

IN THE STUDIO

Two artists share a space — and a life — creatively

WRITTEN BY Rick Brown PHOTOGRAPHY BY Bobbi and Steve Olson



As it turns out, size does matter. Del and Martha Pettigrew share a 20-foot-by-20-foot studio attached to their home in central Nebraska. The modest workspace might inhibit other artists, but the Pettigrews find ways around the arrangement to make their studio work, using the space to create oversize paintings and sculpture.

“The studio is very small, it’s overcrowded and that’s just how it is,” says Martha. “Many artists have palatial studios, but ours is not.”

Del and Martha Pettigrew make no excuses for the state of their studio. Paintings, working models, brushes, stretched canvases, sketches and ideas crowd the room that once served as a garage. When the couple moved into their home in 1997 they had to remove a yellow Cadillac parked in the space.



“Our studio is a mess because two people, doing two different types of art, share a small space,” Del says, while moving a box so he can maneuver around an easel.

The couple’s solution to their limited space can be found in their styles: Del paints *en plein air* while Martha produces large canvases of angular objects, in addition to large sculptures.

“I can’t say that the studio influences us,” says Del. “Sometimes it influences who is working in there. If Martha has a big sculpture going, I’m not going to be doing a sculpture. I might be painting or doing something that doesn’t take up as much room.”

From that small space comes very large, very different art from the married couple who often finish each others’ sentences. They tend to look at their studio space like it’s a high school locker: a place for the business and craft of creating art. They leave it to others to display the art in structures of beauty.

Martha’s commissions include the life-size work, *Ben Nelson Receives his Eagle Scout Badge*, commissioned by Friends of Senator Nelson; *Unbridled Spirit*, commissioned by the City of Irving, Texas; and *Gossip*, commissioned by the “Ground For Sculpture,” Hamilton, New Jersey. Her awards include notices from festivals and museums in Wyoming, Arizona, Kentucky and Nebraska.

Del’s artwork can be found in galleries throughout the southwest, as well as Michigan.

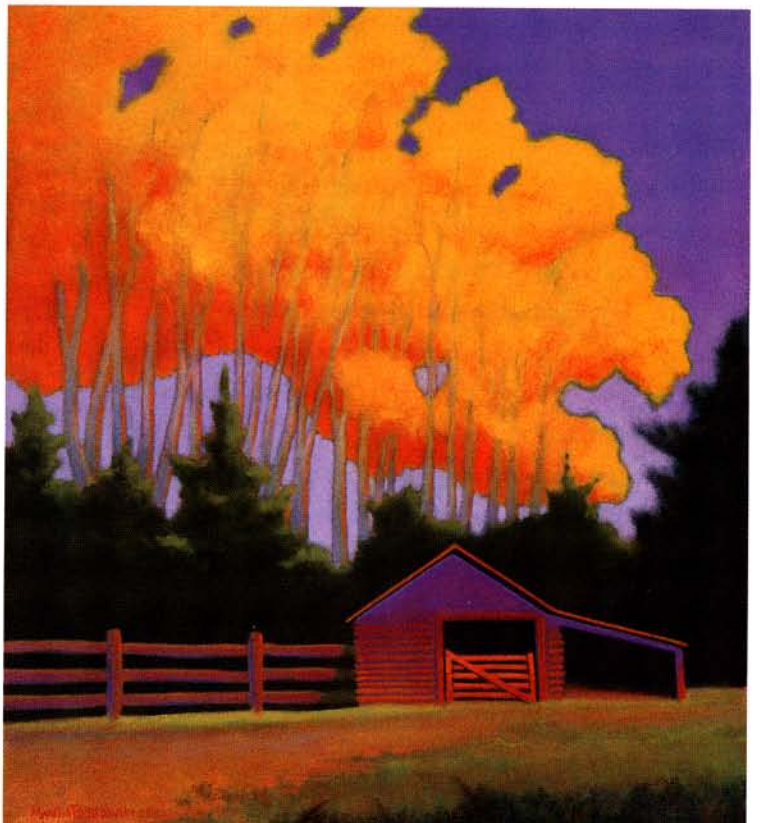
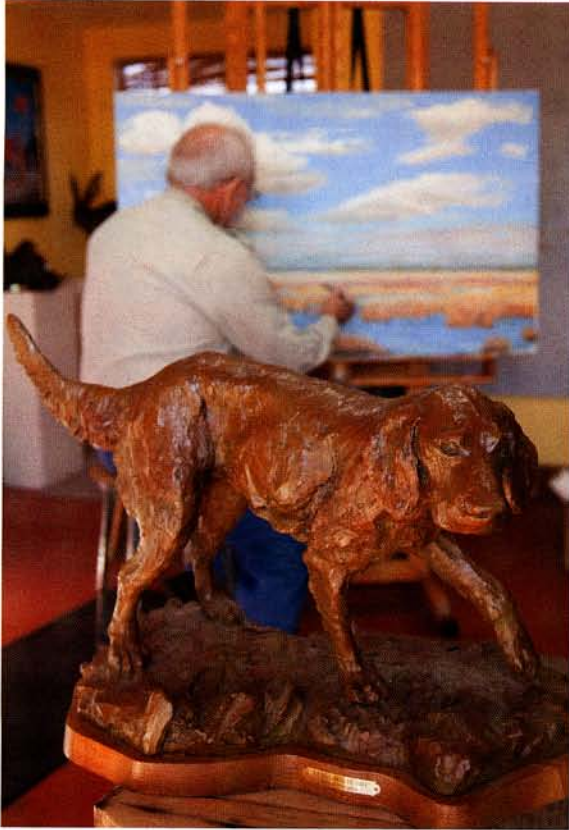
Shortly after moving in, the Pettigrews raised the studio’s ceiling to 14 feet, enabling Martha to work on larger sculptures. She completed a series of bronzes featuring women from a market in southern Mexico. One piece measured 70 inches in height.

