

PARKS & GRAVEYARDS (or “Yes, I am a Nerd”)

November 15, 2018

SPENDING TIME WITH SAM LENZ

NOVA Open caught up with Sam Lenz following his memorable experiences at the convention this year, where Sam contributed to the NOCF raffles, taught seminars, and walked away with several well-earned Capital Palette awards.

WHO IS SAM LENZ?

Sam set a humorous tone for the interview when he responded to a request to tell us a little about himself: “I’m a Sagittarius, I enjoy rainy days, walks in the woods, movies,” 33 years old, in a strong, one-year relationship and - as a Wisconsin native - his favorite cheese of the moment is Smoked Apple Cheddar. And yes, he promised to bring some for the staff when he returns to NOVA Open 2019!

When Sam paused to contemplate the question a bit more seriously, he explained that he is primarily driven by a desire to be constructive, to have meaning in every moment of his day. He has also developed a passion for daily workouts, on a mission to prepare his body for the long haul of life. He is humbled by and grateful for the sheer magnitude of commission work that comes his way, and his biggest take away from the classes he teaches is the joy of meeting the people who take time out of their lives to learn from him. “There is a special symbiotic give and take that happens which is unique to the classroom – the students have something they want to learn, and I have something to share.”



THE JOURNEY OF SAM LENZ

This multi-dimensional artist can trace his interest in miniatures back to age 7 when his father introduced Sam and his 13-year-old brother to model airplanes and “army men in the sandbox.” Not long after that, his brother came home with a box of (wait for it)... Space Marines. Few people reading this article will fail to realize the Great Significance of that moment: they were all hooked. Today, Samson Minis, private classes, and seminars, all combine to pay the bills.

It is not unusual to learn that talented miniature artists have also dabbled in other realms where creativity takes center stage. In Sam’s case, dabbling would be inaccurate. His eclectic history includes developing his artistic skills to a marketable level. He sells art on Big Cartel (childhood dream was to become a Games Workshop illustrator), plays music in bands (heavy metal and drums, though he can play other instruments too), and is an accomplished tattoo artist with hundreds of inks in his portfolio. He also runs a highly successful Twitch stream.

INSPIRATIONS & AWARDS

Roman Lappat (Massive Voodoo) is one of Sam’s greatest inspirations. Sam is a self-taught artist who developed his skills following the blogs of Roman, Dave Taylor, Matt DiPietro, and others. We were surprised to learn that he has taken only four (4) classes in his career – not surprised to discover three were taught by Roman! Sam admits this probably had more to do with finances than desire.

Sam shared that “it is Roman’s chaotic style of painting, his quick points of focus that appeal to him, but it is the large scenic bases that Roman uses to create the atmosphere and add narratives to the pieces” that adds to the impact this world-renowned artist has on Sam’s work.

Sam recalls his first award, a Golden Daemon at one of the original Game Days hosted by Games Workshop back in 2009. The win both surprised and inspired him to continue in competitions. His next outing, much to his chagrin, was a net zero. Undaunted, Sam revels in his first Crystal Brush, awarded by Roman Lappat. He had gathered up several family gifts (sentimental models created for loved ones) and brought them to the show; that the one he’d given his father won the Crystal Brush was, obviously, a treasured moment.



Sam shared that his favorite model is “Dimensional Bleedthrough” (named for a heavy metal album) which one Best in Show at NOVA Open’s Capital Palette this year. Why? A mentor of his once told him that no work of art was ever finished – only abandoned. In a deviation from that long-held belief, Sam sees “Dimensional Bleedthrough” as one of the few pieces he has ever completed.

SAMSON MINIS

Those who attended the convention last year will remember Sam as the guy with the long dreadlocks. He owns Samson Minis. We had to ask: Would cutting the dreads result in a loss of his considerable talents? “I’d love to be Samson in real life. Yes, I am a Nerd! But to answer the question, no. I recently cut the dreads off and, surprise, there is a market for them, to have them made into miniature painting brushes! Who am I to deny the supply?!” Who knew?

Samson Minis is the portal for reaching Sam Lenz for commissions or seminars. He tells us that his favorite part of all this may well be the private lessons he teaches at his home in Appleton, Wisconsin – the HUGE urban center (of just 70K citizens) he moved to from his childhood home in Winchester (population in the hundreds).



Sam enjoys creating lessons around a student’s favorite genre and models, focusing on the desired techniques each is trying to achieve. This is most effective in his private lessons which he describes as two-day adventures that are supposed to run about 8 hours each day, but often run over by a few more. Sam likes to break up the days by sharing Appleton and its surrounding beauty with his students. Doing

what? “Mostly visiting and hiking parks and graveyards around Fox Valley – they’re all so beautiful.”
Yup, he said that – parks and graveyards!

Upon deeper reflection, that makes a lot of sense. Sam imbues his miniature art with what he calls “heavy metal attitude” which dovetails nicely with his attraction to the “dark skull-side” of the hobby and his affinity for orks. In fact, he adds hair to those bald orks just to give them a bit of his own personal style. Confirming the fun tenor of the interview, he also shared that he is spending more time on creating and cultivating humor in his pieces.

NOVA OPEN & NOCF ARTIST CONSORTIUM

Sam was a first-time instructor at NOVA Open this year. We are pleased to report he will be back in the classroom at NOVA Open 2019! Sam told us he’s never taught in such nice, well-equipped rooms: “The flat screen and doc camera were great – they allowed me to spend more time teaching and less time walking around. It allowed me to teach at a quicker pace, and I could, therefore put more value into the learning experience... I really enjoyed that.”

Sam took home three medals and three Capital Palette awards in 2018. His reactions were glorious as he fist-pumped the air and ran to the podium during the final ceremony. It is important to remember that the competition added divisions this year (apprentice, journeyman, master class) which means that Sam’s wins were against some of the best Master Class painters in the miniature hobby world!

Sam was extremely flattered when he was first approached by Dave Taylor to paint for the NOCF Artist Consortium raffles in 2017. He has always been struck by the fact that he could use his talent and “put his brush behind something that will help other people and hopefully make a difference in the world”. No stranger to helping his fellow man, Sam recalls putting a miniature up on eBay to raise money in support of a friend in need of a lung transplant. He was initially unfamiliar with the charity, Doctors Without Borders, which the NOCF would focus his contribution on in 2017, so he researched them. He feels the ability for an artist’s brush to have such a huge impact on a global level is an honor and a testament to the hobby.

WHAT NEXT?

Sam will be back with a slate of classes at NOVA Open 2019. In the interim, he has joined forces with CK Studios and will be traveling and working with them in support of other convention and events. He is particularly excited about a trip to Europe after Adepticon in March. It will be his first trip across the pond and he is currently making plans to take in as much of it as possible while there.

NOVA Open extends its appreciation to Sam Lenz for this interview. Please follow him on Twitch and check out his work at <http://samsonminis.blogspot.com/>. We look forward to his return at our 10th Anniversary NOVA Open 2019!

