

SCA Member Profile:

JEFFREY NEUMANN



Neon signs interspersed with images of legendary football coaches and questions about the meaning of life; of all the excellent talks I heard at the recent SCA conference in Albuquerque none were quite as unusual and thought provoking as that of “Road Trip, The Paintings of Jeffrey Neumann.” Filled with his artistic roadside depictions, some of which will be featured in a future issue of the *SCA Journal*, the presentation was a travelogue of Neumann’s life and how the two-lane highways have influenced him. “The American road is my muse in a search for meaning and my window into the soul of America,” he says.

Neumann’s story begins, ironically, with a trip from Cedar Rapids, Iowa to Albuquerque in 1956 when he was three years old. His father had been hired as an assistant football coach by the University of New Mexico and joined an impressive staff that included future Super Bowl coaches Marv Levy and Bill Walsh. En route to their new home, the Neumann’s Oldsmobile broke down in Tucumcari; it was on Route 66 where Neumann initially became inspired by the sights and sounds of America.

After relocating to New England in the late 1960s, Neumann took an interest in painting and also learned to blow a mean harmonica starting at age 10. Although he envisioned a life as an artist, his career took a different route as he became a successful product manager for 25 years in the art paper business. Even though the job enabled him to see the country and play harmonica with bands in a wide array of blues clubs on his travels, something vital was missing. A close call with death battling non-Hodgkin lymphoma left Neumann reflecting on what was really important in his life. He whittled it down

to three items: “**To love someone. To be loved by someone. To do meaningful work.**”

Always traveling with his camera and harmonica while on business trips, Neumann had never stopped defining himself as an artist. His new resolution resulted in him leaving his corporate job to become an artist and teacher. “Making art is important work, making a difference in someone’s life through teaching art makes it even more meaningful,” says Neumann. He has recently finished his Masters of Education after completing his practicum at Monument Mountain High School in Great Barrington, MA.

Neumann has also found success with his paintings, contemporary realistic renditions of vernacular American architecture that have been featured in five solo exhibitions. He avoids nostalgia or clichéd sentimentality in his pieces, painting the cafes, motels, and diners as he finds them today with all their associated wear. His goal is to preserve what was good about the vintage American roadside—its post-World War II exuberance, its irrepressible spirit—and build on it for future generations. “Let’s give young people the opportunity to experience the rich tapestry of 20th Century roadside America through preservation and education,” says Neumann.

Summing up the latest phase of his life, Neumann reflects excitedly, “This is a journey that constantly finds new meaning around every corner in the road and creates new meaning through art.”

For more on Jeffrey’s art and music, see www.jeffreyneumann.com

— Douglas Towne