

benjamin rader inspired by heritage

By Cathryn Hahn

Take a drive out to Mountain Springs Lake Resort in Reeders, Pennsylvania and enter the front office. Monday through Friday, that's where you'll find Benjamin Rader, a third generation of the Rader family, who own and operate the resort. You'll also find, in that front office, a colorful collection of paintings, each one depicting natural scenes of sterling white birch trees, plush clouds, and shimmering water. These are Ben's work – a handful of the over 200 paintings he's completed in ten years' time.

Rader is self-taught, but he comes by his talent honestly. His grandmother, Marjorie Rader, was a portrait artist. Inspired by an art history class he took several years ago, he creates his masterpieces in the workshop on premises at the resort. A windowsill serves as his easel there, where layers of paint, dripped from brushes over time, cover the space.

Ben's style is reminiscent of Van Gogh. He cites having been influenced by Klimt and Schiele, as well. Through stippling, thick brush strokes, use of bold and vibrant colors, and design, he portrays landscapes not just as they look, but as he remembers them.

"That painting," he says as he points to one of the larger pieces which depicts the dam at the resort covered in snow and reflecting a pale orange sky. "It was the first snow of winter. I walked outside and the sky was literally that color of orange. It's more stylized and not realistic, but that's the feeling I got which translated through."



Though he's had works on display at shows locally, as well as in New Hampshire, New York, and Massachusetts, it's rare that you'll see Rader's work exhibited. He remains selective as to where it will be shown, noting that many of his commission clients find him through word-of-mouth or online.

Rader's Pennsylvania Dutch heritage plays a recurring role in his work. Take a close look and you'll see folk art embellishments, barn hex signs, and Dutch phrases- some subtle and some not.

His most recent piece, titled "Ode to Bethlehem" refers to the city in which he was born. Styled words, written in Pennsylvania Dutch, are incorporated into the landscape. Translated it reads, "In the Lehigh Valley there's a bright light called Bethlehem; my home town. I was born there, and in the end that is where my heart will rest. God in Heaven, leave us Dutch as we are."

When not creating, Ben takes every opportunity to connect with his heritage through Grundsau Lodge and

Versommling meetings. In these meetings, generations of Pennsylvania Dutch descendants meet, have a meal, and speak in the Pennsylvania Dutch language. It's a custom Ben partakes in to preserve the tradition. He's also a new father. He and wife, Sonja, welcomed a baby boy last year. As their family grows, and long into the future, Ben's art will continue to honor his roots. ✱

For more information, visit benjaminrader.com



Ode to Bethlehem | oil on canvas | 2015



Barriye Wald | oil on canvas | 2013

