

## Rockingham doctor-turned-artist to have art featured in New York City

'Mosaic-making' with paint

By Robert Audette

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**ROCKINGHAM** >> When Matthew Peake returned home to Minneapolis from college at the end of his sophomore year, he told his mother and father he wanted to be an artist rather than a doctor. Needless to say, that didn't go over very well with his father, an Irish German who was working at General Mills at the time.

"He said 'We're not paying all this money so you can come out of college with a career that can't support a family,'" said Peake, in an interview with the Reformer. "My dad was the kind of guy who, when General Mills bought art to display in its buildings, would say 'Why can't they just buy us a Christmas ham instead?'"

This was in 1973, and Peake was an undergraduate at Stanford University, studying to be a doctor. He took a design class and something clicked. But after his father laid down the law, Peake gave up on that dream, at least for the next three decades.

On Feb. 18, at Chelsea's Agora Gallery in New York City, Peake and his art will be feted in a reception featuring his paintings in "Fragmented Reality." The exhibition, which features artworks from 20 artists opens for public viewing on Feb. 12.

"I went back to Stanford, finished my major in chemistry and attended medical school at NYU," said Peake. "I was a medical student. I gave up art altogether."

Peake performed his residency at the Medical College of Virginia, and married Leslie Goldman, who was a nurse practitioner. In 1982, they both decided they want to move to New England, either Maine, where they had vacationed a time or two, or Massachusetts, where Goldman had gone to college.

"We went around to various place but somehow ended up in Vermont," said Peake. "We liked it culturally and politically."

Peake and his wife settled into Rockingham, working for Rockingham Hospital until it was bought by Springfield Medical Center and converted into a clinic. Peak, his wife and Gary Clay rounded Greater Falls Health Center, and there he remained until the old itch demanded scratching.

"In my late 40s, I started painting part time. I studied with local artists, using pastels, acrylics and oils. When our kids went off to college and my wife went off for her masters, I decided maybe it's time I did it full time."

Peake, now 62, quit his "real" job on June 6, 2006, and picked right up where he left off before that fateful visit to his folks in Minneapolis. Peake said his father did not approve.

"He wouldn't talk to me for nine months. It was very hurtful. Whenever I called home, he would hand the phone to my mom."

During a trip back to visit his folks, Peake had a long talk with his dad and assured him that he and his wife were financially secure and that he had spent a lot of time thinking about returning to art.

"But he never really accepted the fact that someone in his family was an artist. That was hard."

His parents, both deceased, never had a chance to see their son's art hanging in a gallery.

Though giving up his medical practice was not a financial risk, said Peake, it was a challenge to his identity, who he thought he was. For 27 years, Peake practiced medicine in Rockingham. "I didn't go to art school and didn't believe I could call myself an artist. It took a few years."

But he stuck with it, and in 1997 or so, he began to realize he truly had talent. Eventually his art made it into juried shows around Vermont and he began teaching at Main Street Arts in Saxtons River and at the River Gallery School in Brattleboro.

One breakthrough contributed to Peake's evolution as an artist. He collaborated with a number of artists to create a piece of work in which they took turns painting.

"We sat back and looked at it, turning it over and over. Somebody would pick it up and turn it and it meant something different to each one of us."

Peake learned that there is a difference between intent and how your art is perceived.

"A tremendous amount of unconscious thought goes into making a piece of art. Art reveals itself in different ways."

Peake created the RoFrame, on which a piece of art is mounted and an observer can spin it in any direction to view it from different angles. His art was perfectly suited for the RoFrame, because he often draws from a perspective looking down on a group of people.

"By turning the painting, it allows the viewer to suggest a narrative or tell a story.; By turning the painting, you change the mood and the meaning."

According to a press release from the Agora Gallery, Peake applies paint in small pieces of color in a technique that he likens to mosaic-making.

"In oil or pastel, Peake depicts everyday scenes with energy, finding infinite variations on walking, sitting, and speaking groups of people. He shows us what we look like from an angle that possibly no one has ever seen before. Peake also draws heavily on his experience with dance and travel to depict moving, changing formations of figures."

The Agora Gallery is located at 530 West 25th St., Chelsea, New York. For more information, visit [www.agora-gallery.com/artistpage/Matthew J. Peake.aspx](http://www.agora-gallery.com/artistpage/Matthew_J_Peake.aspx) ([http://www.agora-gallery.com/artistpage/Matthew J. Peake.aspx](http://www.agora-gallery.com/artistpage/Matthew_J_Peake.aspx)).

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