

IN THE STUDIO: UNIQUE VISION

Artist Dennis Hare sees beauty and possibility in people, places and things

WRITTEN BY LAURIE MORRISON PHOTOGRAPHY BY GENE SASSE



The Craggy foothills of the San Bernardino Mountain range encircle the sleepy town of Mentone, California. Fragrant orange groves and picturesque fruit stands frequent the main highway. The setting is quiet, remote and lovely — the perfect place to create a secluded home and studio. Artist Dennis Hare did just that.

As an athlete in the 1970s, Hare lived and breathed beach volleyball and was one of the top players in the world. He wrote and illustrated the first book on the subject, *The Art of Beach Volleyball*.

Clockwise from top left: There are several small entertaining patios on Hare's property surrounded by adobe walls, pepper and walnut trees. The fountain, one of many, provides the lilting sound of water as you pass from one outdoor room to another. | Graceful adobe walls mark the entrance to Hare's home. | Hare sits at the doorway leading to his studio; a tall, athletic man, with a firm jaw and no-nonsense gaze, he is surrounded by his work. On the left, a large heavy assemblage, *New Geography*, dominates the wall, while the other pieces that are shown are large-scale figurative oils with minimal assemblage. The triptych on the back wall of the studio, *Children of Rosarita*, is staggering beauty at 96 by 144 inches.





The home has graceful arched doorways, hardwood floors and wooden beams. Hare's art is on display in each room. Both pieces here feature children; the large piece in the dining room is titled *Joy*. The weathered pillar, one of two in the room, was found in a junkyard in San Bernardino. The small table, an unfinished work bench, was purchased at an antique shop. A Mexican pot and one of Hare's sculptures sit atop.



Clockwise from top: The living room exemplifies the graceful yet eclectic furniture collection Hare has chosen, including a Lincolnian-style chair on the left and a Mission-style chair on the right. The white wall relief in the back is composed of linen, rope, metal, paper and plastic and is titled *Ancient Highways*. The glass bookshelves that line the right wall hold shelf after shelf of Hare's sculptures. | In the gallery attached to his working space, Hare has created a place to sit and contemplate his works. The door on the right leads to his history room where walls are hung with framed magazine covers and awards. | One of Hare's palettes shows the messiness, speed and loose style in which he works. | These three pieces — *Sunday Afternoon*, *Junkyard Sonata* and *What I Know* — reflect the diverse beauty of Hare's work.



In 1979, an encounter with Vincent van Gogh's *Entrance to the Public Gardens in Arles* caused an abrupt change in his career. "Something spiritual happened to me at that moment," says Hare. "There were no words to explain it. I had an epiphany right then and there. I knew without a doubt I was an artist. Not that I *would* be or *could* be or *should* be — that I *was*." The next day he went out and bought paint.

A self-taught artist, Hare spent the next five years — including a year in Puerto Vallarta — developing his style. After starting with realistic watercolors, he changed exclusively to oils. The figure became the focal point in his work. Today, his works are both representational and abstract, with or without assemblage. From the beginning, Hare made a living selling his work.

Mexico left its mark on the artist. The people, landscape and architecture found a way into his paintings. The culture also found a way into his home. His time in Mexico and Hare's love for the Southwest came heavily into play when he designed the changes to his 3,000-square-foot home. Graceful arched doorways, several small enclosed patios, terra cotta tile and wood flooring throughout showcase Hare's Santa Fe style with Mexican hacienda flair.

His home is a place of simple, gracious comfort. An hour from Los Angeles, it feels worlds away. Stepping inside, life feels easier and a little slower, more comfortable. The fast-paced rush that so often entangles us fades as the home, filled



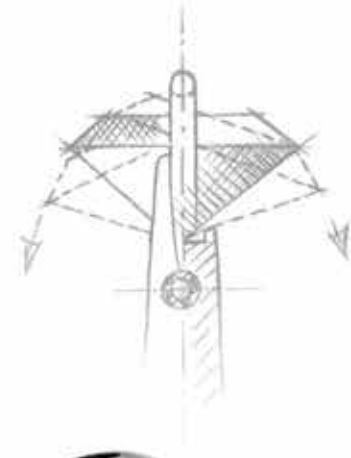
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with the art and the artist, soaks into our bones.

Hare's 1,500-square-foot studio is conveniently attached to the house. "The studio location flavors my work — the tones of the desert, the warmth and the heat come through in my art," he says. The front of the structure is dedicated to a gallery with room and lighting to view multiple paintings and assemblages. The working studio is separated from this by an open storage and sitting area. "I can step back 60 feet from my easel. A lot of decisions can be made based on that kind of distance."

In the area behind the studio, designated as a "junkyard," Hare points to a discarded ottoman. "See this? This is great; the fabric is lightweight and because of time, light and the weather, the colors have changed. It's beautiful. It has a soul." He appreciates the elements of deterioration caused by age. He takes the cast off, abandoned and neglected. Hare sees beauty where others see refuse.

Hare admits that his current work isn't for everyone. "My work isn't passive. I do these pieces for me, first of all, because I love them. If other people can relate to them, that's great. I can't please everyone and I wouldn't want

to," he says. Vivid colors, paint and material placed on the canvas with abandon, Hare's work is large. Creating multi-layered pieces filled with material garnered from landfills and junkyards, the artist is a master recycler, reusing cast-offs and constructing beauty from harsh reality.

"I push the envelope a little more each time I create. I want to be surprised by my work," the artist offers.

Art historian Peter Selz has this to say about Hare: "Dennis' work is exciting, energizing and even a bit unnerving ... his work helps the viewer to see the beauty in the ugly, the special in the commonplace and surprises everywhere." Bed springs, car parts, books, belts and shoes all become part of his intricate art. Hare uses these discarded objects to build up his canvas, to create a textured wilderness of patterns and color that emerge into familiar or wildly unfamiliar shapes and images. "These things are beautiful, I take things that others throw away, use them and bring them back to life in a new form."

"Was this inside of me all along? Oh yes," says Hare. "But it's all about timing, it wasn't coming out until the right time."

Fortunately for us, the time is now. ■



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