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Bonnie Burch: Passion of Martin Masters' featured artist rivals his creativity

By Bonnie Burch
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Artist Frank T. Gee feels just at home waist-deep in a brook full of trout as he does in front of a blank canvas.

That's just one of the interesting items about this Nashville native, who was born in China, that I uncovered during a chat with him as he was dropping off some paintings for inclusion in Martin Masters, an art show and sale to raise money for the FiftyForward Martin Center, a senior activity facility in Brentwood.

"From a tender age, I knew I was going to be an artist. Every time I picked up a pencil, there was no doubt. I'm not normal and don't want to be," he said.

Gee, who has a studio in Gallatin, is this year's featured artist for the eighth edition of the fundraiser that includes work from 40 other artists. It will be 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Nov. 8 and 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Nov. 9 at the center, 960 Heritage Way. Admission is free.

A 1972 graduate of the Memphis Academy of Arts with a degree in commercial art illustration and advertising, he also developed his own artistic pursuits. In 1974, he opened the Frank T. Gee Studio to reproduce and distribute his limited-edition prints.

"I started in watercolors. It's still my passion and my medium of choice," Gee said.

But he's also well-known for his acrylic paintings.

His subjects are varied, from flowers to wine bottles to African scenery and wildlife.

"All my paintings come from my life experience," he said.

An avid fly-fisherman, hiker and canoeist, Gee often records his best fish catches in a method known as Chinese fish rubbing, or gyotaku. Before photography or taxidermy was invented, people used this printing to provide a true record of a fish's size and type.

"I always paint on the night of a full moon. I think I might be a werewolf. I start with a raw canvas and easel. I'll pace back and forth. I might play some soft music. It's so peaceful being by myself. And I hide my paintings from my wife. I don't want her to see it until it's done," he said.

You can meet Gee during an opening reception with wine and hors d'oeuvres and get a sneak preview of the art exhibition 5-7:30 p.m. Nov. 7 at the Martin Center. Tickets are \$35 and can be reserved by visiting www.themartincentertn.org or calling 615-376-0102.
