

Artist Spotlight: ‘Surreal’ teacher inspired T Santora to pursue painting



Desert Splash by Palm Springs artist T Santora, who describes himself as a “process artist.” On May 10, he will be opening his studio in collaboration with other artists in the building they share at 1500 South Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs. He said his work is inspired by politics, the environment, textiles, quilts and other things. (Photo Courtesy T Santora)

By **PATRICK BRIEN** | Riverside Arts Council

PUBLISHED: April 5, 2018 at 10:30 am | UPDATED: April 5, 2018 at 10:33 am



Palm Springs artist T Santora describes himself as a “process artist.” He said his work is inspired by politics, the environment, textiles, quilts and other things. (Photo Courtesy T Santora)

The road to success can often be traced to an influential teacher. For T Santora, that was Lamont Westmoreland, his painting teacher at Santa Monica High School.

Santora had been drawing for as long as he could remember, but didn’t begin formally training as an artist until entering high school. He took classes in several different mediums, but it was Westmoreland’s class that stood out.

“He was particularly interested in surrealism, and encouraged me to follow my instincts rather than simply make pretty pictures,” says Santora, who will be 61 April 10. “I wound up following him to classes at Santa Monica College. He pushed me to make fine arts my major, so I enrolled at Grossmont College in San Diego.”

Santora found it difficult to afford studying art so far away, so he returned to the Los Angeles area and ended up pursuing another passion. Earning a Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies, Santora embarked on a 40 year career as a union leader and political organizer with the Communications Workers of America.

He continues to draw inspiration from politics, as well as the environment, textiles, quilts and several other sources. He said he's constantly influenced by the work of other contemporary artists. A self-described "museum and art gallery junkie," Santora said he loves traveling to destinations with art centers to explore.

"I've been to most of the major museums in the U.S. and Europe already with a very large bucket list to get through," he said.

Born in New York, but raised in Santa Monica, Santora said Palm Springs is now his primary residence.

"I've owned the place since 1990, but moved here after retiring two years ago," he says. "I have a part-time residence in Napa, as well, where I generally spend the summers."

Since moving to Palm Springs, Santora has exhibited in galleries throughout the region, including Palm Desert, Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage, San Diego and in his own studio during open studio nights. He is part of the Riverside Arts Council's Artscape exhibition at the Riverside County Administration Center, as well as in the new extension of the exhibit at the Riverside County Economic Development Agency.

“Art in public buildings makes the space more accessible,” he said. “Art not only beautifies and elevates a space, it democratizes institutions and inspires people to explore other venues. I think it’s fantastic that Riverside County opens its facilities this way. It speaks volumes about the sense of pride in this community.”

When Santora lived in Washington, D.C., several years ago, he was represented by Gallery A in Dupont Circle.

“I had several shows at that gallery, as well as a number of other venues,” he says.

Santora described his work as tending toward geometric abstraction. He said that he is a “process artist.” While he may start with a particular idea, he responds to other ideas that come to him as the work progresses.

“If there is a downside, it’s that my work isn’t easily categorized,” he said. “I’m good with that. If I had to choose a description, I’d say I’m a contemporary abstractionist.”

Outside of his work as an artist, Santora serves as a docent for the Palm Springs Art Museum. He said that one of his greatest joys is leading tours for students every Friday morning when school is in session. He is also a commissioner on the Palm Springs Sustainability Commission, where his focus is on sustainable jobs, including helping working artists make a living.

On May 10, Santora will be opening his studio in collaboration with other artists on the second floor of the building they share at 1500 South Palm Canyon Drive in Palm Springs. For more information, visit his website at www.tsantora.com or follow him on Instagram @trsantora.



Untitled (color glaze) by Palm Springs artist T Santora, who describes himself as a “process artist.” On May 10, he will be opening his studio in collaboration with other artists in the building they share at 1500 South Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs. He said his work is inspired by politics, the environment, textiles, quilts and other things. (Photo Courtesy T Santora)



Parallels (Asia) by Palm Springs artist T Santora, who describes himself as a “process artist.” On May 10, he will be opening his studio in collaboration with other artists in the building they share at 1500 South Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs. He said his work is inspired by politics, the environment, textiles, quilts and other things. (Photo Courtesy T Santora)



#Resistance by Palm Springs artist T Santora, who describes himself as a “process artist.” On May 10, he will be opening his studio in collaboration with other artists in the building they share at 1500 South Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs. He said his work is inspired by politics, the environment, textiles, quilts and other things. (Photo Courtesy T Santora)



Ghost Cells IV by Palm Springs artist T Santora, who describes himself as a “process artist.” On May 10, he will be opening his studio in collaboration with other artists in the building they share at 1500 South Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs. He said his work is inspired by politics, the environment, textiles, quilts and other things. (Photo Courtesy T Santora)