

New York artist comes to South Jersey for inspiration

By MATT GRAY
Staff Writer

BRIDGETON — A blending of the country and the city, artist Matthew Garrison reflects his work.

Garrison, who grew up in Albany and works in New York City, has family ties in southern New Jersey. And it's to New Jersey he comes when he seeks inspiration outside of the city.

Garrison opened his first solo art exhibition of sculpture and works on paper this weekend at Gallery 50 here.

His work has been on exhibit in New York, Boston and Italy and despite a little anxiety, these shows have proven a positive experience for Garrison.

"There is a nervousness. But it's a good feeling," he said. "You learn a lot about what you're doing."

The inspiration Garrison finds he translates into his work, which reflects, in various often unconventional materials, the diverse qualities of both cultures. "You can see the mixture of the city and the country," Garrison said.

Some of the wood used in his work, for example, is old barn material from Elmer, while concrete is often of the New York variety.

In the back of Gallery 50, which is partially funded by the Cumberland County Cultural and Heritage Commission and the New Jersey Council on the Arts, Garrison's exhibition is a mix of sculpture and works on paper he has created in the last three years. More of his creations are in the gallery's front window.

For the 25-year-old Garrison, his artistic pursuits began at an early age.

His father, John Garrison, is an Elmer native and CEO of the American Lung Association, and his mother, Sally Woodruff Garrison, hails from Bridgeton. The family has a home in Roadstown.

Great-great-grandfather Daniel F. Woodruff, also from the area, was an artist and teacher, who also went to the big city. His big city was Philadelphia, but Garrison feels a connection to him.

Photos by
Pat Crowe II

"I've always been interested in art," he said. "I was always very serious about art in school."

This despite the fact that art was not always the most encouraged field in school.

While this was frustrating, Garrison found opportunities to nurture his interest in the art program at Francis Parker High School in Chicago as well as the Art Institute of Chicago.

He continued his studies at the Rhode Island School of Design, spending time in Italy and the Aegean School of Design in Greece.

"Still Now" is a series of sculptures showing partial faces cast in plastic surrounded by plastic and wire, sitting on a concrete base. In these industrial-looking cases, the faces are preserved as if artifacts under glass in a museum.

Garrison describes these as having been removed from the ravages of time and placed in a setting where they will no longer deteriorate. "Still Now" is a suitable title, "since time is going on and on and it's still, now."

"As Is" a series of works on paper, using canvas primer, pencil and marker reflect a similar freezing of time.

In these, partial faces looking like masks are preserved from further erosion. Gold marker was used in patches to reflect the timeless fascination with a precious metal that

wears away so easily over time.

Garrison traces the inspiration for "Still Now" and "As Is" to an interest in archaeology.

Before creating such works, Garrison said he learned how to draw such things as the human form, getting the basics down, "before I could really go on to this."

An interest in the human form remains in his work in figure studies.

In an untitled work, a figure stands at one corner with a window in the background. Garrison poses the question: What lies beyond that window?

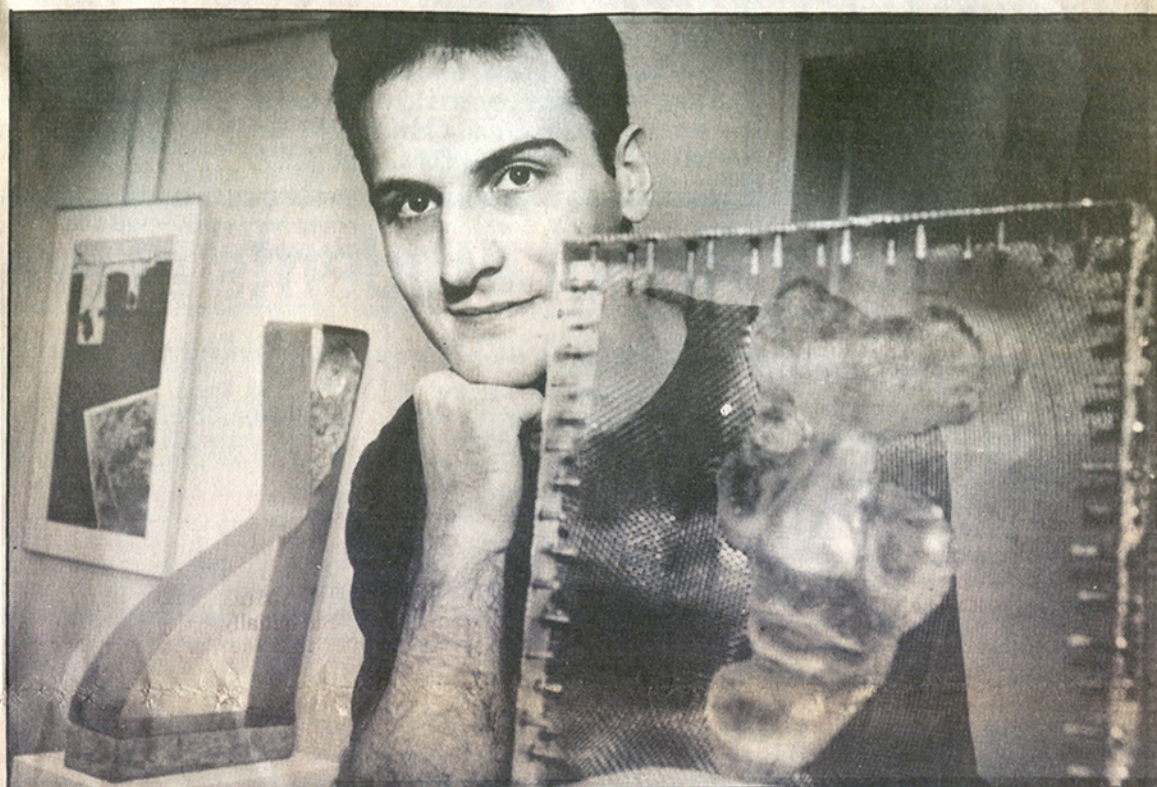
In his work, a questioning of the future is often evident. Garrison said he does not like to answer questions such as what the future holds, but prefers to pose that question.

