

# Artist bringing some color to Hamilton

By [Bridget Clerkin/The Times of Trenton](#)

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**HAMILTON** — What started as a way to decorate his own home became a passion that has helped him decorate dozens of homes around the world.

Using whimsical colors and simple figures to convey complex ideas, artist Thomas Kelly has attracted a following of enthusiasts who have helped the Hamilton resident sell over 200 paintings over the past 16 years.

Done with acrylic paints, Kelly's pieces span a variety of subject matter, from household scenes of couples to fanciful pictures of exotic creatures, but the artist said he hopes they all have one thing in common: the ability to promote thought and awareness about universal human experiences and feelings.

"I think my paintings strike a common ground with people," Kelly said on why his work has been successful. "My art is recognizable, I have a very specific style, and it really makes people think."



Kelly hopes to soon use a different medium to make people think, with plans to pen a book on the “100 Rules for the Aspiring Painter,” including tips on “the five C’s: composition, control, color, contemplation and civility.”

The idea came to him after looking over notes he’s made throughout the course of his painting career, where he’s given many talks about his art, he said. But becoming a painter — which is a part-time job for Kelly, who works full-time at a manufacturing firm — almost never happened, he said.

He was not involved in art until he purchased his first home and made a few sculptures to help fill it, he said. Interested in what she saw, his sister encouraged him to take more art classes at Mercer County Community College, which is where Kelly was first exposed to drawing and painting and quickly recognized for his skill.

“It’s a lot of fun,” he said. “I love taking a blank canvass and filling it with something, but after a while, you can’t keep all your work.”

Luckily for Kelly, there were people interested in taking some of the paintings off his hands. After having his first solo art show in 1998, Kelly was soon booked for another, where he sold more than 20 pieces. Today, he estimates that between 40 and 50 people are official Kelly collectors, owning several works by the artist, and his paintings have been sold to people living as far away as Germany.



Despite his success, he sticks to a simple process, where he will often make rough sketches of a scene on a Post-it note, which he will reference once he's transitioned to canvass. Several overstuffed binders brim with past and future ideas for pieces. They include preliminary sketches for several large-scale installations covering the blacktop at Morgan, McGalliard and Sayen elementary schools and work that will be featured at the upcoming Pork Roll Festival in Trenton, to be held May 24.

While Kelly considers himself an "expressionist" whose paintings are inspired by real life but don't necessarily depict real life or realistic scenes, he also considers his more public and commercial work important for its promotion of art awareness.

"I think this town could use a little culture," he said. "It's about doing anything you can do to help people learn something new."

In making it more accessible, he said, he hopes to make it less mysterious.

“There should be more people involved in art,” Kelly said. “People take art all throughout school, but after high school, that’s about it. Art intimidates people and it really shouldn’t.”

