

Artist stays true and does it all

By **Kristen Tomaiolo**
Features Editor

JAMESTOWN — Napoleon Dynamite is a cultural icon. As the underdog high schooler in the 2004 film of the same name, his vulnerability and fearlessness transformed him from a mere character into a relatable person. For these reasons, artist Luke Randall calls Napoleon one of his heroes and even an artist.

“He has crazy ideas and he stands up for his rights and ideas and that’s what I love about Napoleon,” Randall said. “If I can be as inventive and confident as him, I’ll be happy.”

Randall finds beauty in Napoleon and his message, which explains why the character appears in a few of Randall’s works including a wool hooked rug, which took 175 hours to craft. It is said people define their values by their heroes and in turn, these values define them – Randall, with a home studio filled to the brim with different types of art, is proof of that.

His motto, taken from Napoleon, “Do what you want to do,” lies at the heart of his show, “Multimedia: Art and Invention,” which opens Friday at Jamestown Arts Center, 18 Valley St., Jamestown. An opening reception will be held from 6 to 9 p.m. The exhibit, featuring many still life and album cover oil paintings,

inventions, trays, rugs and more, runs through April 11.

“I’m not putting my stuff out there and saying, ‘Look, I’m a brilliant craftsman in all arenas,’” Randall said. “I’m just an enthusiastic participant. I’m a person who gets involved in things that I want to do.”

He’s a painter first, but also has a deep passion for making things. Randall has been boldly trying his hand at an array of crafts including rug hooking, leather work and electronic inventions. He brings the level of patience he’s gained as a painter into everything he does. Like Napoleon, he focuses on the act of creating and not on what others may think of what he does.

“I don’t want to be known as a jack-of-all-trades. I’m an artist,” Randall said. “Jack-of-all-trades is a master of none and I’d like to think of myself as a master painter in some way.”

By day, Randall is a serious painter in both fine art and decorative painting, which he does in homes and mansions across Rhode Island and New York. By night, Randall focuses on traditional American crafts or inventions. In recent years, Randall has incorporated the skills from his decorative work into his other art like the discipline he gained from fine, intricate detailing.

Randall chose to feature all media in his solo show not only to highlight their



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

Luke Randall of Saunderson works on a painting in his home studio. A painted album cover, right, and an orgone emitter, which serves as an “energy cleaner,” far right, will appear in Randall’s exhibit “Multi Media: Art and Invention,” Friday through April 11 at Jamestown Arts Center.



Exhibit

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similar executions but to reveal his passions and interests.

For example, his electronic inventions began with the idea of being able to alter energy and fix bodily alignment with crystals. After more than 10 years of research, experimentation and discovery, Randall was able to get on the same page as his ideas to make them come to life, like "The Chrono-Resonator," which can align a person's energy.

"The electronic stuff fascinates me," Randall said. "I feel like a kid again. I feel like I study a circuit and I look at it like a child looks at a maze. What drew me to electronics is that challenge of not understanding. Not that painting is a simple task, but painting, for me, is such a serious occupation and the electronics is very playful."

It appears Randall thrives off a challenge. Most recently, Randall has teamed up with The Low Anthem, a Providence indie folk band, to create visual and audio inventions to be used on stage. Such inventions include "The Moth Machine," 9-foot-tall zoetrope with 3D moths; "The Leslie," a hypnosis machine; and a bell ringing machine, which will debut in a Moth Band performance in the exhibit opening.

Many of Randall's inventions, which he refers to as a "Dr. Frankenstein aesthetic," also reveal another passion of his: salvaging.

"If I wasn't an artist I'd be a salvage expert. My lifetime goal is to salvage things. I like recycling. I love materials made in the old days," he said.

His appreciation for traditional styles and materials trickles into all his work. But whether it's reproducing a found Polaroid or an Edgar Winter album cover, or making a leather box inspired by the American cowboy leatherworking of Al Stohlman, he finds a way to fuse a modern edge into all that he does.

"I'm a traditional painter in the sense that I use traditional methods and materials. I'm not an abstract painter in any way, but I think some of my sensibility is very contemporary," he said.

In all his work, Randall isn't necessarily presenting a message for the viewer to understand. Rather, the work is personal. His ideas come randomly. His process is often filled with unknowns, pain and sufferings, but when he gets an idea from deep within, it excites him to push forward.

