





An artwork titled 'The Quiet Move' (previous pages), 'Heaven Can Wait,' ▲
 ▲ 'Centre Stage' the artist Daniel Merriam poses in front of his painting, 'Sea Blossom,' at his exhibition in Dubai entitled 'Beyond Imagination' ▼



Flights of Fantasy

By Meena Narayan

His art is mesmerising – the strange gargoyles, the women with fluttering eyelashes and large heads and the butterflies and frogs that inhabit his world seem to entice you into their web with their brilliantly luminescent colours. Meet the master of surrealism – Daniel Merriam

As we speak to this talented artist, Daniel Merriam, our eyes are drawn to the painting, 'Sea Blossom,' that shows a woman deep in meditation. She exudes serenity and yet there is a certain sensuality about her. All around her strange creatures with octopus like tentacles and butterfly wings move about, making her an extension of this red universe. Painted in beautiful hues of reds, browns and gold the woman looks like the queen of this fantasy world.

As our view shifts to another painting entitled 'Centre Stage,' a woman stares back at us and flaunts a curious mix of sophistication and exhibitionism.

Hailing from Naples, a rural town in Central Maine, USA, Daniel Merriam is regarded as one of the world's foremost water-colour artists, capturing attention through his





◀ 'Madame Blanche' and 'At The End Of My Rope' ▶



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▲ 'Chamogafly' and 'Balancing Act' ▼

unconventional visuals. Merriam paints dream-like situations and adds a lot of character and colour to them. There is a glowing shimmer to his works that make them surreal and alluring. His paintings lure the viewer to follow him on a journey into a land that he creates like 'Narnia,' where the two worlds of reality and fantasy fuse into an explosion of colour, shapes and symbolism.

His works such as 'Chamogafly' and 'Balancing Act' leave the viewer wanting to make some sense of what he tries to convey through the frog and the monkey with wings, but at one point you give up and just admire his technique, the colour combination and the intricate details.

'A World Apart' projects a dream-like scene that is almost sci-fi in nature with capsule homes and a 'bee-man' doing the rounds! These images define landscapes of imagination that are uniquely Merriam's own, yet inspiring us to step beyond what we have known as our threshold of consciousness.

Born into a large family of seven children, Daniel grew up in a home where creativity was encouraged and practiced. Daniel taught himself to paint at an early age and began to explore the images of his dream life through his medium. Says Daniel, "I grew up as the middle child in a family of two girls and five boys. Creativity filled the air. Our house was full of a variety of musical instruments. Two pianos played constantly as seven siblings practiced daily. My mother would

throw open the windows and sing, while playing hymns, serenading the neighborhood. We often sat around the kitchen table and sketched on paper bags until they were covered inside and out with pictures of anything we could imagine. Many hours were spent in my father's woodworking shop carving toy boats and other fun things to play with."

He honed his talents further as a cartoonist for his high-school newspaper. He went on to study mechanical and architectural design, applying his dimensional skills and passion for architecture in the family's design and construction business.

He then turned his talents to the commercial art field, working as an architectural and commercial illustrator for a number of multinational corporations; but he never lost sight of his personal goal to paint full-time. He continued to build his body of work until, in 1987, he was the featured artist of a one-man show at a gallery in Maine. Leaving the world of commercial art forever, he shifted his focus solely to fine art.

Over the next four years Merriam's works were featured in numerous local galleries garnering interest from collectors and gallery owners abroad. In 1991 he began showing his work in galleries outside the state of Maine, and has since been the focus of more than thirty one-man shows across the USA.

Among many accomplishments, Merriam was awarded an honorary Master of Humane Letters





'A World Apart'



◀ 'The Smoking Tree' and 'Big Ideas' ▶

by the University of New England in recognition of the potential social contribution of his art. His work has been featured in many publications, including *The World and I* (a publication of the *Washington Times*), *Art and Antiques*, *New Art*, a feature article in *Ego* and many other periodicals. He has also featured covers for the Bantam Books' titles, *The Grand Ellipse* by Paula Volsky, and *The Treachery of Kings* and *The Prophecy Machine*, both by Neal Barrett Jr. Other covers by Merriam can be found on *Boulevard Magazine* and quarterly covers on *Mid-American Review*.

He participated in the VNA Hospice Mask Project, in which celebrities were asked to design masks that were then auctioned to benefit this charitable organisation.

In 1997 Merriam took up residence in San Francisco, where he purchased and renovated a one-hundred-twenty-year-old, three storied Victorian house, the style of which has long been featured in his work. Incorporating trademark 'Merriam' touches of magic and whimsy into the renovation, he created an environment not unlike those recorded on his canvases.

"It is a place, in which my imagination feels at home," says Merriam. "It is the world as I see it, one that is both creatively nurturing and full of vitality."

An elaborate painting takes anything from one to a few weeks to complete. He considers himself lucky to be able to do something that he enjoys for his livelihood. As he dreams on, we get to enjoy the fruits of his labour. ©