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## Artist's dream finally came true

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"If you can dream it, you can do it," Walt Disney said. Augusto Argandona, an artist who teaches watercolor painting at Venice Art Center, is living proof that Disney was correct.

Born in Bolivia, Argandona came to the United States in 1959. Although no one in his family was an artist, he dreamed of being one.

He enrolled in the College of San Mateo, CA, majored in art and then, degree in hand, he joined the U.S. Army. There he was able to earn extra money by painting portraits of the girlfriends of his fellow soldiers.

He also painted murals in Army dining halls and did some work as a draftsman. Heading back to school after his time in the service, Argandona earned a degree in industrial design at California State University.

Argandona worked for Sunbeam Appliances, then designed displays for Hallmark Cards in Kansas City and then, toys for Fischer Price in East Aurora, NY. He made a good living and even acquired patents for some of his designs.

Industrial design paid the rent, yet his dream continued.



**Beginning watercolor students watch closely and take notes as instructor Augusto Argandona works on a demonstration painting of a rustic house in a rural Florida setting.**

Argandona wanted to be able to support his family by brush alone.

Finally, when Fischer Price closed up shop in the United States, the company made him an offer that finally would make his dream come true.

He could paint what he wanted. He would sell his work at outdoor art shows.

"I started with outdoor malls in New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio," he said.

The artist lived in East Aurora, NY, which was close to Pennsylvania and Ohio. Finding success in those areas, he went to Florida where he discovered visitors from not only the entire U.S. but from around the world. It was a ready market for paintings of local scenes.

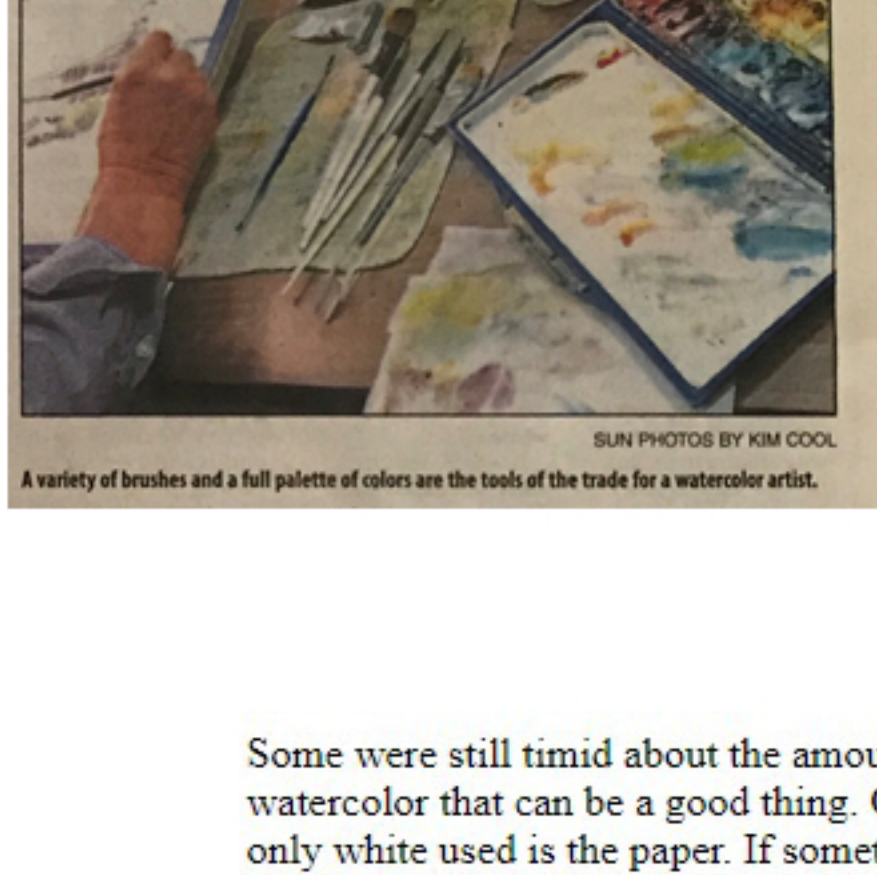
He moved to Florida in 1997. Soon his work was in galleries in Sarasota and Bradenton, and he had representatives in Tampa and Bradenton to sell his work throughout the state.

The dream took on a life of its own.

"I was always interested in teaching," Argandona said. "I developed a method for people who had never touched a brush."

It worked. Some of the proof is at the Venice Art Center where beginning students are not only drawing simple buildings but surrounding those buildings with interesting skies, green foliage and palm trees.

In a March 7 class at the VAC, he painted such a scene and the 15 or so students in his class painted similar scenes from photos they had taken to class. For many, this class was their third class — ever — in watercolor painting.



A variety of brushes and a full palette of colors are the tools of the trade for a watercolor artist.



Venice Art Center students can watch a demonstration painting in process close up or at their tables thanks to a giant mirror above the artist.

Some were still timid about the amount of color to use but in watercolor that can be a good thing. One can always add more. The only white used is the paper. If something in the final painting is to be white, that white spot on the paper must be planned for. As an example, the teacher left some white areas in the sky of his demonstration painting of an old building out in a rural area.

