



JOHN COULFARI/CITIZEN-TIMES  
"The school of spontaneity is the school of the abstract expressionist," artist Jonas Gerard said. "My concentration is being sincere, being genuine, and allowing the energy to come through, and not judging if it's a good painting or a bad painting or will sell or not sell. It's not about pleasing others."

# LETTING GO

River District's Gerard paints with passion — while dancing

By Paul Clark  
and Barbara Blake  
STAFF WRITERS

ASHEVILLE — Jonas Gerard dances when he paints, and it's not just because of the music that's playing while he's working.

What's dancing isn't his feet so much as it is his soul, he believes. A long life of loving and letting go has opened his creative energy, he said in recent interviews in his studio in Asheville's River Arts District, a space he's occupied since May.

"Here's the secret of this type of painting," he said last month as he finished the fourth of six large paintings he planned to complete that day. "It's totally different from what they teach in school. What they teach is

very much about the results, the composition. Where is the yellow going to go? How you paint the sky, the trees?"

"My kind of painting has nothing to do with that," the Moroccan-born artist, now 66, said. "It has to do with what's going on, the process of letting go. The canvas tells me what kind of color on this side. The canvas speaks to me, and I just obey, so to speak.

"The music helps a lot. A good cup of coffee helps a lot. In this case, it was V8. Where did I put it? Never mind. I probably painted with it."

## A long way

Gerard's works are in the collections of World Bank, Price Waterhouse, Raymond

James Financial, the University of Minnesota, Worldwide Nissan and the Florida Department of State. Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, Sassoon Fashions and Megabank in Miami have commissioned his work, as have private collectors in Paris, Saudi Arabia and Duesseldorf, Germany.

"It's as much of a pleasure to talk about Jonas as it is to talk to him or to look at his art," said Carol Gough, co-owner of Artizen Fine Arts Gallery in Dallas, Texas, which sells his work. "Jonas may be the most passionate artist we've ever come across, and all of that passion shows in his work."

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## THE ARTIST

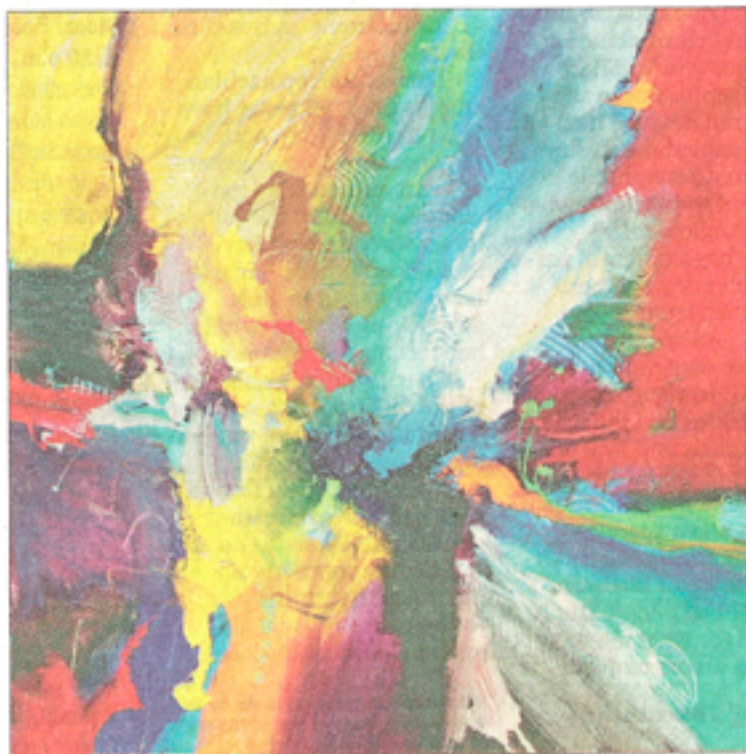
**Who:** Jonas Gerard, painter.  
**Home:** Asheville's River Arts District since May; 40 years in Miami.

