

Focus

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Crary exhibit, 'Toy Tableaux'...

for his Masters Thesis at Edinboro University between the fall of 2014 and the spring of 2015.

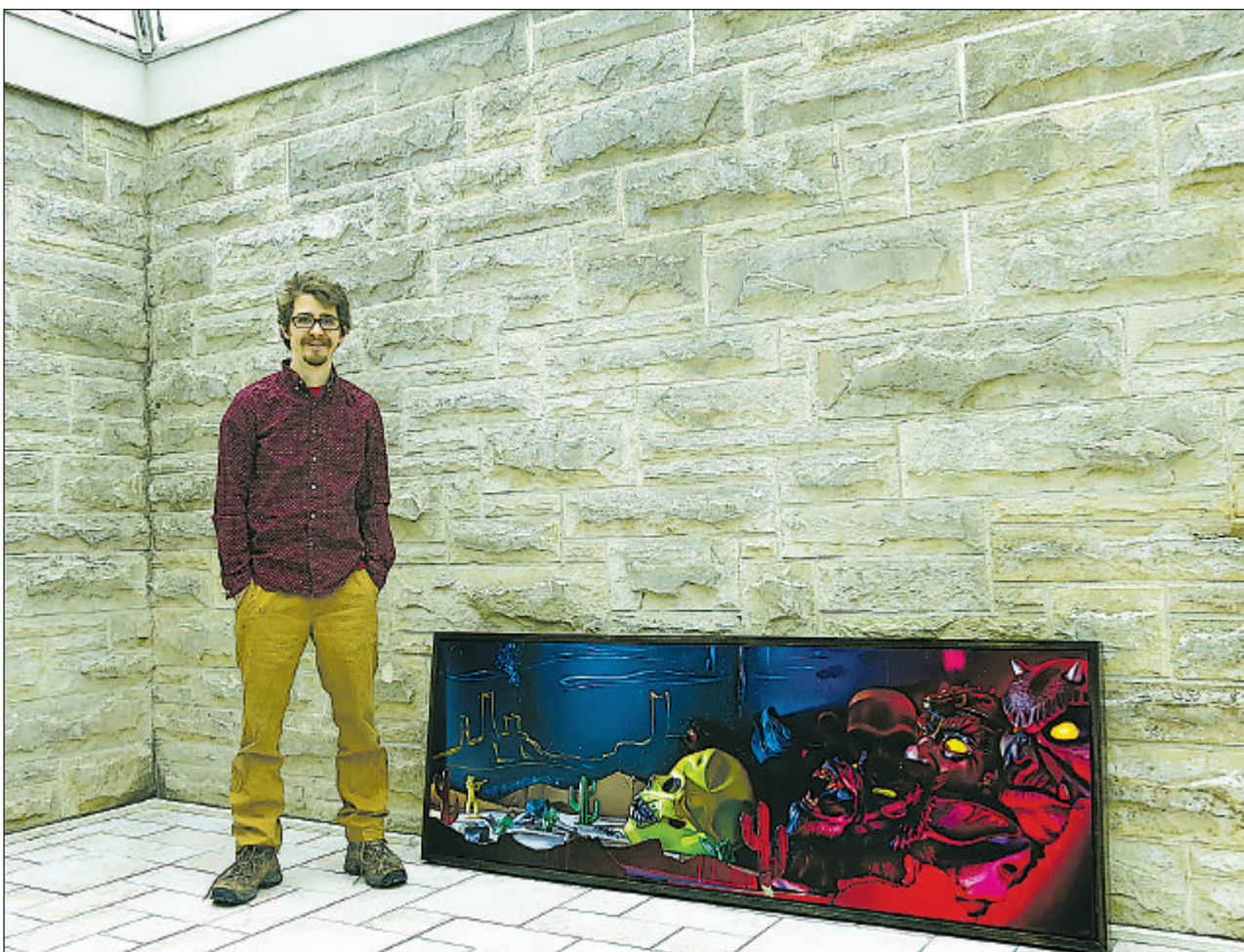
"I've been involved in the arts since 7th grade," Pickens said when asked what made him want to become a painter. "I went to an arts based high school. I was pretty much always going to be involved with the arts in some way." But, he said, "I never thought I'd be a painter." Like many students who find themselves entering a fine arts program in graduate school, the idea of training for a career as a painter or poet can at times feel a bit like preparing to devote one's life to something as impractical as basket weaving or pearl diving.