As he applied a light wash of blue at the top of the paper, one could see the clouds that would likely end up above the building. He decided to not paint two of the palm trees in his photo because they would detract from the old house, which would be the focus of this painting.

Next came the building itself — at least the base colors of the roof, front of the house with its somewhat dilapidated porch and the side of the house facing out from the page.

He planned to do away with some of the greenery in front of the building for the same reason he would omit the two palms — another distraction from his main subject.

As he continued with his demonstration painting, he continued to voice his thoughts. As he applied paint, he said what colors he was using such as sienna and cobalt and also mentioned whether he was working with a fairly dry brush, or not. He also decided to add some more to the back of the building and to add to the front porch.

Working on the roof with sienna to make the roof appear rusty, he applied color with a rather dry brush and then used an old credit card to scrape away some of the color. Most of the 15 or so students surrounded him, feverishly taking notes about the colors used, the various brushes and basic technique. Two students remained at their tables in the classroom, choosing to watch the mirror above the artist. There, they could see every move quite clearly.

Always thinking of his goal, Argandona decided to add a window to the building and some palmettos at one side. As he added greenery he was careful to leave some white paper to serve as light coming through the shrubbery.

He did a little more scraping with his old credit card to add some texture to the front of the house.

"Scrape when the paper is damp but not wet," he said. "If it is too wet, you will make a ridge and the paint will go there and be too dark."

"Don't be timid with the dark colors. It won't do any good in the tube."

Not missing a beat, the teacher added one more key piece of advice.

"It is not the paint. It is not the brush. It is the music."

In the classroom and at home, soft background music accompanies Argandona.

"As we go into the distance, tone down the colors with cobalt blue and raw sienna, with light violet to add distance. Keep the foreground simple, not much texturing."

He used his finger to blend some colors on the paper.

"Another lesson for the timid," he said. "There is no shadow at the bottom but we add it to set the stage of the whole scene."

He then added some more shadows to the building and beneath the leaves of the plants near the building (while maintaining those white spots).

It was 90 minutes since the class began. The painting was finished. He removed the blue tape that he uses around each painting, resulting in a nice clean edge to his work.

It was time for the students to get to work for the final hour.

"I have only been doing this for a year," student Nancy Thompson said. "I am very much a beginner. He wants us to go out and get pictures each week. For this week, it was a rural setting with a building."

Thompson's picture had a fence in front of the building.

"Don't do the fence," Argandona said as he chatted with Thompson. "It says, Keep away."

Thompson said she would be back for the afternoon class that day as well.

Next to her at the front table was Evelyn Albert, who came to Venice from the Wilksbury-Scranton area of Pennsylvania.

"I've never done anything like this before," she said. "I'm a book reader and played tennis and golf. I figured I would jump into something unfamiliar."

This was just her third day of class yet she had a building that actually looked like a building. It was surrounded by greenery and had a pale blue sky above. No student seemed to have used too much paint. If anything, the tendency was to be timid with color, knowing they could always add more.

In this class, it seemed as though everyone had listened.

At 1 p.m., Thompson was back at her place at the front table but with an entire new class. The teacher would be painting a picture of downtown Cedar Key, using far more colors than in the morning's painting and a far more complicated subject that contained buildings with intriguing roof lines, cars parked along the street and people in colorful outfits out shopping. (The artist picked the colors for the outfits and even for the cars on the street.)

There was an electric pole at one side, some wires and many more such details than in the simpler painting created for the morning class. A returning student at the back of the room was working on a painting of a float plane landing near a dock. It would be a gift for her grandson who was a pilot.

As in the morning, Argandona talked about the brushes and colors he was using and why as he tackled the more complicated subject. Students took notes as they had in the morning and, again, it was obvious that Argandona was constantly thinking of each step needed to place that complicated picture on the white watercolor paper. Somehow, although the subject was far more complicated, Argandona completed his afternoon demonstration painting in 90 minutes as he had in the morning.

Watercolor is the most unforgiving medium for a painter. One can add more color but taking it away is sometimes impossible, even with a credit card and scraping. Artists in oil, tempera and acrylics can put color or light colors on top at the end, as needed for definition. Watercolor artists need to always think about where the white and light colors must remain to the very end.

Opening Friday,

April 7, with a reception from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Venice Art Center, is the Florida Suncoast Watercolor Society annual members show. Argandona is one of several local members whose work will be featured in this show, which continues at the VAC through May 5.

If there is an art to it, Venice Art Center has a teacher for it. Classes range from one day to several weeks in length and cover techniques as well as marketing. Stop by the VAC to pick up a course selection guide and/or to see the latest show in the galleries as well as member work for sale in the VAC sales gallery at the center's front entrance.

The Venice Art Center is at 390 S. Nokomis Ave., on the Cultural Campus of downtown Venice.

Thursday, April 6, is the next Venice Art Walk that features more than 12 Venice galleries and local artists. For Art Walk information, call 941-485-3029.

For more information about Venice Art Center, classes, shows, satellite galleries and more, call 941-485-7136.

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