**Medium:** Acrylics on canvas.  
**Price:** \$50 for small digital prints; up to \$20,000 for original paintings; average price \$2,000 to \$4,000.

**Contact:** Jonas Gerard Fine Art, 240 Olingman Ave., 333-4971, [www.jonasgerard.com](http://www.jonasgerard.com).

## WEB EXTRA

Visit [CITIZEN-TIMES.com/video](http://CITIZEN-TIMES.com/video) to see footage of Jonas Gerard painting in his studio.



SPECIAL TO THE CITIZEN-TIMES

"Presence Is" by Jonas Gerard, 48 by 48 inches. Not for sale.



JOHN COULAKIS/JCOULAKIS@CITIZEN-TIMES

From the first step into the Jonas Gerard gallery, one's senses are happily assaulted with a riot of color, texture and movement.

## PAINT: Art is spiritual for Gerard

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After 40 years of increasing artistic celebrity in Miami, selling his brilliantly colored paintings as fast as he could produce them, he had had enough.

"I had made a name for myself. I just got bored of the same thing," he said. "I decided to leave, and look for another place."

Four months ago, he found Asheville, just over the mountains from his daughter, Mira, an art professor at East Tennessee State University. He quickly rented a 5,000-square-foot space on Clingman Avenue adjoining Clingman Avenue Coffee and Catering, and Jonas Gerard Fine Art burst onto the scene.

"Jonas has loyal customers who are now coming to the River District, so he is helping bring in new clientele," said Barbara Perez, a potter and sculptor and president of the River District Artists group. "But he also is very generous in spirit, welcoming the young artists — all artists — into his studio to talk about his style and his work. He is a wonderful new presence in the district."

### No secret

"A lot of painters, students approach me and ask me, what's the secret (to his style of painting)?" Gerard said. "The secret is simple but yet it's very complicated. It takes a lifetime to let go, to dive out of a plane without a parachute, to jump off the cliff without wings. To just trust the energy that will take care of you. It's that kind of fearless attitude that (makes) the artist. In that way, the painter becomes the artist. There are a lot of painters out there, but there are very few artists."

"The artist is really a vessel for this energy to come through. It's about the purity of the energy. In my case, I've been meditating for about 40 years, so that helps a lot."

This is not an artist who stands with a palette and brush and carefully constructs a picturesque scene. Painting, to Gerard, is a spiritual experience, informed by his studies with his "master," the Indian guru Kirpal Singh, and executed with the musical aid of salsa, Afro-Cuban, rock and blues as he dances about the canvas for hours at a time — often with an audience of spectators who happen to be in the gallery.

Each splash of paint thrown jubilantly toward its target is tinted with some small piece of the strange and wonderful experiences Gerard has encountered, from his beatnik days in New York to his humble presentation of the official United States Bicentennial portrait to President Gerald Ford in the White House.

"It was very typical of the kind of work I was doing in the '70s, much detail," he said of the portrait. "I was very successful, making lots of money. But I got very tired of it very fast. I wanted to be more of a painter. I wanted to paint what my personal life was about."

Gerard moved to Florida and began selling his work to galleries all over the country, dabbling occasionally in sculpture and eventually moving from his detailed portraits into the explosive, abstract canvases he does now.

"There is nothing 'right' about any of these," he said, pointing to the four pieces he had done that day. He often looks at the colors and movements he's just put on canvas and thinks they're wrong. But then he sees they're right. He looks at what he can do with it, what it will look like if he adds some yellow.

"So yes, mistakes are preferred," he said. "When I give a workshop, I ask my students to do mistakes. They're not allowed to do something right. Mistakes are the mind stepping out of the way. The more the mental processes are out of the way, the more the creative energy can come through."

"You are just the receiver at the end of the pipe. And the pipe is usually clogged up with judgment, all kinds of interpretations (about) right, wrong. Which narrows it down to barely a pinhole."

"I say, scrap all that, get rid of all the plaque and let the blood flow. And watch what happens."