well over an hour away. A collector flew up from Georgia just to see the show. And when it was in California, I received tons of great response there, too.

Q Any other projects or exhibits coming up?

It must be the conservationist in me again: My next solo museum show is about water (“Touching on Water”). It opens at the Rockwell Museum in Corning (N.Y.) in late January, concurrent with “On Nature’s Terms” in Evansville. This has got to be one of the biggest achievements of my career so far, two simultaneous solo museum shows, but my aim is to have in those shows the best work possible. That’s all. That’s what keeps it moving.



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