

## Upholstery buttons furnish unusual medium for Cutrone of Denville

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Denville artist Marco Cutrone spent childhood Saturdays making buttons in his father's upholstery business. Wanting to challenge himself by creating a work of art made from a medium not used by any other artist, Cutrone did not have to look much beyond those youthful days.

Using 20,000 upholstery buttons, Cutrone created a portrait of his girlfriend. The piece, which he described as a "labor of love," pays homage to two of the people who have supported his art career. More upholstery button pieces are planned.

Cutrone said, "I'd like to create enough pieces to have a complete and cohesive body of work."

Until now, Cutrone's art has been made with more traditional media: pencil, colored pencil, pastel, acrylic, and oils. The upholstery buttons, however, has been an idea lurking in the background. Recalling the times making buttons for his father, Cutrone said, "They were fun to make and there seemed to be an element of fun combined with productivity. I always knew I wanted to do something with them. I thought it would be in the form of a still life painting because they can be so colorful."

Cutrone said the "ah-ha moment" in deciding to work with the buttons is one he will never forget.

Going through his father's stock fabrics and inventory, Cutrone found all of the primary colors – red, blue, and yellow as well as black and white.

"With the primaries you can make any color. I teach Color Illustration 1 and 2 at The Kubert School in Dover and that is what I try to etch into the minds of the students. All you need are the primaries," said Cutrone.

Unlike the fun he had as a boy, making the buttons now was tedious work.

Cutrone explained, "You first need to cut the fabric to fit into the dye. That means you need to cut 20,000 patterns and then make 20,000 buttons out of them. So, in actuality, you're leaning over that cast iron button machine and pushing that bar down about 40,000 times. I started the button project a little over two years ago. That doesn't necessarily mean I worked on it every minute of every day. I did however, put a lot of time into it."

Indeed he did. Cutrone spent much of his free time at his father's upholstery shop. He noted that at times, he could feel himself falling asleep at the button maker, particularly when he "hit that wall at 4:30 in the morning."

Cutrone added, "I just didn't want to stop because I loved the idea of this project."

It was his artistic passion that kept him going and the joy of watching a piece progress from start to finish.

"An unfinished work nags at me constantly to finish it, so I can call it complete," observed Cutrone.

Never did he find this project too much to handle.

"I looked at it as something I couldn't wait to see finished. Although, there were times where it felt like the making of the buttons would never end. Twenty thousand buttons are a lot to make by hand. It just seemed to go on and on. I think that was the most difficult part of this undertaking," said Cutrone.

He added, "That feeling, however, was offset by that of knowing I was creating something completely original. It was very rewarding to get through it and hammer that last button in place. One of the greatest feelings, in my opinion, is to step back when you're done with a work of



Marco Cutrone's brother, Anthony, left, and neighbor, Tom, hold a portrait created with upholstery buttons outside to show the size of the piece.

art and look at your idea in a finished state. It's now a work of art and no one can take that away from you. It's a strange satisfaction to stand before your creation and know that you've completed it, to know that you've figured it out. It's a feeling, which one cannot easily express. You didn't allow yourself to succumb to the challenge before you and sit in front of the TV to waste time.

"Life is short, and I think at the end of mine I'll enjoy seeing where my time went. It's proof that you put your time into something that will hopefully, retrospectively fulfill that desire to be productive and make you (the creator) proud of what you've accomplished in your lifetime, that's the goal, anyway..."

Currently, Cutrone is busy with the button art, but another challenge awaits. He noted that this is always the way with art, be it in the concept, medium, patience, or in the time needed to complete a body of work. Having worked in an unusual medium has given Cutrone confidence in his ability to try new things.

He said, "It has made me think outside of the box. When you think about it, to pick up a paint brush in the first place is thinking outside of the box, right? This made me realize there were many different sized boxes to be thinking outside of and there always will be."

Adding, "In the future, I hope to continue doing what I love and hopefully bring it to the next level. Someday, I'd like future artists to look at something I did and say, 'How did he do that?' or 'How did he think of that?' and that would make me feel like I've contributed greatly, to the representational arts. People ask me all the time, 'Do you have a favorite work of art that you've done?' The answer is, 'Yes, for a short while... and then you move on...' I look forward to conceptualizing and creating the next one."

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