

Thomas Kelly displays his 'Zodiac Series' at Artful Deposit Gallery

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By [Janet Purcell/For The Times of Trenton](#)

Hamilton artist Tom Kelly likes to work in series. His latest, "The Zodiac Series," has been at the end of his brush intermittently for the past 10 years.

The general public, along with his avid followers, can help him celebrate the series launch tomorrow evening at the Artful Deposit Gallery in Bordentown.

"I read the Greek myths and stories in fourth and fifth grades and saw how they were tied to everyday life," Kelly says. "They're about the people searching for higher beliefs and how to get to treat each other better.

"This was higher learning for the people of that time," Kelly adds. "They didn't have TV. They went outside and studied the heavens. And what still captivates me is we can still look at the sky and see what the Greeks were seeing.

"Not only the myths, but the signs interested me, and when I started to think about a Zodiac series I thought about the stories behind the signs and started drawing thumbnail sketches," Kelly continues. "Most of my work is done in my head before I get to the canvas. The hardest part for me is the drawing, because you're making your own reality."



He began the series with "Gemini" in 2003. In this, he depicts the Greek twin brothers, who were great warriors. Castor, a patron and tamer of horses, is standing with a horse behind him, and Pollux, the patron of boxers, is portrayed in a boxing position with fists clenched.

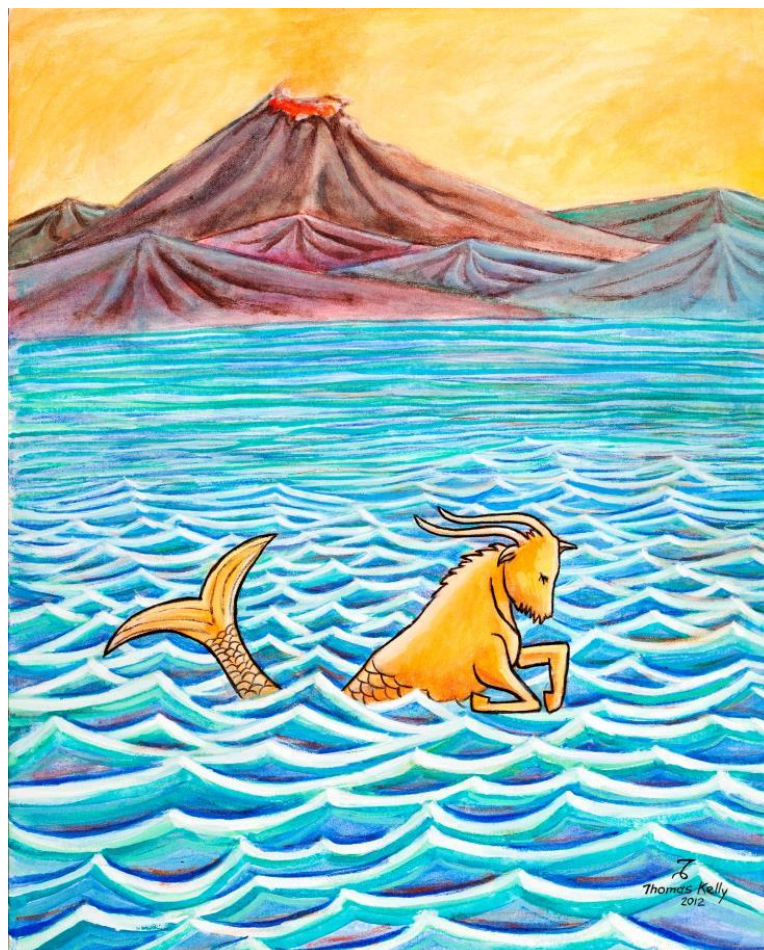
A simplification of the myth says that when Castor was killed in battle, Pollux was grief-stricken and begged Zeus to let him die. They are now reunited in the sky, where they will remain together forever.

Displayed with each painting is a printed version of the myth and an astrological map showing the location of the constellation in the night sky.



Thomas Kelly
2004

Pisces, the last constellation in the Zodiac, is interpreted in the printed text about Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, and her son Eros, the god of love, who were walking along the Nile River when the great monster Typhon suddenly rose up from the water to destroy them. Aphrodite tied herself with a cord to her son Eros so they would not get separated in the river. They transformed themselves into fish and swam away. After the demise of Typhon, the two fish were hung in the sky, their tails intertwined, to commemorate the day when love and beauty were saved. Kelly's painting shows Aphrodite tying the rope to Eros' ankle as the mighty river rushes by.



Kelly offers his interpretation of Capricorn, which is based on Pan, who was said to be the goat raised with Zeus who treated him like a son. Pan, too, plunged into the Nile to escape Typhon, and when he hit the water, from the waist down he became a fish. The rest of his body, which stayed above the waves remained a goat.

Kelly shows him in the roiling river, and in the background he shows the erupting volcano Mount Etna, under which Typhon was eventually imprisoned.



Kelly's depiction of Virgo shows Astraea, the goddess of virtue as well as of wheat and grain, who was last to leave earth when Pandora released the demons of greed, war, envy and spite. Kelly portrays her floating

above earth holding a sheaf of wheat as she watches from the sky every night to see when earth will be ready for her return.

In his depiction of Leo, Kelly shows a naked Heracles defeating the Nemean Lion, a monster, thought to be impossible to kill. The spirit of the lion was said to be placed in the sky where, no longer deadly, it has become beautiful.

In his artist statement that accompanies the exhibition, Kelly points out "These stories, though sometimes cryptic, always had the backbone of honorable behavior threaded through them. They spoke of the origins of natural things and must have been like magic to the peoples of millennia ago, explaining easily what was then unexplainable."

He says the myths explained that the sun crossing the sky was actually Apollo driving his golden chariot pulled by colossal horses. The myths advised sailors and fishermen to appease Poseidon, the God of Oceans, so their fishing would be successful and their journey safe. They illustrated Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love, smiling and Ares, the God of War raging.

Usually Kelly does not speak much about his expressionist paintings because, he says, he doesn't want to ruin the viewer's experience of them by telling people his own insights. But he enjoyed putting together the information texts that accompany each of these paintings, giving the story behind the myth, the symbol and the astrological map.

This series is different from Kelly's other paintings, in which he most generally presents figures interacting with each other within interior spaces. This series was also a challenge in that he knew he had to distill his vision of each myth, and the difficult part was always what to leave out in doing so and still keep the focus on the main elements of the myth.

Kelly began with thumbnail sketches, and he says the resultant paintings stayed true to his original concept, to what drew him to it.

In his statement, Kelly says, "Woven into everyday life now, 4,000 years later, are these myths. Look around you, the constellations are still there, the horoscopes are in the newspaper, the sports teams, products, automobiles, spacecraft, planets and geography are all named after these myths and their characters. □

"The continuity of myth, characters, and the human condition is why I wished to paint this series."

"The Zodiac Series"

When: 1-6 p.m. Wednesdays, 1-8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 1-6 p.m. Saturdays, 1-5 p.m. Sundays, through Oct. 21; opening reception 5-9 a.m. tomorrow; artist's talk 2 p.m. Sunday

Where: The Artful Deposit Gallery, 201 Farnsworth Ave, Bordentown

Contact: (609) 298-6970 or artfuldeposit.com

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