

## Greenwich artist overcomes dyslexia to pursue artistic passion

By Frank Maceachern

Staff Writer, Greenwich Times

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Michael Hone doesn't know how to describe himself when it comes to his art.

"I don't know what I would call myself — I just like to draw," said the retired backhoe operator for the town who dropped out of school at the age of 16.

His work, which is on display at Cos Cob Library through the end of the month, revolves around his love of his Model T cars — of which he has three — junkyards and scenes of Greenwich that the town native remembers as a youth.

Hone, 65, an Old Greenwich resident and self-taught artist, infuses humor into many of his works, such as one in which he and his wife, Lynne, sit in a Model T watching a movie at a drive-in theater — except the theater is, in fact, his cluttered garage and the couple views the movie alone.



“You can see I’m asleep and she’s crying,” he said with a laugh about their respective interests in the movie.

High school sweethearts, he and Lynne married in 1970.

It’s that subject matter, drawing on scenes of everyday life, that puts Hone in the category of a folk artist, according to a folklorist.

Gregory Sharrow, the director of education at the Vermont Folklore Center in Middlebury, Vt., said it’s a broad term and doesn’t simply mean someone who has not formally studied art.

“It’s that intimate personal expression and experience that makes it folk art,” Sharrow said.

For Hone, art was a way of coping with dyslexia, a learning disability that makes reading and writing difficult and traditional school in the ’50s and ’60s a trying experience.

“They just passed you on, that’s what they did in those days,” he said about being promoted to higher grades in the even though his dyslexia took a toll on his grades. “I was an awful student.”

Hone did whatever he could to avoid reading and writing in public.



“I was a good liar,” he said with a laugh. “I don’t know how many times I said I had a problem with my eye or that I had to go to the bathroom. But I think the teachers knew.”

What the teachers also knew was that he had a singular gift for drawing.

“I think it was around Grade 3 that I knew I could draw when one of my teachers saw me and said I was doing a really good job,” Hone said.

The middle of five children born to Robert Emmett and Eloise, Hone said he believed he acquired his gift from his father, who would draw mechanical objects.

Hone can’t remember if he completed the ninth grade, but said his mother made the decision that he leave school and get a job.

“It was actually a waste of my time and my mother said it was time for me to get a job,” he said.

He was 16 years old when he dropped out, and for the next seven years he held a succession of jobs, such as a landscaper and working at the Greenwich Field Club where he did a number of jobs, from stocking shelves to tending bar.

Then the Army came calling.

In 1967, Hone was drafted as the Vietnam War raged. He said the Army’s attempt to turn him into a rocket specialist was a failure.

“I told them you’re wasting your time,” he said with a laugh. “Light a firecracker, no problem, light a rocket,” he said, his voice trailing off.

His dyslexia made it difficult to read and write quickly and he had to absorb a lot of information for the unit.

After three months of frustration, the Army decided he was right and Hone was transferred to a unit that

stored and cared for ammunition.



He struggled to take notes on what an instructor wrote on a blackboard. That's when his gift of art came in handy.

"I couldn't write the stuff down fast enough, so I would draw a picture of what he was talking about," he said.

One day an instructor caught him drawing during a class and slapped him because he thought Hone wasn't paying attention, he said.

But Hone explained to the instructor that it was his way of taking notes. Intrigued, the instructor offered him the chance to illustrate a training manual for the unit.

"I said that would be great, but I got shipped out; I got ordered to go to California — they made a cook out of me. Oh boy, that was terrible," he said.

He was sent to a base in Germany after his cook's training.

"I lucked out, I really did, everybody else, or nearly everybody else, was going to Vietnam," he said.

Near the end of his time in Germany he was transferred to the motor pool, as a mechanic, and tapped into his love of automobiles.

Fresh out of the Army, he returned to Greenwich in 1969 and got a job with the town's parks and recreation department in November. He spent the next 34 years there before retiring in 2003.

He continued drawing, sometimes even on the job, when work was slow and there was some downtime, he said.

Hone has never thrown any of his drawings away.

"I have boxes and boxes of it at home."

He began selling his works in the early 1980s, but said the business side of art is uncomfortable for him.

“That’s the hard part, selling it. I can draw it, but selling it is another story,” he said. “I am just not a very good salesman.”

But his original works in pen and ink and watercolor range from \$500 for a smaller work to \$1,100 for a larger 21-inch-by-30-inch canvas.

A portion of his collection is on display at the Cos Cob branch of Greenwich Library. The original works at the library are not for sale, but he is selling prints of his works.