But, said Pickens, after finishing his Bachelors of Fine Arts at Bowling Green State University in Ohio with a specialty in Digital Arts, he felt compelled to understand the traditional roots of all the digital painting he did for that major. He was accepted at several graduate programs but chose Edinboro, ultimately, for the faculty. It was there he began to focus on climbing out of the "rabbit hole of art" that is animation and explored taking control over what he was creating.

With digital arts, he said, one is utterly beholden to the "photo" in Photorealism. "You become a slave," he said, to the information in the photo and the recreation of that information. With still life, he said, one has more control. The flip side of that, he conceded, is that "all of it rests on your shoulders with painting too."

But that was what Pickens wanted. In digital arts and animation, there is a heavy emphasis on group projects. The thing about group projects, he said, is that "your vision, or the groups vision, winds up compromised," by the one person who's not willing to put in the work.

One of the things that Pickens learned when he began painting was that "one of the best ways to learn to paint is to paint from observation." In this way, Pickens said, one is able to pick and choose what to include and what to omit. What will serve the vision one is trying to convey and what isn't worth wasting time on? One way that he really concentrated his efforts, Pickens said, was to paint landscapes in nature. "You only have that limited amount of time," he said, to convey the image and the light and everything



Pickens with perhaps the masterwork of this collection, "Old Yella," with which he completed his Masters thesis at Edinboro University.

that you're trying to convey. You only have that little bit of time to get it right." The other thing he liked about working outdoors, he said, as opposed to studio time and work, was the instant gratification.

The largest painting in the Toy Tableaux collection, Old Yella, took Pickens about 500 studio hours to finish. That's about average, he said, but the instant gratification of a landscape painted outdoors was incomparable for him during that time, and continues to hold allure.

And what is Pickens' message in these paintings, or any of his paintings? Right now, he said, his process and career are still very much in their infancy. While he likes to address some serious issues with his work, really his goal is to convey his nature: he likes his work to be lighthearted, with a sense of wonder. While

the toys he paints and chooses for each tableaux - each of which representing an individual narrative within the body of a larger story - naturally convey a bit of nostalgia, Pickens said he's okay with that being a unifying theme for Toy Tableaux. Who's not nostalgic when confronted with images of plastic velociraptors roof surfing atop matchbox school buses, or barrel-of-monkeys apes apparently worshipping their first encounter with a wayward Entenmanns (and really, who can blame them)? He hopes his audience, he said, will walk away with a sense of the spontaneity of the child. "I'll always go back to that self-reflection in the individual narratives," he said.

What might be considered the masterwork of the collection, 'Old Yella,' features a yellow toy soldier standing his ground against a screaming yellow skull with a cloud of

magenta dragons and demons seeming to defy him to take his best shot. The whole scene suggests the ultimate Fear and Loathing of the Existential Crisis, and that's what Pickens said it meant to represent. Painted at the end of his work toward his Masters in Fine Arts (Painting) at Edinboro, he said it represents all those anxieties that come with being turned out of academia and into the world with... well, a degree in painting.

Failure, insecurity, being at the end of what one knows and at the edge of a great and terrible mystery. The painting is about facing ones demons, Pickens said. His professors at Edinboro, perhaps concerned that he wouldn't have the time left to finish the ambitious 24 by 70 inch oil painting before the end of his thesis, encouraged him to postpone it, and make it a summer project in 2015. But, said Pickens, "the

best way to motivate me is to tell me I can't."

Asked whether there's anything he doesn't like painting, his answer was that, I don't like painting Legos. They're so strict in their structure, and if you get off, people notice."

Asked whether he's been asked to select an agenda for his work by professors or anyone else yet, Pickens simply said, "once you're reasonably confident with who you are, that's the end of the battle." That seems like one way to answer the questions Old Yella raises as well, and Pickens appears to be on his way to doing just that.

Pickens' show - Toy Tableaux - will open at the Crary Gallery, 511 Market Street in Warren, on Saturday March 12th at 6 p.m. with an artist's gallery talk beginning at 7 p.m. More information about Aaron Pickens and his work can be found at his website: aaronpickens.com.



Times Observer photo by Stacey Gross
"Existential Planking," by Aaron Pickens.

To Do...

