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Words of a Veteran: Doing Art Shows for 50 Years

by Jonas Gerard

In 2007, artist Jonas Gerard will mark his fiftieth year of outdoor art exhibitions. A prolific painter and sculptor, he estimates that over his career he has executed several thousand portraits, paintings, abstract sculptures and mixed media works—many of which hang in top corporate and private collections across the country. But there will be one painting he will always remember as his most special.

In 1975, Mr. Gerard was inspired by the upcoming Bicentennial to create a unique piece of art; a painting that would celebrate in images the 200 years of American history and heritage. "We the People" measures eight feet in diameter and incorporates many of America's most famous icons and historical figures. In the center, a young boy looks out over the scene, gazing towards a vibrant sunrise.

On July 17, 1975 it was accepted at the White House by President Gerald R. Ford on behalf of the American people and given the honor to being named the "Bicentennial Portrait."



President Gerald Ford shakes hands with artist Jonas Gerard at the White House.

Art shows are a way of life.

I'm a painter and I love what I do and I get paid for it. Can you beat that?

These days I do mostly very large abstract paintings. I started at the age of 16, showing my painting against the outside walls of NYU in Greenwich Village in 1957. I know of only one other person who has been in this business as long as I have. And I'm still at it. Now I travel all over the East coast, the South and Midwest with a van and trailer and a full time assistant.

Doing art shows is a way of life.

In my opinion, there is nothing like it. It solves all the problems artists have. It's fantastically perfect. All solutions to all problems are found by being present and receptive at art

continuously successful we have to push ourselves beyond our comfort zones. It keeps you alive and fresh. I've done it all, I've seen it all—from exhibiting in coffee shops in Greenwich Village in the 60s to exhibiting in major NY, Miami, Chicago, DC, and other galleries. I've had my own gallery at least six times. I've had very large warehouse studios with three assistants but have always done art shows to support it all. I organized art festivals. I've painted from nudes to abstracts, worked in clay, sculpted in wood, welded, went from 3D mixed media and back to painting. I've had a few "no-sale" shows in my life as well as several five-figure shows. I've been in little-known church shows as well as in great national shows and have



"We the People"

festivals. In every show thousands of people come to see you and your work. What gallery can offer you that? The answers to it all come to you, clients come to you, all kinds of art connections come to you: doctors, lawyers, therapists, lunch menus, new relationships, all kinds of valuable info, good weather, bad weather. It all comes to you, for you. All you have to do is be there, be open, loving, grateful and sincere.

Patience can easily be added to the mix. All the challenges that come up in art shows are lessons in life. Whatever issue one needs to work on is clearly shown to you. The opportunities for personal and artistic growth and art business growth are beyond description. It's a perfect way of life for an artist because to be

also been rejected from those great shows. I've even been kicked out of a show once, and I've been in the White House presenting art to the President. The spectrum of my art experience has been very wide and on top of that nothing remains the same.

There is no better profession in the world than being an artist, always challenging, never boring.

God willing, I'll die with a brush in my hand. ♦

Mr. Gerard's Secrets of Success:

- Art that's alive sells. That is the most important lesson I have learned and am still learning. It has to be alive and fresh. Not last year's fresh, this year's fresh.
- Making art cannot be an option. It has to be a must, a passion, a reason for living. It's not an occupation. It's a way of life. You eat, sleep, and walk art. The artist's canvas is his whole life.
- The work has to be as honest and truthful as possible.
Every brush stroke, every gesture in the clay, every click of the camera must be from the heart. The honesty of the process of making art is more important than the results. Making art for the sake of getting good results and ignoring the passion of every step along the way creates good looking "dead" art.
- The world out there is starving for uplifting soul food. From my point of view, art that's alive can fill that void. When it does, the sale is inevitable.
- Gimmicks appear to be the solution but ultimately don't work; there is no juice in that. Clever concepts of what might sell do not define what a true artist is. There is no real satisfaction in that.
- Doing art shows just for the purpose of making money will do just that, at best, nothing else.