"A lot of contemporary artists give you an answer," he said. "I don't want to do that."

In "Sacks," large sacks hang above a row of city buildings as a figure works its way through the blackness of the structures, upward to the sacks, not knowing what they hold.

Another medium, seen in his works "Web" and "Horizon," is etchings of human forms in plexiglass placed on a wood frame. These works once again combine the qualities of the manufactured city and nature.

A twist is taken in the use of wood to form hard lines of columns and structure, while the human form is



Garrison with some of his works on display at Gallery 50. On his right is a piece made of cement, screws, wire and plastic and is a study on the human form.

portrayed in an artificial material.

Garrison's materials, whether they be wood, cement or metal, share a common bond in their contemporary nature. "All of these materials are of our day," he said.

While he has sold works in his career as a professional, Garrison still maintains a regular job.

"The art doesn't support me, yet," he said. Garrison works as an artist's assistant in New York. He has worked with accomplished artists Dorothea Rockburne, whom he assisted in painting a mural at the Sony Building in New York, Ellsworth Kelly and is

currently working with Judith Shea.

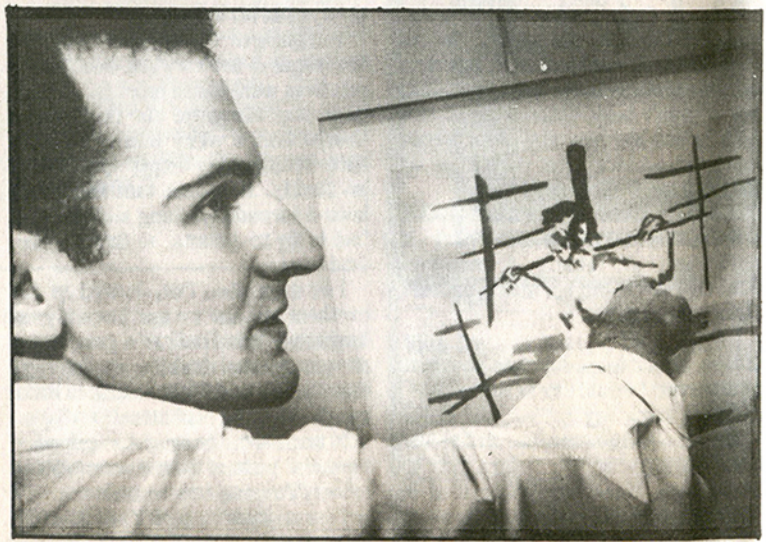
While New York is a major center of the art world, Garrison said he enjoys returning to South Jersey when he can. "In New York, it's so active," he said, leaving him with little time to work on new ideas.

Here, Garrison gets back in touch with his thoughts. "It's a great place to come and work outside," he said. Garrison maintains studios in New York and South Jersey.

The Matthew Garrison exhibit is on display through July 31 at Gallery 50, located at 50 E. Commerce St.



One of Garrison's works done in ink and paper.



Garrison describes his work on figure studies.



Garrison in front of a pencil, gold marker and primer work.

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