

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: MICHAEL BRANCA

SMCC adds art to curriculum

Michael Branca is the artist in residence at Southern Maine Community College.



Staff photo by John Ewing

Michael Branca and his latest painting, "Reach" (in background).

Q: *What is your background?*

A: I'm a visual artist. I work mostly in oil painting, but I also experiment with a lot of other media. I sometimes work large, sometimes tiny and occasionally incorporate found objects into my work. I've been exhibiting in museums and galleries since 1993. As artist in residence at SMCC, I have developed and am teaching the school's first introductory drawing class, and have worked on infusing art into the broader curriculum by giving art talks to a variety of other types of classes. I'm helping to get an art program off the ground at a school where art has never had much of a place. After this year I will remain at SMCC as an adjunct art instructor. I studied art at Colby College, Temple University Rome and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.

Q: *Why did you choose this line of work?*

A: I do what I do because I love it and always have. I chose to pursue my art because it's my passion and it's what I'm best at. Making a career out of it has been challenging at times and not very lucrative, but if it were about money for me I would have quit a long time ago. I feel very lucky to be getting into teaching as well because I have the opportunity to use my passion and experience to help inspire others.

Q: *What are the favorite/least favorite aspects of your job?*

A: SMCC is undergoing a lot of change right now, and it's great to be a part of that. The broader societal trend is more toward reducing arts education, not expanding it. People on this campus, including students, faculty and staff, all seem to be excited about anything art-related that springs up. I enjoy being in the position to help bring that to people.

Q: *Which artist(s) do you emulate and why?*

A: I derive my inspiration from all over. My historical influences are rooted in the storytelling of the Italian Renaissance artists, and I've always admired van Gogh's color and energy. I like any work that's non-

alienating, has something to say and is well-executed.

Q: *Did you grow up in this area?*

A: I grew up in Massachusetts and moved to Maine to go to Colby. After living in the Southwest and elsewhere after graduation, I eventually gravitated back here. I identify as a native New Englander, and Maine has intact elements of all the best characteristics of New England, including beautiful landscape and great communities. It also has a fantastic art scene.

Q: *What's the best thing about living/working in South Portland?*

A: The SMCC campus is in one of the most beautiful locations imaginable for a col-

lege. If I need a break, I can take a walk on the beach or climb up on the fort and look out over the harbor. I commute from Scarborough by bicycle as much as possible, and the roads I take are some of the best biking routes around.

Q: *What do you do for fun/recreation/hobbies?*

A: Along with biking and painting, I hike and go camping as much as possible.

Q: *Is there anything you would like to add?*

A: As part of my residency at SMCC, I have created a large painting for the Campus Center. It's titled "Reach," and as its title suggests, it is meant to help inspire viewers to stretch themselves to realize their full potential.