

Hermansader paints portrait of successful businessman



BOB BRODE

Artist/entrepreneur Tom Hermansader wields his palette in front of the Victorian Mansion on Chestnut Street, Columbia.

by **BILL SIMPSON**

"Starving" is a word often used to describe artists, who are often pictured leading the bohemian life, sacrificing worldly comforts in pursuit of expression through art.

Tom Hermansader of Columbia is an artist, but he hasn't chosen the bohemian route. Instead, by combining business expertise with his artistic talent, he's built a successful business centered on his own creations.

Hermansader is perhaps Lancaster County's best known artist, and he's the owner of Hermansader's Victorian Mansion in Columbia and Tom Hermansader's Gallery in Lancaster. Both locations sell Hermansader's works and offer services such as custom picture framing.

In addition, the mansion, which doubles as Hermansader's home and studio, is available for weddings, dinners and other private functions. Together, the artist/businessman's ventures annually gross "a couple hundred thousand dollars," according to Hermansader. He attributes much of his success to having complete control of the business, and he believes that being an artist gives him a definite advantage in the business end of the art world.

While his approach has clear financial advantages, it also has its artistic drawbacks. Hermansader would like to be able to devote all of his energies to painting, but he finds that the business aspects of his life frequently take up large blocks of his time.

"I try to paint three to four hours a day," he said, admitting that running the commercial operation sometimes makes it difficult to spend as much time as he'd like with his canvases.

He knows, however, that the success

of his business depends largely on his producing new works, so he must make time to paint. And, because of the attention that he pays to the details of his works, he can't paint quickly. He estimates that he often puts as many as 400 hours into a single painting, so his is hardly an assembly-line operation. "In a year, I average three to six paintings," he said. He said he frequently receives requests to do commissioned works, but turns most of them down. "I could spend half a year doing a commission, but there's more money in prints."

The most popular subjects for his brush are famous scenes from Lancaster County, such as Wright's Mansion in Columbia, the Donegal Presbyterian Church, the Ephrata Cloister and the Hans Herr House. To date, his best-seller has been Penn Square at Christmas Time, which he painted in 1988 in conjunction with the MS Society. He had a limited edition of 495 prints made, and at the time of issue they sold for \$60. Today, they can sell for as much as \$2,000.

Most of his prints are produced at local concerns. "We're very fortunate to have such high-quality printers around here," Hermansader said. He uses acid-free paper for all his limited editions.

In addition to traditional limited-edition prints, Hermansader has found other original ways to market his works. One is canvas lithographs, which are a superior variation on traditional prints. Canvas lithographs offer greater longevity and a more realistic reproduction of the original work. "I don't know of any other artist in this area who's doing canvas lithographs," Hermansader said. He's also transferred his images to objects such as porcelain plates, jewelry boxes, bells, mugs, ceramic tiles and Christmas balls, which have been very popular.

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