

# The Art of Winter at TI Arts Center to feature works of R. Paul Saphier

By [CHRIS BROCK](#)

TIMES STAFF WRITER

PUBLISHED: SATURDAY, JANUARY 31, 2015 AT 12:30 AM

CLAYTON — Artist Robert Paul Saphier had been painting for years when he first witnessed the Thousand Islands area, which brought him unmatched inspiration.

“This is where his anchor dropped,” said Evelyn Saphier, the late artist’s wife. “Paul really tuned in to the spirit of the Thousand Islands. He had a feeling about the river that it was infinite. He could sit in the same spot and paint forever.”

Some of the works by Mr. Saphier, who died at the age of 70 last June, will be showcased beginning Friday when the annual exhibit “The Art of Winter” opens at the Thousand Islands Arts Center, 314 John St.

Mr. Saphier’s works have been shown at galleries across the country and frequently in New York City. Many art collectors in the north country own his works.

Mr. Saphier received his bachelor’s degree from Syracuse University and did graduate study at the University of Colorado at Boulder and Teachers College, Columbia University, New York City, where he received his master’s degree in fine art.

Before discovering the Thousand Islands, the areas he visited and captured in his art included India, the Pacific coast, the American Southwest, Florida and the Caribbean.

The small gallery at the Thousand Islands Arts Center center will feature the Saphier exhibit, consisting of about a dozen works including watercolors, egg temperas and gouache paintings. All works, including prints, will be for sale.

Nicole Heath, exhibitions and events coordinator at the arts center, said the Saphiers have been supporters of the center through their membership and frequent participation in exhibitions.

“Paul’s paintings are often thought-provoking and always visually striking,” Ms. Heath said. “They often stood out in our exhibits. His approach was unique and distinctive.”

Mr. Saphier first came to the Thousand Islands in the 1980s. He married Evelyn Kaselow in 1984, who had been coming to the Thousand Islands area for years as part of her family’s vacations. When Evelyn and Robert Paul married, they lived in New York City but would spend several months of the year at their seasonal home near Hammond.

“He loved the north country — the sort of rugged, wild, unmanicured feel of it,” Mrs. Saphier said. “He loved the austerity of it.”

Mr. Saphier was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1978, eight years after he first began experiencing symptoms of the disease. MS, his wife, said, greatly affected his art.

“Multiple sclerosis, at various points, became a blessing in disguise,” Mrs. Saphier said.

She said her husband had “primary progressive” MS. According to the Cleveland Clinic, such patients tend to have symptoms that gradually progress without typical relapses.

“He didn’t have dramatic onsets and remissions,” Mrs. Saphier said. “Whatever he had, he dealt with and it was very gradual. And because he was moderate in his habits, he was able to live a long time without pain.”

Mr. Saphier’s MS mainly affected his legs, his wife said, which left his upper body free to paint and draw.

“A lot of people with MS live with pain,” Mrs. Saphier said. “Paul didn’t live with pain. He was lucky from so many points of view.”

Mrs. Saphier said her husband also practiced meditation, which combined with his lack of mobility, gave him a particular benefit as he produced his art.

"The inability to move and the ability to calm his mind gave him an enhanced ability to focus," she said.

She recalls watching him sit patiently gazing out at the St. Lawrence River at their Hammond-area home.

"He'd sit out by the river, basically almost without moving for hours and hours," Mrs. Saphier said. "He'd paint and draw in the wind and the rain. Dogs would come up and shake off beside him. People would be talking to him. It didn't matter. He just sat there and painted."

His multiple sclerosis also led to Mr. Saphier to take up the medium of egg tempera for many of his works. Egg tempera is composed of egg yolk and pigments and dates back to the Renaissance age.

"Because of multiple sclerosis, Paul couldn't use oils," Mrs. Saphier said. "He started to react to the fumes. So he took up egg tempera. It was the perfect medium for the translation of his artistic ideas. (It) requires a careful composition, which enabled him to use his love of structure and geometry."

It's also very time consuming, she said.

"It's layer upon layer of translucent coloring," Mrs. Saphier said. "It creates a very luminous effect and the colors don't diminish over time like oils."

Mr. Saphier also used a geometric relationship pattern for much of his art called the divine proportion, also known as the golden ratio. It's a geometric ratio (1.618) often found in nature and thought to be aesthetically pleasing.

"After he was introduced to the concept, he discovered that his artwork had already incorporated it intuitively and he started to do it more consciously," Mrs. Saphier said. "For a while, he was working out his art compositions according to mathematical principles and applying them ... His work became more abstract and he became more interested in pure abstraction."

But there was one constant about Mr. Saphier, his wife said.

"His mentality was vast, yet his nature was childlike and very simple," she said. "Everything about him was always fresh and original."

"He was a great inspiration to us in showing us how to live life with purpose and perseverance — as both an artist and wonderful individual," Ms. Heath said.

the details

WHAT: "The Art of Winter" exhibit at the Thousand Islands Arts Center, 314 John St., Clayton

WHEN: Runs Friday through March 27, with an opening reception from 5 to 7 p.m. Friday.

The exhibit can be viewed from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Admission is free.