"I like the challenge of bringing an idea into existence," Randall said. "I want my work to look perfect and when I paint, I paint as well as I possibly can."

He honors this drive with every new idea, but it

certainly comes with its anxieties and challenges. Randall worries that his other activities will take away from him being a great painter, but with every project he's learning to trust his intuitions.

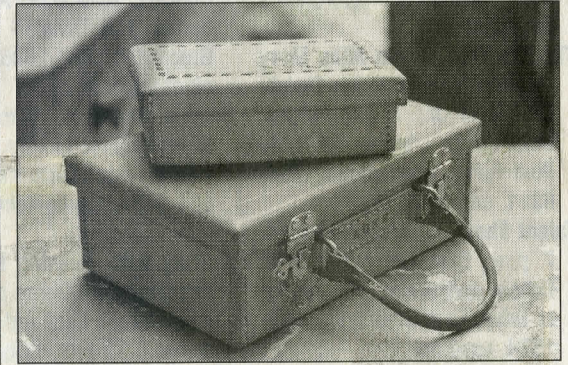
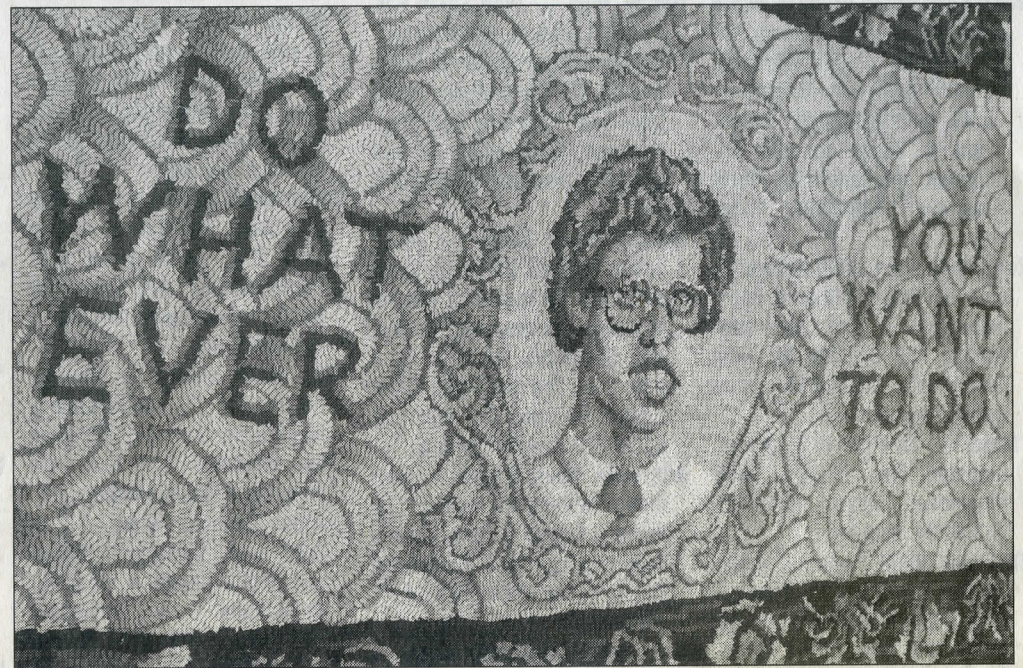
"I'm just following my heart," Randall said. "I love this childish participation, this naive sensibility that guides me when I have ideas...I'm [going to] be myself. The kid in me needs to live."

Since building his own studio behind his Sauderstown home five years ago, Randall has given himself the opportunity to learn new things any time he wants. His willingness to be an amateur and explore the unknown, although a bit scary, is vital to his growth as an artist – and that's something to be celebrated.

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FYI

Luke Randall, Multi-media: Art & Invention Friday through April 11
Opening reception, Friday 6 to 9 p.m.
Performance, 8 p.m.
Wednesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Jamestown Arts Center
18 Valley St.
Jamestown
560-0979
jamestownartcenter.org
lukerandall.com



PHOTOS: MICHAEL DERR

Luke Randall's Napoleon Dynamite rug, top, gold leaf tole painting on a tray, above left, and leather boxes will be in his exhibit, "Multi Media: Art & Invention," at Jamestown Arts Center.



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