

Scott Cahaly never planned to be an artist. “As a child, I wasn’t interested in art at all,” the Somerville resident wryly recalls. Yet, in the scant decade since his first college drawing class, Cahaly has emerged as a formidable and driven talent. Recognized as an accomplished painter and sculptor, the kid who once had no use for art today exhibits his radiant abstract paintings and intricate stone carvings in prestigious East Coast galleries from Boston to New York.

“I never made any art until I was twenty-one,” Cahaly, now thirty, declares. Indeed, there is little in the Lexington native’s childhood to indicate this particular turn in his future path. During those early years, the closest Cahaly came to artistic expression was, as he freely admits, “this nervous doodle in grade school.” When he eventually landed at the University of Vermont in Burlington, Cahaly savored the beauty of the surrounding mountains, practiced meditation, and matriculated in science.

The transformative moment arrived in the spring of Cahaly’s sophomore year as he meditated on a dock near the UVM boathouse. “I was in front of Lake Champlain and the beautiful Adirondack Mountains,” remembers Cahaly. “A voice just came up through me and said, ‘You are an artist.’ That was my ‘instant awakening,’ the inception of my artistic path.”

At the time, Cahaly had yet to find his academic niche: “I was no good at lab work, and my writing was horrible,” he explains. Looking back, he believes it was not coincidental that his epiphany occurred just as he was taking his first drawing class, a liberal arts elective. “I think all that drawing triggered something inside of me,” he observes. “For the rest of that spring and summer, I felt reborn through drawing. When I arrived back on campus the following fall, I switched my major to Fine Art and just checked into the art department and hardly ever left the building!”

Cahaly embraced his newfound calling with a convert’s singular zeal. “I took many classes in painting and sculpture, all different materials and different schools of thought,” he says. “In art history it was the first time in a large lecture class that my interest was perpetually peaked, and I didn’t have to struggle with the work.” He found himself particularly drawn to the High Renaissance and Pre-Columbian periods as well as to religious and tribal art.

Passionate and independent, Cahaly strove to express these disparate influences through a vision uniquely his own. “I had a reputation for not doing what an instructor wanted me to do but rather what I wanted to do,” he states. “I felt a mission from the beginning to create things in my own style.” From the start, hallmarks of that style have included jagged, abstracted figures and swirling hearts and stars rendered in brilliant, jewel-toned oils and delineated like stained glass panels against much darker backgrounds. “I’ve always sought to depict the metaphysical, the transcendent, and a sense of timelessness and mystery in my work,” Cahaly notes.

As had his new idol, the Renaissance master Michelangelo, Cahaly soon channeled his seemingly boundless creative energy into sculpting as well. “At one point, before I started sculpture, I was basically just carving out the white gesso base of my canvases with black paint – not adding paint into something but using the paint to reduce the white space into all these archaic, Greek looking sculptural forms,” he explains. “I even made my own weird tools to paint with. They were like little sculptures themselves.”

During his final year at UVM, Cahaly met Mike Reccia, a local sculptor who would become his mentor. Upon graduation, at Reccia’s urging, the young artist headed to central Vermont to join the active stone carving community there. Soon he had settled in as a resident sculptor at the Vermont Marble Exhibit – “a museum with marble everything” – in Proctor. It would prove a providential move.

For the next three years Cahaly demonstrated stone carving to visitors of “The World’s Largest Marble Exhibit” in the heart of quarry country. “I had the most amazing two thousand foot studio to myself – with hoists, machines, compressors, freight elevator, and tourists watching me as I worked,” he recalls. With ample time and space and a full complement of accoutrements provided, Cahaly embarked on increasingly ambitious projects, culminating with the completion of his largest sculpture to date: *New Nazca Stone* (56”x 36” x 26”).

“I had never felt anything as satisfying as that block of stone when I got it into my studio,” Cahaly observes of the two-and-one-half ton chunk of native white marble. “It

was the complete feel of artistic freedom.” Inspired by the mysterious, miles long ancient geoglyphs which dot the arid Nazca plains of southwestern Peru, *New Nazca Stone* reflects Cahaly’s affinity with Pre-Columbian art. Now less than half its original heft, the hand-carved sculpture depicts the stylized figure of a woman. Her tilted head, elegantly poised on a long cascade of deeply inscribed curls, forms one edge of a vee-shaped valley. One disembodied leg and foot forms the other. In a nod to the most famous and enigmatic Nazca earth drawing – a humanoid shape with two over-sized hands, one normal and one inexplicably four-fingered – Cahaly’s figure, too, boasts two disjointed arms, each anchoring the statue’s base – five digits on one hand, a mere four on the other.

Though inspired artistically by his sojourn in Vermont, Cahaly, who had continued painting, began to yearn for an infusion of urban culture. “I was a little bored,” he confesses. Returning to the Boston area, he settled into the Mad Oyster Building, a recently converted art space in Somerville. Soon he began exhibiting his paintings and sculptures in well-regarded venues around the area: Harvard University’s Swedenborg Chapel, Boston Center for the Arts, the

Soprafina and Zeitgeist galleries, and the Middle East Restaurant in Cambridge. In 2003 he was invited to participate in a traveling show of works on paper dubbed the International Paper Exhibition with stops in galleries from Manhattan to Minnesota.

“If I am not growing from previous work, I am not happy with what I am doing,” Cahaly asserts today. “I am not interested in repeating myself.” His latest sculpture series, relatively small works carved in alabaster and suggestive of ancient tribal art, are currently featured at the Boulevard Gallery in Newport, Rhode Island.

For the moment, however, Cahaly’s focus is on painting. “I have been affected by our world and the whole New Orleans thing,” he states. “I have so much abstract visual imagery flying around in my head, and I can release these images more quickly through painting. My latest paintings are incorporating images of the globe, being surrounded by spiritual, abstract beings radiating light to protect the earth.” As Scott Cahaly, the painter and sculptor whose life was transformed by art, knowingly observes, “Good art touches people’s hearts and souls.”



Scott Cahaly will be hosting a holiday open studio event

in his Somerville studio November 19th from noon to five. For more information

for directions, e-mail Scott at

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To view photos of Cahaly’s paintings and sculpture, visit www.cahaly.net.