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LIVING THE DREAM

Father Paul Plante's Art Spirit

A Maine priest finds a way to balance his religious calling with his artistic life.

THE BEST BUY IN CONTEMPORARY ART IN New England—if not all of America—are small oil pastels of birds' eyes by Father Paul Plante, a diocesan priest in Winslow, Maine, who holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Maine College of Art (formerly the Portland School of Art). Although art dealers in Maine, Massachusetts, and New York have urged him to raise his prices, his exquisite little five-by-five-inch paintings, which abstract the colorful markings and unblinking eyes of wild birds, have been selling for just \$60 (unframed) because Father Paul wants working people to be able to afford them.

"One of the greatest achievements of my art career," says Father Paul in a soft voice with just a trace of a French Canadian accent, "is to know that my work is appreciated by professionals who know about art as well as by children and others who know nothing about art."

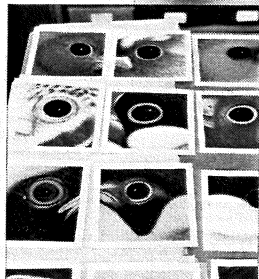
Father Paul Plante, 58, is a man who has managed to realize two dreams.

Growing up the son of a mill worker in Sanford, Maine, Paul Plante knew from the time he was in junior high that he was destined to become a priest. Thus, he deferred his ambition to become a professional artist until he was in his forties.

For two years before his ordination in 1971, Paul taught arts and crafts at a state mental hospital in Bangor, Maine. Subsequently, he was called to serve as a parish priest in Auburn, Lewiston, Biddeford, Portland, and Winslow. During all this time, Father Paul painted (primarily landscapes) in his free time. In 1983 he decided to pursue a degree and become a professional artist.



In his bird's-eye paintings, Father Paul Plante strives to capture "the divine spark in God's creations."



Walking past a studio building at the Portland School of Art one day, Father Paul wandered in to see what was going on. A week later he was enrolled as a full-time BFA candidate. For the next four years he juggled his religious duties with an art education.

He credits his formal training with broadening his aesthetic horizons while also deepening his own artistic focus.

Since graduating in 1987, Father Paul has gained a growing reputation for his ability to capture the divine spark in God's creations. His bird's-eye paintings

are featured in several leading Maine art galleries and in Boston's Nielsen Gallery, as well as on the New York-based Web site mixedgreens.com. In 2001 the Colby College Museum of Art in Waterville, Maine, mounted a solo exhibition of Father Paul's bird paintings entitled "The Eye: Mirror of the Soul."

"My art career has gone beyond what I ever thought it would be," says Father Paul. "It was a secondary thing, but once it got established, it seemed to spread by itself. I've always felt my life is very ordinary, but the ordinary has value. The extraordinary comes out of the ordinary. That's very precious to me."

Today, Father Paul balances his religious calling with his artistic life by rising early and creating two or three paintings each morning before spending his days ministering to the spiritual needs of the close to 4,000 parishioners of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in the mill town of Winslow.

"It does take discipline," says Father Paul. "You just have to learn to start. Don't wait for the ideal time. Just start."

Good advice for anyone who aspires to living a dream. — *Edgar Allen Beem*

The Cost of the Dream

Father Paul recalls that, because he had already satisfied the liberal arts requirements, it cost him only about \$4,000 a year to study at the Portland School of Art in the 1980s. The biggest cost, he says, was that "it absorbed all of my free time and my vacations."

Today, the full-time tuition at the school, now the Maine College of Art, is \$18,360 a year.

