

Published October 3rd, 2018

Artist Michael Stehr shows work at Tally Home in Orinda

By Sora O'Doherty



Photo Sora O'Doherty

Unlike Corot, however, Stehr doesn't have an allowance from wealthy parents that allowed him the luxury of painting without concern about supporting his family. So Stehr in his day job is a decorative artist, offering his clients a range of special finishes for their interior decorating, including murals, gold leafing, and trompe l'oeil work. Stehr learned his trade putting himself through college as a house painter.

Stehr devotes himself to his fine art work on evenings, weekends and holidays. But he says, "I don't consider this work. It isn't a hardship; I would do it for fun." Nevertheless, Stehr actually does work very hard. He won't exhibit his works unframed, and doesn't want to spend what it would take to frame his works, so he does it himself. He has an annual exhibit at the Piedmont Center for the Arts each November, for which he produces some 40 new paintings and fabricates the frames for each, doing his own carpentry and metal leafing on the frames.

In addition, Stehr applies his art history expertise leading groups of art lovers through Rome and Paris several times a year. He has just conducted his 16th guided tour of Rome. He shares his own experience of the art aloud with his clients. He did his first guided tour in 2000. "It's been fun to build relationships," he notes, "with both the art and the people." He feels at home staying in the same hotels each time he visits. In fact, he has had an exhibition of about 16 of his paintings, which he brought over and displayed in the hotel where he stays. His clients usually extend their trips, either before or after joining him for the guided art tour. He is currently putting together a trip for painters, where they can practice their art in a European setting, likely either Sienna, Italy or the Loire Valley in France.

Stehr has done a lot of work in the Carmel home of Tally Home founder Megan Lindberg's father. Lindberg admires Stehr's European flare, which is what she wants people to experience at Tally Home. "I want it to feel like people are walking into Europe," she says of her store. The Oct. 18 event will be a Meet the Artist Open House, with light appetizers, wine and other beverages, starting at 5 p.m.

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