

SCRATCHPAD

To public artists: Thanks for letting us judge you

By ERICK BENGEL

I'm trying to imagine what it would be like to write this column with several dozen pairs of eyes on me — scrutinizing my expression, second-guessing my word choices, judging my abilities. Would I block them out, or treat myself to a nice public meltdown?

During the last two weekends, I attended Cannon Beach events where artists had to do that very thing: Craft something in full view of murmuring spectators.

First came the Sandcastle Contest, where teams set out to build impressive, yet delicate, sand sculptures while thousands of visitors

streamed by (not to mention judges — of whom I was one — taking notes and assigning scores).

And on Sunday, at the Plein Air & More arts festival, painters, sculptures, ceramicists and others plied their trade outdoors amid throngs of opinionated onlookers.

I asked Mike Rangner, an oil painter and guest artist at Bronze Coast Gallery, how he can even concentrate in a setting where his process is analyzed as much as his product.

"There is a little bit of insecurity when you first start any event," he said. "You always feel a little bit of insecurity."

It helps, he said, to show up with a work-in-progress, so that most

major decisions have already been made.

Later, I asked Michael Orwick and Anton Pavlenko — featured artists at DragonFire Gallery — how they got over their stage fright. "Alcohol," Orwick joked.

They, too, came prepared with small-scale versions of their planned paintings to use as a jump-off point.

Every year becomes less nerve-racking, they said. But the anxiety is still there, a faithful friend that can be more or less audible.

"Sometimes thoughts creep in like, 'What if this goes horribly wrong?'" Pavlenko said.

"And paintings do, all the time," Orwick added.

That's the real fear, right? Not that people are watching, but that we will lose the moment, stumble, and people will judge us. What if this pile of sand looks nothing like a singing porpoise? What if I completely botch this beachscape of Haystack Rock?

Judging the work of people who put themselves out there is an easy and necessary pastime, and — let's be honest — a fun one. We lay down our standards and dock points when those standards aren't met. Human nature.


But here's to the people — from artists to athletes to city councilors — who know this and choose to work in public anyway, who let us watch them make mistakes in real time, who are brave enough to let us judge them. 



PHOTO BY DANNY MILLER
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