“We find space to do what we need to do,” says Martha.

When necessary the couple simply rents a larger work area to create larger pieces. While creating *Unbridled Spirit*, an oversize rearing horse, Martha found a workspace along the Front Range of Colorado close to Art Castings of Colorado, the foundry they use.



Opposite page: Martha and Del Pettigrew work around each other in their small attached studio. They solve their limited studio space by juggling their styles and the size of their artwork. | Scupper, their new puppy, noses around the studio while checking out one of Del’s wildlife sculptures. **This page:** Books, brushes and artwork adorn the small, functional studio. Martha’s only regret about her working space: not enough room to hold the mountain of books she uses for reference while painting or sculpting.



Clockwise from top: Del adds texture to a painting of wetlands created *en plein air* near Funk, Nebraska. | A detail of Del's bronze, *Crossing the Tundra*, shows his skill in expressing the beauty of wildlife in a natural setting. | A sketch of twin silos rests amid tubes of paint in their studio. Martha prefers the controlled environment of their modest studio for the large works she creates. | Martha's oil *Aspens with Shed*, displays the signature elements she often relies upon: strong geometric shapes, bold colors and precision. | Martha works on a painting in the studio, with one of her sculptures in the foreground.

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The Pettigrews' studio feels like a pair of comfortable slippers. Located in Kearney, Nebraska, the couple settled in the small university town between Omaha and Denver. They liked the affordability of the community and the vast, open spaces of the Great Plains. Before moving to Kearney, Del and Martha lived in Lincoln, Nebraska, and cast their sculpture at Art Castings of Colorado in Loveland, Colorado.

"We would work at the foundry until 5 or 6 o'clock. Since we were still struggling to make it in this business, we would take off for Lincoln rather than spend the night," says Del.

The modest workspace might inhibit other artists, but the Pettigrews find ways around the arrangement to make their studio work, using the space to create oversize paintings and sculpture.

"We would save the \$50 or \$60 for a motel room," Martha adds, "even though it was an eight-and-a-half-hour drive."

Nebraska.

"I said to Martha, 'If we lived in Kearney we'd be home now,'" says Del. "I still had two more hours to drive and I

was already sleepy."

Living far from the places that show their work, the

Pettigrews keep an outsider's fresh perspective of locations like Santa Fe, the mountains of Colorado and Scottsdale.

What keeps the couple in central Nebraska is the simple

lifestyle.

"This is a really nice town," says Martha. "It's big

enough to have the stuff you need and small enough to get

around in."

Audrey Kauders, director of Museum of Nebraska Art

in Kearney, sees the value of the Pettigrews sharing a work-

ing space.

"Their work is very different from each other," she says.

"They have a major understanding and a great feel for the

visual aspect of Nebraska — and for what we see here in

Nebraska. Although they don't work together as a team, they

complement each other."

Del paints landscapes. "One of my favorite things to

paint is sunsets, especially winter sunsets. They are so beau-

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tiful here in Nebraska," he says.

During November and December of 2010, Del made a habit of driving about 30 miles to a wetlands area near Funk, Nebraska.

"I would get out there and set up about half an hour before sunset," he says. "Every night I created a small study of the sunset over the wetlands. I never saw the same sunset twice. I had to work fast to catch the beautiful colors."

Because of her style, Martha stays indoors. "I'm a studio painter," she says. "I don't like painting outdoors. I'll do it occasionally, but it's not my favorite thing to do. My style lends itself to working in the studio."

Martha will take copious photographs when traveling and use them when she returns to the studio. She always has a camera in her lap while driving.

"Sometimes we have to turn around and go back because she saw something she liked," says Del.

Frequently the subject is a grain elevator or an old wooden barn. They stopped once to paint a grain elevator in Ravenna, Nebraska, about 40 miles north of their home.


"We painted it on several occasions in the fall," Del explains. "We decided to paint the elevator in spring. When we got up there it was gone. During the winter they had torn it down — a beautiful old structure."

For the Pettigrews, subject matter abounds wherever they live or travel. Part of what drives their careers is the desire to capture the beauty of a winter prairie sunset or the twitch of a lean wolf alert for prey. From their small studio come works of great size, strength, dignity and serenity. ■

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