



Visiting Darren Haper at his art studio for the first time is a jolt to the senses. There's the smell of paint, the beams of sunshine coming through the window, and you can't help but notice the striped knit cap on his head that matches the stripes on his paint-stained shirt. Among it all are his beautifully eclectic paintings in different stages of completion.

There are the giant canvases of whimsical characters and objects that erupt from bright colors that are ready to hang in a gallery or on an art lover's wall. Then, there are the stacks of paintings that you can leaf through, and earlier appreciates the modern masters, it is his two children that influence him most. His "Cyclops" series is a direct descendent of his son's imagination.

"This drawer is full of the kids' artwork. I loved to draw all the time as a kid. I think they're more creative than I ever was."

His daughter is 11 years old. His son is 9. The family lives in the Villages of Miami subdivision. He, his wife and kids, have called the township home for about a decade.

Haper says he really started to focus on his love of art in the sixth grade when his mother bought him a Walter Foster cartoon drawing book. Foster was an artist who created and published how-to art books. "I would spend hours just drawing these cartoon characters."

Haper's most recent work pays homage to those how-to books he loved as a child. "You can see that I'm kind of getting back into a cartoonish feel of art."



He grew up in the south with his mother until the eighth grade when he moved to Ohio to live with his father. He attended Spring Valley Academy, then got a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Miami University. Haper worked for the now-defunct McAllister's Art Supplies in Dayton and for a non-profit to help make ends meet. He currently works for Dayton artist, Mike Elsass, whose work is described as mixed media on weathered steel.

Haper knows just how tough it is to make a living as an artist and that it takes a great deal of business savvy to get your work recognized. He relies on Instagram and other social media to share his art, but he also has his own website and uses an online marketplace called Saatchi Art to help sell his paintings.

“This is all I ever really wanted to do, never really had a way to make a living with it. So, I have other jobs as most artists do.”



Haper needs a lot of space to create his huge canvases. He currently paints on a synthetic paper of which three sizable sheets lay on the floor with his works in progress. His studio is one of many inside the Front Street Building near downtown Dayton. His studio

neighbor is Elsass.

Front Street is a growing artists' community made up of refurbished warehouses. It bills itself online as the largest community of artists and artisans in the Dayton area. It holds a popular First Friday event each month when the artists open their studios to the public. They also hold a Third Sunday outdoor market to encourage people to visit the nearby small businesses along East Third Street. The market offers everything from crafts to arts and antiques, baked goods and entertainment.

If you are looking for a Friday evening excursion outside Miami Township, consider meeting Haper and experience his work firsthand during a First Friday event on Front Street. There you will find artists, artisans and an overabundance of talent.

See more of Darren Haper's works of art by visiting his website:

<http://darrenhaper.com/>.



Cyclops Series
(Photo courtesy: Darren Haper)

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