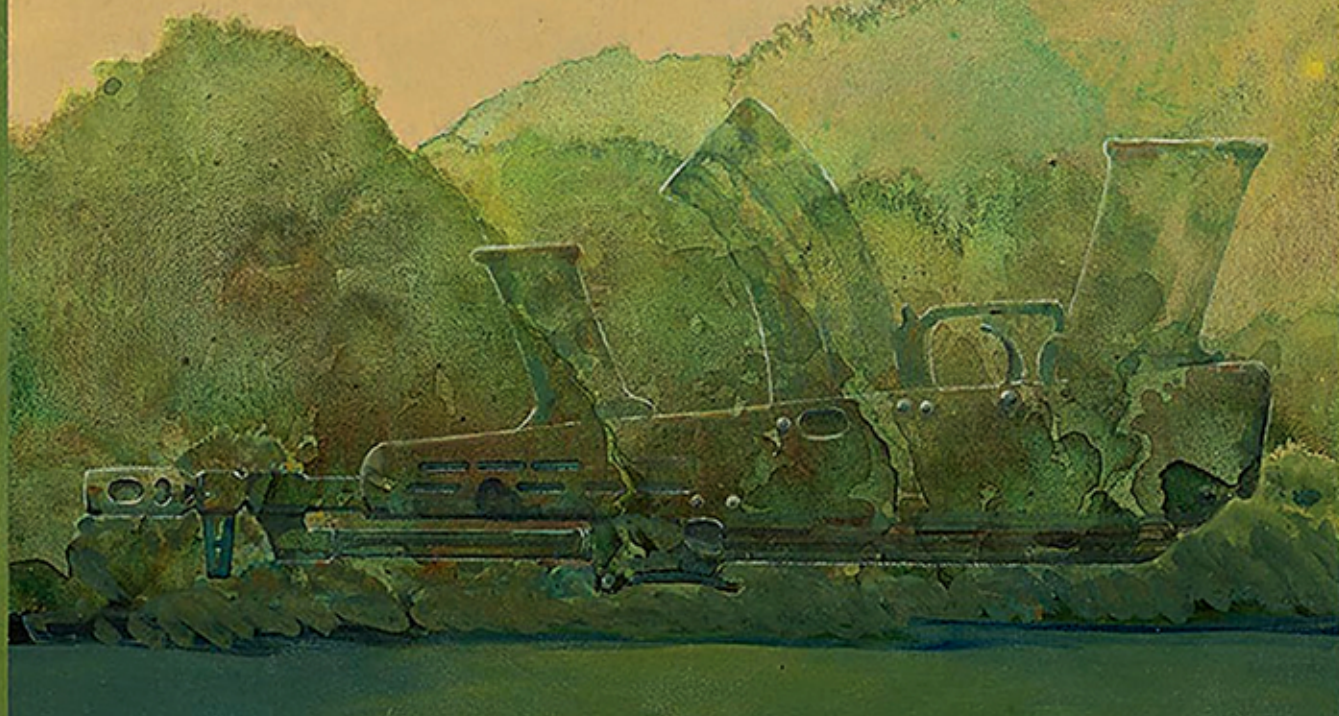


# LIFE through ART

By RYAN CRONK  
Siuslaw News

*Florence artist  
Stuart Henderson shines light  
on progressive painting.*



*"Mourning in America"*

War. Corruption. Injustice. His paintings often convey a visual language that evokes political contemplation through abstract textures and representational imagery, but Stuart Henderson refrains from calling his artwork contemporary.

"It's more therapy than anything else," he said.

Though probably most known for his hand-painted signs, some of which still adorn buildings throughout Old Town, Henderson has received much attention lately for his ethereal paintings that depict social ills.

The 75-year-old artist is modest about his work, which is currently on display through June 21 at Kenneth B Gallery, 1458 First St., in Florence. He calls painting a "liberating process," a way for him to express his thoughts on progressive issues.

"For a long time I was, and still am, pretty upset about the way our country is going," he said. "I'm finding that as I paint I touch those bases, and it comes out with some sort of relationship to what I've been thinking about."

Originally from Tacoma, Wash., Henderson earned a bachelor's degree in sociology at the University of Washington before moving to New York City to attend Cooper Union, where he not only met his wife Joann, but also pursued his passion for art.

"I knew in my heart painting is what I wanted to do, but I felt like I had to get a degree — family pressure — so I got a degree in sociology," he explained.

The couple eventually relocated to Los Angeles. For three years Henderson worked as a lithographer, printing work from such famous contemporary artists as Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Frank Stella.

In 1971, they moved to Florence and became co-owners of the Kyle Building, the town's first mercantile built in 1901 on Bay Street. They live in the top floor of the building, now known as the Bridgewater Restaurant.

*Stuart Henderson arranges fallen leaves for inspiration for his next painting in his studio area.*



PHOTO BY RYAN CRONK/SIUSLAW NEWS

"I didn't think I'd last here, but it seemed like a good fit for me," he said.

To make a living, he started Henderson Signs, designing graphics and painting signs for the community. Coincidentally, one of his first jobs while in junior high was painting signs for local businesses.

"So I had that in my genes apparently," he said with a laugh.

Through his business over the years, Henderson has left his mark on the town — literally. In Old Town, he painted the Bill's Auto sign, which currently hangs on the east side of Siuslaw River Coffee Roasters, and the Bridgewater Restaurant sign. He and his son Nick also created the logos for the now-defunct Chowder Blues and Brews event for more than 12 years in addition to the Florence Events Center logo and many other



*"Greed Creed"*

als as masonite — a hardboard wood surface — and textiles that include sand and powder pigment in addition to translucent paint, acrylics, latex and oil. A few of his paintings have taken up to six months to reach fruition.

"Painting is a way to get out of the world and leave a bit of a mark. If you have something to say, do it with whatever kind of means you have



*"Artichoke Rising"*

PAINTINGS COURTESY OF STUART HENDERSON

signs for individual businesses.

Henderson left the sign business in 2000, but he never stopped painting.

His methods are unconventional, using such materials

at your disposal," he said. "It seemed like painting was the one thing I could do better than anything else."

The last few years have been a relearning experience for Henderson.

He struggles with remembering certain painting techniques since having a stroke four years ago that also partially impacted his speech as well as his right arm and hand, which lost some nerve endings.

"It was pretty much unexpected," he said. "Makes you wonder how the brain works."

Though he can no longer paint signs like he used to, Henderson said the stroke "didn't seem to affect painting" in his studio.

SK Lindsey, owner of Kenneth B Gallery, said Henderson was her top choice to be the new contemporary gallery's first featured artist. Nearly 200 people attended its opening and artist's reception for Henderson on May 10.

See HENDERSON 3B

## Henderson from 1B

"He has taken art as a medium to put forward and illuminate current progressive issues, and these issues are sociopolitical," Lindsey said. "They're about war, corporate corruption and global warming."

The gallery features more than two dozen of Henderson's paintings that range from abstract to landscapes to sociopolitical commentary. Four pieces of his collection have already been sold, with a portion of the proceeds benefiting Florence's newest community radio station KXCR 90.7

FM, another passion of Henderson's.

Henderson said he is grateful to have a venue that can showcase his larger paintings.

"It's really quite a boon for people like me and others who would like to show in a space that is so friendly to art," he added. "I'm grateful for the opportunity to be part of that dream (Lindsey) had."

A few of Henderson's paintings are also on display at Gallery 903 in Portland.

"This man lives art. It's not a hobby for him. He is communicating constantly," Lindsey said. "Every moment of his life he is living his art."