

Living Large

Hungry for Art

Industry consultant Norm Cooper becomes one with his paint brush, rice paper and Chinese ink

By Marty • Whitford Managing Editor

From as far back as I can remember, from when I was a very young boy, I have always loved to draw and paint and been schooled in the disciplines of the arts,” says Norm Cooper.

“I just developed a bad habit along the way — I like to eat — and not too many artists were making a living when I was younger,” adds Cooper, tongue-in-cheek when explaining how a creative type such as he wound up spending 53 years (and counting) in the pest management business.

Cooper has dabbled in drawing and painting throughout his illustrious career — which includes founding Abby Exterminating Services, heading Exterminating Services Co. (ESCO) for 25 years, being selected to *Pest Control's* Hall of Fame and serving as an industry consultant specializing in mergers and acquisitions for the past 10 years (normcooper@verizon.net).

In 1991–92, when serving as president of the National Pest Control Association, now called the National Pest Management Association (NPMA), Cooper designed the organization's “Guardians of the Environment” theme.

Cooper also helped the group create a coloring book for kids that educated them (and their parents) on different pests and how pest management technicians are both professionals and

guardians of our planet's precious people and natural resources. The coloring book, which contained puzzles and other games, is being considered for recirculation after its first printing of nearly 500,000 copies, Cooper says.

THIRD LOVE

Cooper says he first met his *third* love — Chinese art — after being introduced to his other main squeezes, his wife and the pest management business.

The year was 1981 and it marked Cooper's first trip to China. He would fall fast and hard for the Orient, traveling to China five more times, Japan five times, Singapore four, Indonesia twice, and India and Taiwan

once each since then.

“I was immediately struck by both the beauty and the uniqueness of Chinese art,” Cooper says. “I remember saying to myself 25 years ago, ‘Some day, I'd like to do that.’ However it wasn't until I semi-retired and became a part-time industry consultant in 1996 that I had the time to pick up my paint brush and give Chinese art a try.

“I haven't looked back since,” Cooper says. “Chinese art had my attention from Day 1 and my heart from the moment I began to walk in the footsteps of other Chinese artists and accept the hands-on guidance of greats like Diana Kan and Jin

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“Autumn Outside Chengdu,” showcasing the lush fall foliage in a Szechuan village (based on sketches made on site)



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Guangyu.”

Chinese art typically is painted on silk or rice paper with Chinese ink, which typically is processed dark charcoal containing a binder. The artist grinds different types and pigments of charcoal on a special stone and mixes them with a little water.

“The Chinese have a Zen-like approach to art,” Cooper says. “Before, when creating so-called Western art, I knew exactly what each brush stroke would look like, and its precise thickness and curve, before I put brush to paper.

“Now, with Chinese art, it’s all about *a coming together*,” he adds. “I’m just one piece of the big picture, along with the paper, charcoal and water. We’re all

major contributors. I painted the same scene five times and it truly looks like five different Chinese artists created them because of all of the variables inherent in each of the many contributors. Each Chinese artwork is truly unique and breathtakingly beautiful in its own way — just like each of us.”

LIMITED EDITIONS

In the summer of 2004, Cooper hosted a backyard party and shared his Chinese artwork with his friends. Two friends wanted to purchase pieces but Cooper told them that’s not why he invited them. He just wanted to share with close ones his passion for Chinese art.

“My two friends said, ‘That’s not

nice: Showing us your work and not letting us purchase it. You’re teasing us,’” Cooper says. “I had never thought of it that way.”

As surprises, he later gave his two friends the Norm Cooper originals they sought.

In 2005, Cooper exhibited his artwork at the Hammond Museum in North Salem, N.Y., as part of an exhibition by the Oriental Brush Artists Guild (whose executive board he sits on), as well as at the China Institute and the National Arts Club in New York.

“I showed the maximum pieces allowed at each of those three showings,” Cooper says, noting each artwork had to be selected for the exhibitions.

“Early Winter’s Eve Return,” depicting a fisherman’s return to his waterfront village



"I guess I've come quite a ways from when I first picked up my brush, rice paper and charcoal 10 years ago," Cooper says. "The National Arts Club told me they could have sold each of the three pieces I showed there at least 30 times due to demand, but I wasn't selling my artwork then.

"That got me thinking about my two friends and that maybe I need to share my artwork with more people," Cooper adds. "After all, it's not *my* artwork; it's *our* artwork."

Cooper has since invested in having

50 limited-edition prints made for each of his popular pieces so those interested in his Chinese artwork can go home happy.

"I now charge just enough to cover my expenses," Cooper says. "I don't need to paint to put food on the table.

"Chinese art has changed my life and I want to share that more," Cooper adds. "I want others to fall in love with Chinese art just like I have." **PC**

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"Summer Idyll," encompassing recurring themes of classical Chinese art: meditation in a tea house, mountains, mist and waterfalls