- sion, 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
- April 5: Warren County Fiber Artists, Knitting from the Center Out by presenter Mary DeFabio, The Crossing, Pennsylvania Ave. W. at Hickory St., 6:30 p.m.
- April 9: EVA presented by Warren Concert Association, Struthers Library Theatre, Warren, 7:30 p.m. (723-6505 or email warrenconcertassociation@gmail.com).
- April 16: Celebrity Series, "The Calamari Sisters," Library Theatre, Warren, 8 p.m.
- April 22: SLT Academy Performance, ARTE, Expressions Performing Art Center, Dance Express, Library Theatre, Warren, 8 p.m.
- April 23: Tribute to Bob Seger by "Hollywood Nights," sponsored by Yankee Bush Productions, Library Theatre, 8 p.m. (489-3110)
- April 29: Celebrity Series, Grand Funk Railroad, Library Theatre, Warren, 8 p.m.
- April 29-30: Russell VFD Spring Rummage Sale, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. April 29; 9 a.m. to noon April 30; \$1 bag Saturday only; accepting donations from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. April 28.
- April 30: Classy Castoffs Sale, Williams' Carriage House, 308 Poplar Street; This is not your typical garage sale; benefits the Warren County Historical Society, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- April 30: Sybarite5, Warren Concert Association, Struthers Library Theatre, Warren, 7:30 p.m. (723-6505 or email warrenconcertassociation@gmail.com).
- May 3: Warren County Fiber Artists, What can you do with an I-Cord? by presenter Priscilla Breese, The Crossing, Pennsylvania Ave. W. at Hickory St., 6:30 p.m.
- May 7: Tribute to The Eagles by "Seven Bridges," sponsored by Yankee Bush Productions, Library Theatre, 8 p.m. (489-3110)
- May 8: Warren Philharmonic Concert, "It's All About Mom," Holy Redeemer Roman Catholic Church, Warren, 4 p.m.
- May 19-22: Warren Players presents "A Tale of Casadaga," Library Theatre, 7 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday.
- June 4: Women's Outdoor Workshops (WOW!), Chapman State Park, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
- June 10 - 12 - The Allegheny-100 Hiking Challenge covers a 100 mile stretch of the North Country National Scenic Trail in the ANF. The A-100 challenges hikers to traverse 100 miles, 75 miles, 50 miles or 25 miles in a 50 hour time period. This challenge is for anyone, regardless of skill level, who wants to test themselves against the trail. For more information go to <https://northcountrytrail.org/get-involved/special-events> or email anf@northcountrytrail.org.
- June 30: Warren Philharmonic Concert with students from the Warren County Summer Music School Program, "4th of July Kick Off," 7 p.m. outdoors by the fountain on Second Ave., Warren.
- July 2-4: The Warren County 4th of July Organization presents "The 69th Annual 4th of July Celebration." For a complete schedule, visit www.warrenpajuly4th.com, or visit the organization's Facebook page.



Photo submitted to Times Observer
Warren County Special Olympian Duane Bennett rebounds after a free throw.

Warren County Special Olympics

The 2016 Warren County Special Olympics Basketball Skills Competition was held on Saturday, March 5, at the Warren Area Elementary Center.

Here are the results:

- Male Division I - 1st Place Conner Campbell, Participation Erik Irons,
- Male Division 11 - 1st Place Kyle Fortman, 2nd Place Turney Yount Participation Charles Atkins
- Male Division 111 - 1st Place Justin Allen, 2nd Place Duane Bennett 3rd Place Francis Molinaro
- Male Division IV - 1st Place Scott Petitt, 2nd Place John Pearson, 3rd Place Cliff Van Tassel, Jeremy Sensing Participation
- Male Division V - 1st Place Kyle Burge, 2nd Place Rick McKee, 3rd Place Shawn Albaugh
- Male Division V I - 1st Place Marshall McCumber, 2nd Place Mike Gray, 3rd Place Arthur Windham

- Female Division 1 - 1st Place Brooke Evans,
- Female Division 11 - 1st Place Jolee Rutenber, 2nd Place Debbie Glotz, 3rd Place Jen Kersey
- Female Division 111 - 1st Place Cindy Zaffino Rose Lank Participation
- Female Division IV - 1st Place Julia Cutshall, 2nd Place Brenda Huya, 3rd Place Linda Buser
- Female Division V - 1st Place Kayla Smith 2nd Place Tina Hoffner, 3rd Place Beth VanLuvén