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## Dickinson's poetry a catalyst for art show

By CATHERINE BAUM  
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AMHERST - Eighteen years ago, Easthampton artist Alberto Mancini suffered a cerebral hemorrhage that left him in a coma for six weeks. He suffered partial paralysis for two years and memory loss to the point where he didn't know his own name.

He has since fully recovered, and was able to express his awakening from that experience in the title of his coming exhibit, "I'll tell you how the sun rose -" inspired in part by the works of 19th-century poet and lifelong Amherst resident Emily Dickinson.

The exhibit is especially meaningful to Mancini, who said his love for Dickinson's work began years ago after he awoke from his coma and found himself in what he describes as a "personal psychological regression," in which he was trying to understand himself in relation to nature. He dedicated the exhibition to his only child, his son Jacopo Mancini, 19, who lives in Italy and attends the University of Perugia. The artist will reunite with his son this fall, when he returns to Italy for three months before coming back to Easthampton.

The show, presented by The Emily Dickinson International Society with The Emily Dickinson Museum, is made up of 29 oil paintings Mancini created based on Dickinson's poems. They will be displayed at Amherst College's Eli Marsh Gallery, 105 Fayerweather Hall, Saturday through Aug. 10. The opening reception will be held Saturday from 4:30-6:30 p.m.

"Scenes of transfiguration proliferate in Mancini's paintings, impressing us with the luminous, shimmering pulse of vital energies that we have come to know in different ways through Dickinson's poems," said Paul Crumbley, president of The Emily Dickinson International Society. Crumbley, associate professor of English and American studies at Utah State University, is one of many Dickinson scholars who meet once a year for the society's annual meeting. The meeting place varies throughout the world, but this year - the 20th anniversary of the society's annual meetings - the organization will meet in Amherst.

"He gives us her sunsets, flowers and butterflies recast according to the terms of his own artistic vision," said Crumbley. "Even the most dedicated student of Dickinson will see her work in new light as a consequence of viewing the 29 paintings."

Mancini, 47, painted these pieces when he was living in Sarasota, Fla., and has kept them in storage for two years. He said he wanted the paintings to be seen first in Amherst.

Mancini has always been fond of nature, as nature grabbed his attention when he painted while growing up in Atina, a small mountain town in southern Italy where generations of his family have lived for 400 years.

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GORDON DANIELS

Alberto Mancini stands next to one of the paintings that will be featured in an exhibit opening this weekend at Amherst College.



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His father, Flavio Mancini, taught him, between ages 8 and 12, how to use fabrics, oil and watercolors and tree leaves and branches to create drawings, paintings or collages, in sessions in their home almost every evening. Flavio Mancini, a portrait photographer, inspired his son to draw and, in doing so, passed on his curiosity and appreciation of nature, Mancini said.

"My father was able to play with everything," he said recently in his Eastworks art studio as his cat, Micia, which is Italian for "kitty," walked around the studio's maple wood floors.

Mancini, who is also a practicing architect in Italy, consults his business partners and workers in Italy via a Web camera daily.

"He's a force of life; now he's 74 and he's much more alive than myself," Mancini said of his father. "We cannot stop him."

Knowing Mancini's affinity for nature, his poet friend, Alfonso Cardamone, guided Mancini to a collection of Dickinson's poems.

"He said, 'Why don't you put your nose in Emily Dickinson poems?'" Mancini said.

Following his advice, Mancini read a collection of Dickinson's poems. Later, he found her full collection, which was translated in Italian. He was able to connect to them using his imagination, which is stored in what he calls his "big pot." Mancini believes the person he is today is rooted in experiences and thoughts created in early childhood.

Emily Dickinson's words bring Mancini back to that earlier period in his life.

"It's very easy to build up a meaning because our brain has energy to make meaning," Mancini said.

Mancini recalls connections he made with nature as a child - from holding tree branches down to get a closer look at birds to spending every day exploring the woods with his friends to holding a bee in his hand, assuring it he would not hurt it and then letting it go. The flowers, the breeze and the clovers Dickinson wrote about are a familiarity Mancini wanted to work with.

When it came time to express his interpretation of her poetry in his images, Mancini painted on impulse, to a point, he said, that "seemed like somebody else was behind me" stroking the paintbrush for him.

"When I need images I have to go into my big pot," Mancini said. "You just go in your big pot and search. The process is much more important than the work."

This exhibit is the first Mancini's done working with poetry. It all happened because he was touched by the connection he made to words that were written more than 100 years ago from a place that is thousands of miles away from where he grew up.

"Poetry has no space, no time, no distances," Mancini said. "It's just there. It just happens. The feelings, they come out. All of them go into this feeling of just one."

Following the August exhibit, Mancini will sell his paintings. Though he admits it "hurts" him to think they will be taken away, he said he wants them to communicate something to others.

"Anything an artist does must leave," Mancini said. "They must go around. They have to give the chance to be put into life."

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