

the art of Exclamation!

Crestwood artist Charles Blood claims a recent compulsion for punctuation

by Linda Jarrett

Charles Blood wants to make a point, lots of them.

Blood creates his art out of his Crestwood home, and while his forte is decorative painting such as distressed faux cabinetry, floors, murals and furniture, a newly-acquired iPhone gave him a new outlet for his creativity.

"I started texting, and I realized that people use a lot of exclamation points," he said. "Then I really began noticing them on television ads, and I got to wondering, why all the exclamation points? I like them from a graphic point of view, and it means a myriad of things like excitement, caution, fun, fear, and anger.

"A question mark can only mean one thing," he continued. "What?"

A patron approached him wanting a painting, "something exciting for the end of his hallway," he said.

"So I did an exclamation point, and from that time on, it excited me," Blood said.

The artist is now working on growing his inventory of exclamation point art with plans for a future gallery showing.

He has created exclamation points out of branches, leaves, rebar, feathers and even an old radiator cover. Most of them bend gracefully to the right, as if being blown by a gentle breeze.

"I think changing the scale of it gives it a different importance," he said.

Part of Charles Blood's recent series exploring exclamation points. This punctuation piece was made from tree branches. photo by Diana Linsley (click for larger version)

He has a theory about the plethora of points.

"What I've come to think about them is why people are so insistent on this," he said. "It's because we're trying to have some sense of importance. There are seven billion people on the planet. Who knows we're here? How do you stand out?"

"This is the last vain attempt to be heard, punctuation-wise," he said. "It's like, 'I've said it! Do you hear me?' There's so much information now, and you're trying to shake people's visual page with an exclamation point."

Blood is not trying to get people to stop using the exclamation point.

"As far as I'm concerned, they can put three of them at the end of a sentence," he said. "But I've seen paragraphs with exclamation points at the end of each sentence, and that might be overdoing it. F. Scott Fitzgerald said a bad sentence is a bad sentence, exclamation point or not."

Art has always been in Blood's blood, so to speak. In high school at the long-shuttered Augustinian Academy, he doodled in the margins, did wood-burning kits, drilled holes in metal and made models.



Charles Blood with his dog, Zola, in the pair's Crestwood home. In the background is an example of Blood's exclamation point art. photo by Diana Linsley

"They didn't teach art there," he said. "And my friends said I should go to art school."

He studied two years at Forest Park Community College, then two years at the University of Illinois in Champagne. After earning his master of fine arts at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, he tried advertising ("that wasn't for me"), then did some display work at Stix Baer and Fuller.

He was working as a house painter when he was asked to help create some of the "Painted Ladies" in Lafayette Square.

"Then, in the early 1980s I had a customer who wanted something decorative," he said. "I did a couple of rooms for him and it took off from there. I happened to meet up with the right people at the right time."

In 1986 he opened his own business. Blood creates a variety of decorative surfaces such as gold and silver metallic, marble, and textured wood grain on walls, ceilings, mantles, columns and furniture. Basically whatever the customer wants.

"I'm doing a seven and one-half by 20 foot mural for a dining room," he said. "It looks like a giant oak tree that you can sit under."

"On one I finished yesterday, the customer wanted vines on the wall, but that's a bit out — from the 90s," he said. "So we changed it a bit, got it a little more stylized, and now it looks almost like a lattice work with flowerettes. It's very loosely done, tone on tone, with a more modern take."

He tries to stay with trends without being too trendy.

"We want it to last longer than two years if you put all the time and money into it," he said.

He said the color palette has changed over the years, with colors more subdued now than they were in the 1980s and 1990s.

"Many decorators I work with use a lot of metallic, like painting a gold metallic, then cover with a silver gray, so you'll get a blend," he said.

Blood talks with his clients and offers direction if they are not sure of what they want. Sometimes they will bring pictures out of magazines, or ask him to visit a locale, like a restaurant, where they saw something they like.

"I usually have to let things percolate a little bit. Then, all of a sudden, it will come to me. I look at magazines and, even if I'm watching a movie, I'll see something and pause it."

After getting his idea settled, he makes sample boards of what he plans to do and takes them to the client.

Blood has his studio in his garage, and is kept company by his nine-pound white Maltese, Zoola. His home reflects his taste with a lavender swing in the front yard, distressed blue cabinets in his kitchen, and his own decorative creations on the walls.

He keeps his collection of exclamation points downstairs. He is now working on making a cross into an exclamation point.

"People seem to think it's sacred!"

For more information, visit www.charlesbloodartistic.com.



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