

Father's turpentine and linseed oil inspired Oxnard painter

By Nicole D'Amico

The seeds for Dan LaVigne's art career were planted in his youth, when he would smell the turpentine and linseed oil of his father's oil paints.

"Dad was kind of a Sunday painter," LaVigne said, sitting at a table at Sonarhart's at Petenook in Simons, where an exhibit of his art adorns the walls through April 2.

Although his father put his art on hold to provide for his family, he passed his interest on to two of his children. It was about third grade when LaVigne thought he might have some artistic talent.

"I went to a Catholic school, and we were given paints and the class went outside," he said. "Most of the kids did trees or grass, but I did the outside of the church. I got a lot of praise for it,

and I thought maybe this was something I could be good at."

LaVigne studied art throughout high school and college, eventually earning bachelor's and master's of fine arts degrees at California State University, Long Beach. He also studied at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, where he met Dan McCann, who became his mentor, guiding him through the medium of oil painting to illustration.

"That changed my life," LaVigne said. "I always thought it was a touchy mess. He broke it down and demystified the process."

LaVigne has worked as a freelance illustrator since 1984 and currently is a graphic designer for the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office.

But he estimates he spends about 10 hours every weekend painting in his

Oxnard studio.

Many of his still life paintings are inspired by his grandmother's vintage silver-leafing collection.

"They bestowed a love of still life, looking at reflections, light shadows," he said. "There is a miniature atmosphere that surrounds these objects that has always interested me."

Sometimes they hint at a story. One painting at Sonarhart, titled "After the Waiting," shows two teacups, one filled, one empty with two saucers on top of the table.

The brush has a word for still life that translates into death, LaVigne said.

"I want my work to be about living things. I have tried to inject life into them, small gestures that may wander

into my studio. Boxes, plants," he said.

He doesn't use photographs, preferring to work from life, capturing the light.

"Working from natural light you can also tell what time of year they were painted. It's like a calendar," he said.

His paintings are about life and light and taking a moment to reflect on beautiful things you wouldn't otherwise notice, he said.

"I try to give the viewer a moment of clarity, a place they can return to and see something in it they didn't see before."

To view LaVigne's work, visit <http://www.danlaivigne.com>.



Clayton photo