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People/pet portraits, deep sea/outer space fantasy all in a day's work for local artist

From his office on the second floor of the Willdon Building, William Ludington has a good view of the reality of the ground and the possibilities of the heavens. Looking at his paintings, it's obvious his work is on an even larger spectrum.

A self-taught artist - save for high school art classes - Ludington opened a studio in the Willdon Building earlier this year. His work, which adorns the office, ranges from portraits to animals to fantasy work, mixing sky and sea: an astronaut underwater, the seabed reflected in his visor, or a sea creature on the surface of a planet far, far away.

Ludington came to painting in a roundabout way. Born in Louisiana to evangelical Methodist ministers, his parents were always "low man on the totem pole," and were moved from church to church. When the now 40-year-old was 11 or 12, the family moved to Oakwood.

His parents have moved on to other churches, but Ludington and his brother stayed in the area. Their parents return occasionally, more often now that grandchildren have arrived.

Although his earliest work was in graphite and colored pencils on paper, Ludington's earliest canvas was skin, working as a tattoo artist at Iron Tide Gallery in Danville for 15 years. There, he would take a barebones idea and flesh it out into artwork in ink.

He still remembers his first actual painting. Noting his tattoo talent, a coworker asked him to paint a picture from a photo of the coworker's deceased dog. "I said, 'I don't paint,'" but the coworker was insistent and Ludington obliged. "I fell in love with painting doing that painting," he said.

To paint well, Ludington thought he should learn the rules of painting...which he vaguely remembered hearing from a high school art teacher. "I wish I'd paid more attention then," he said.

He knew some of the rules, but didn't know why they were rules, so he researched. Sometimes the rules

served as a guide and sometimes, he found, it was ok to break them. He watched painting videos, learning strokes, textures and other techniques. He learned that techniques can be unique to the artist. "Just because something works for one guy doesn't mean it will work for you." He learned that quality materials are important. "The better the quality of the material, the better your product."

Research is something Ludington does no matter what the project. Even as a tattoo artist, if someone wanted Chinese characters, he researched. "I wanted to make sure it didn't say '99¢ double cheeseburgers,'" he said, chuckling.

For the last eight or nine years, Ludington's work has been in acrylic paint. Although he's used water paints (too limiting) and oil (takes too long to dry. "I don't have the patience") acrylic is his favorite. "I feel there's more life (with them)."

At one point, he took a break. "I went through two years where I didn't paint." Dissatisfied with some of his work, "I thought the piece of art that went on the canvas had to deserve to be on the canvas."

While he wasn't the stereotypical "starving artist," along with tattooing, Ludington took on other jobs, working for a while as a cook at Buffalo Wild Wings.

It was there he met Samantha Phillips, of



William Ludington puts the finishing touches on a painting in his Hoopeston studio.

Hoopeston, who was a waitress at the restaurant. They became friends who realized over time that they were more than friends. They've been together four years and have a son, three-year-old Sawyer.

Having previously worked at home, as Sawyer became mobile, Ludington realized he didn't want his son around paints and thinners and decided to move his career into its own space, although Sawyer is welcome there, too, to paint using Sawyer-sized easel and

See ARTIST on other side

Artist continued from other side

canvas. “I expected him to paint himself,” Ludington said, but after watching Dad so much, “he paints the canvas.”

In February, Ludington purchased an iPad, which opened up the world of digital art. There, he can play with colors, light, shadows and quickly erase things he doesn’t like. It also allows him to create videos of time-lapse portrait work and share them on the internet.

As painting became more important, and provided income stream, Ludington became tired of tattooing. At Mother’s Day, he brought his tattoo kit home to do a new

tattoo on Phillips. With Sawyer, the three went to Kennekuk County Park, where “I realized my heart wasn’t in it,” he said. Then came COVID-19.

Businesses deemed nonessential - like the tattoo gallery - closed, leaving Ludington with a family and no income. He did a self-portrait then one of Sawyer and posted them on Facebook. A couple of people messaged him, wanting portraits of their children, and he ended up with 25 or so orders.

“This was definitely a godsend to me. I started making a living.” People could order and pay online and there was “no contact whatsoever.”

Ludington doesn’t create art just to make money. He has donated his talent to help local groups, such as Save the Lorraine Foundation.

Whether its portraiture or fantasy art, Ludington wants to get his work out to the public, but he’s a realist. “If it

Weather

Sunny today. High 81. Tonight, mostly clear. Low 58. tomorrow mostly sunny. High 70, low 46.

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speaks to somebody, they’ll buy it. If it doesn’t, they won’t,” he said.

Some of Ludington’s work is available to view on his

Facebook page, www.facebook.com/Tattoo.BILL.I.AM, where he may also be reached for portrait requests. He may also be reached by phone at 217-260-3528.

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Cade’s Heating and Air HVAC installer/ service tech. must have valid IL drivers license and EPA freon license. Please send resume to ramcade@frontier.com or 101 E Penn St., Hoopeston IL 60942.

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