

Meet Visual Artist Mark Retacco

By Lindsay Dandeo



Photo Credit: Martin Uriarte

"Mirror Guitar"

Bayville resident and Toms River- based visual artist Mark Retacco's unique style, including bold colors, clean lines and socio-cultural statements, has been noticed by the likes of MTV, PBS and even the White House. Gen X'ers may remember watching MTV's 1997 *Real World Boston House*, where Retacco premiered his work. He has also participated in PBS's *On-Line Guide to Arts & Culture*, and had his artwork on loan to the White House in the mid 1990's.

Roots

The oldest of five children, Mark was born in Newark, New Jersey. Mark bears no relation to former Toms River Regional School District Superintendent Michael Ritacco. He remembers taking a liking to art as early as age five. A childhood trip to the Newark Museum had a particular influence. There he viewed an exhibit of buildings made out of woodchips. He recalls later building "cities" in his backyard. "I would get in my backyard, build cities, and then tear them down," he said, with a bit of childlike enthusiasm. "I would have my own utopia." When he was in seventh grade, he began reusing items created out of plastic. "I was green before it was green," he said.



Photo Credit: Mark Retacco

"Shadow of Love"

Mark's family moved to Ocean County in the early seventies. The move brought with it a change from the Catholic school system to the public school system, where he encountered bullying. The only time he felt comfortable in school was in art class. "The school system was a torture-bearing experience," he recalled. This had a profound

Continued on page 13

effect on him so much so that he, later as an adult, created the Art2Facts art program, where he would visit area schools and speak to the students about his artwork, school experiences, and the importance of respecting and honoring each other's work and uniqueness. He brought the Art2Facts program to the Bayville School in 1997-1998 and has given talks at other Ocean County schools. In some respects he feels the school bullying situation is a little better today, "but then there is cyber bullying." Mark is always looking for ways to give back to the community.

...On Technology and Tenacity

Mark recalls a patron asking, "Do you have a website?" and thinking "I have a reality site; it's right here." The subject of several pieces of his artwork, Retacco readily continued on about technology.

"Seeing technology go from vacuum tubes, to digital, to cellphones, I feel like we're hiding behind our technology in a way," he said. "It used to be easier to get your foot in the door. Now, it's more impersonal."

I asked him how he got on MTV. "I called the artistic director of MTV, and introduced myself. I put my foot in the door," he said.

He says that other artists often ask him how he is able to get the publicity and opportunities that he gets. "You have to go out and get it," he said. "You can't expect it to come to you. In this economy, you have to be more tenacious." His resume and the numerous places where his artwork can be viewed is evidence of his tenaciousness.

Downtown Toms River: Slow and Steady Progress

Retacco is a busy man, involved in the Toms River Artists Co-Operative, Exit 81 (TRACx81), the Downtown Toms River Business Improvement District's (BID) Cultural Committee, and regular networking with many local cultural establishments. He gives credit to the BID and to Yvonne Yaar, who founded TRACx81, as important positive forces for the arts downtown.

"The downtown is underutilized, but a work in progress," he said. We have to just keep going at it. Support your local businesses. Come and see local artwork – TRACx81. Go to the Farmer's Market." Retacco practices what he preaches.

Passionate about his work and the importance of public art, he finds himself drawn increasingly towards creating sculptural work. He recently created a striking large piece with mirror fragments on a white background, called Mirrored Guitar (featured on the front cover of this publication) with downtown Toms River's Music Academy in mind. The Music Academy, (see Music Academy article) has recently moved to a new location. The



*"On the Eighth Day God Created the Internet"
by Mark Retacco*

Photo Credit: Mark Retacco

Continued on page 14



"Space Pup Ozz!"

piece will be located on the wall space above the staircase inside the newly renovated interior.

"We need more public sculpture," he said emphatically. He already has a vision for an additional weathervane sculpture with seashells for the area where South Toms River turns into Beachwood along Route 9.

Not surprisingly, as a visual artist, he recognizes and prizes the natural beauty which abounds here. "When you come back to Ocean County, you come back to the roots, the water, the earth," he said. "The salt of the earth, Ocean County is."

Mr. Retacco's artwork can be viewed in the following places: movenart.com, Flying Saucers, Asbury Park, The Music Academy and Donna's Downtown Salon in Toms River, Mr. Cuts in Manchester, Berkeley Library, St. Barnabas, and on amazon.com, e-bay.com and at other local and regional venues.