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without sharing the profits with the students, de'Masi has little work to show from that period.

Not only did he flourish creatively back then, de'Masi was also primed to represent Naples as a professional soccer player. Departing his native country at such a time and age made the transition difficult, especially since the bustling metropolis was a far cry from the representation of America's spacious and untamed countryside portrayed in the western films de'Masi watched with his brothers.

"I never liked it," he said. "I always wanted to go back."

He had the opportunity as a young man in his 20s, after serving with the U.S. Navy and traveling to Italy, assisting the admiral by translating and sharing insight into the country. Upon his mother's wishes, however, de'Masi returned to the U.S.

There are times he feels the sting of disappointment for opportunities he might have had — such as a professional soccer career — were



COLIN MURPHEY PHOTO

Oscar de'Masi holds up an example of his work now displayed in his new studio in Astoria.

he not moved from Italy when he was.

"When the visa came, when I was 15, that dream went out the window," he said. "It is still stuck in my throat, and it doesn't want to come up and it doesn't want to go down."

Projecting emotions

He considers himself significantly fortunate, however, because of his family, including his wife, Patricia, whom he met while dealing blackjack in Las Vega, and his daughter and two sons.

As for life's more disappointing turns, he has

made peace. His experiences — moving to Las Vegas in 1980; owning and cooking at restaurants; working in casinos; meeting interesting people, even celebrities; and caring for his younger sister during the final years of her fight against cancer — have molded his perspective and

approach to art.

Part of the impetus for switching his career from card dealing to food service was to help balance, in a larger scheme, his participation in the gambling industry, which he saw bring misery to many people.

"I was making people unhappy," he said. "After a while, I realized what I was doing, and it didn't feel good. But when I cooked, it was a whole different ballgame."

The same is true of his work as an artist.

"I paint things to move people," he said, adding that every piece of work tells a story. He believes art is a way to project his inner emotions — "When I do a painting, I'm completely involved," he said — and elicit the same in people who view his work.

Art is also, he feels, a way to gain a certain immortality.

Breaking free

Two themes are embedded in a couple of de'Masi's series.

The first is breaking free from systems of oppression or monotony to become the

truest version of oneself. This theme is represented in a few pieces by carousel horses that break away, finding genuine life.

The second is the desire to leave home that most young people possess, which is symbolized by the character Red Riding Hood. Going into "the woods" can have various meanings for different people, but leaving home inevitably leads to facing the often frightening unknown.

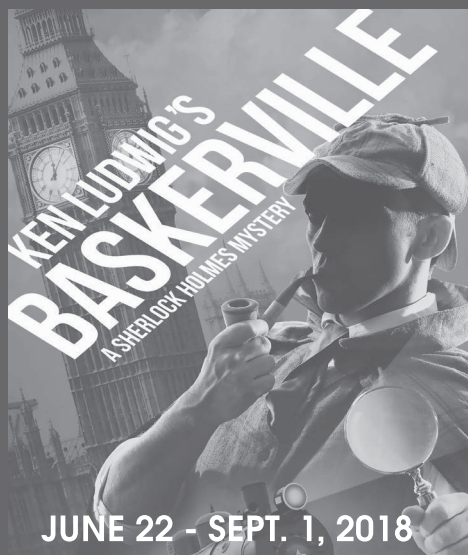
De'Masi has also started working on a series of paintings that draw inspiration from Astoria's history and landmarks. He hopes to eventually produce these images on souvenir items.

Having his gallery double as his studio is important to de'Masi. People who stop by can talk to him in person about the artwork and hear the story behind each piece.

"I'm hoping my art will trigger some emotion or memory or event, or make someone realize something, or give a person something in just a day that will pick them up," he said.

For more information about the gallery, visit demasiocreations.com. 

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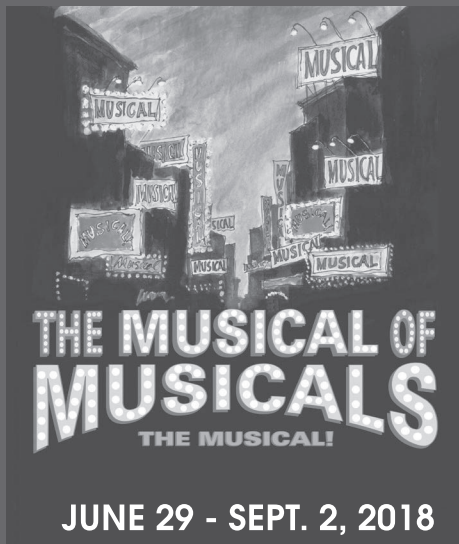


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