

99blocks

DOWNTOWN'S MAGAZINE

February 28, 2008
FREE

THE PAINT BRUSH chronicles

Artist
William
Mangum







IMAGES COURTESY OF BILL MANGUM

THE PAINT BRUSH chronicles

*Artist William Mangum
celebrates the heritage and the
revitalization of Greensboro*

By Eddie Huffman

It's a book to make the chamber of commerce proud. For the fifth bound collection of his paintings, "Greensboro: Roots and Renaissance," William Mangum celebrates business and industry, traditional neighborhoods and the fine arts. Working downtown in his "hole in the wall" studio on Bellemeade Street, the artist has glorified his adopted home. He works in a style reminiscent of American illustrators like Norman Rockwell and Jessie Willcox Smith, and he wrote text to accompany the layouts in his new book.

Just out of college, I did not yet have a gallery to showcase my work. Inspired by Blandwood's Old World charm, I rented the Carriage House for my first art show. I used a little paint and elbow grease to smarten up the basement for the unveiling of 50 paintings.

Continued on page 15 →

It's a world of (mostly) sunshine and light, smiling faces and lush flora, ballparks and golf courses. Mangum, 54, originally planned to use existing paintings for his Greensboro book, but changes to the city -- over the past decade, in particular -- necessitated scores of new paintings, large and small.

"I had come up with the idea of doing over 100 paintings, and I thought it would be a piece of cake," he says, wearing paint-stained jeans and clogs, facing a window looking into an alley, sitting next to an easel holding a painting of Center City Park. "But I found that a lot of my work was dated. There is a kind of renaissance, and downtown is a big part of it. I didn't want to do a starchy book that is only history. That's why I called it *Roots and Renaissance*."

One of the city's premier revitalization projects located just south of downtown had an immediate draw for me. Arlington Street Lofts remind me of treasured time spent in New Orleans as a young artist.

The Pinehurst native came to Greensboro in 1973, picking UNCG over the art school at another state university, East Carolina. "When I discovered the ratio of females to males was 10 to 1 in Greensboro, that's what decided it for me," he says, laughing. His decision to balance art with girls paid off: Mangum met his wife, Cynthia, in Greensboro, and they have been married for 30 years.

As Mangum worked on his book, it mushroomed from a planned 64 pages to 105. "Toward the end, my wife wasn't real happy with me," he says. "I was grinding out three or

four paintings a week, working 60 or 80 hours."

Mangum is known as a watercolor artist, but the paintings in the book employ pencils, acrylics and other media: "I throw anything that will stick to the paper." He begins his paintings with location visits, taking photos and drawing thumbnail sketches. One such outing helped Mangum capture the look of **Triad Stage** on a performance evening. "I parked there two nights -- way past my bedtime," he says.

The eclectic mix of homes and the canopy of mature trees lining her easy-stride sidewalks make Fisher Park an absolute gem to paint.

While he was tempted to include some nostalgic paintings, Mangum made a rule that the book would include only places currently in business -- with one exception: paintings of the facade of the old **Woolworth Drug Store** on Elm Street and the stools at the lunch counter inside, an iconic image from the 1960 civil rights sit-ins. Mangum highlights several contemporary downtown businesses, including **Chakras Salon by Panache** ("I've been having my haircut at Sheila's place for 25 years"), **Cheesecakes by Alex**, **the Green Bean** and **Natty Greene's** in a panoramic painting of **Hamburger Square**.

"They had to be up and running," he says. "While there are wonderful novelties like **Fordham's Drug Store** downtown or **Don's Pool Hall** -- where I spent many hours -- I didn't want to use those that you couldn't experience today."

"Greensboro: Roots and Renaissance" costs \$39 and will be available beginning March 1, exclusively at Mangum's gallery at 2166 Lawndale Drive. 99

Eddie Huffman is a freelance writer.

Editors note: Italicized words are taken from "Greensboro: Roots and Renaissance."

