

Re-creating da Vinci

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Milton — Painter Yanusz Gilewicz created a 12-by-9 foot reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's "Leda and the Swan" for the Buttermilk Falls Inn & Spa and is now offering budding area artists a free Internet lesson in how it was done.

Gilewicz, 46, has reproduced old masters paintings since he was a 9-year-old attending after-school programs in his native Poland. He became passionate about da Vinci because he felt the work required the most patience and intelligence to re-create.

In his 20s, he shared the techniques with Polish school children and later in documentary films made in Italy.

The method involves a complete monochrome rendering of the painting to fine-tune light values. Colors are then applied in multiple thin glazes that create rich, deep tones.

"I give people the power to do it on their own because it takes enormous patience to use da Vinci's applications. The mystery is to have the patience to do da Vinci's process of laying in light layers. When light hits it, it filters through those layers, creating its own colors," Gilewicz explained.

He learned about da Vinci's

methods by reading the artist's notebooks and by spending day after day studying the only unprotected da Vinci painting in the world, "Lady With an Ermine," at the Czartoryski Museum in Krakow, Poland. A sleepy guard sat in a chair nearby as Gilewicz edged closer to the painting to observe the brush strokes and layering, furiously scribbling notes into his sketchbook.

"Leda and the Swan" is his eighth reproduction of a da Vinci work. Gilewicz's paintings are in the collections of rock stars, prime ministers and the late Pope John Paul II.

Gilewicz said he was born into a family of artists whose methods were very similar to those used in the Renaissance.

"My grandfather was a painter. He was a man who would make his own paints and brushes. When I was little, my mother would send me to stay with my grandparents for two months at a time. As a boy in the country every year, I got to watch my grandfather in this process. It was an alchemy — combining the things around him into the tools of his art," Gilewicz said. Sticks, fur, tinted earth and cloth became canvas, brushes and paints.

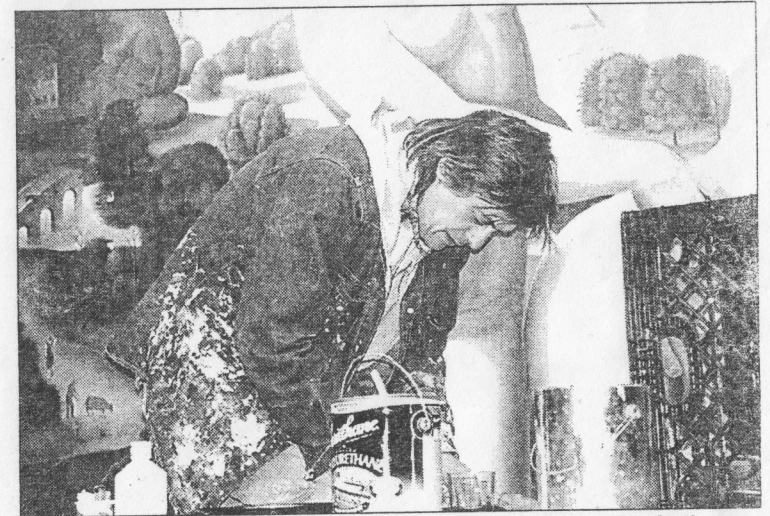
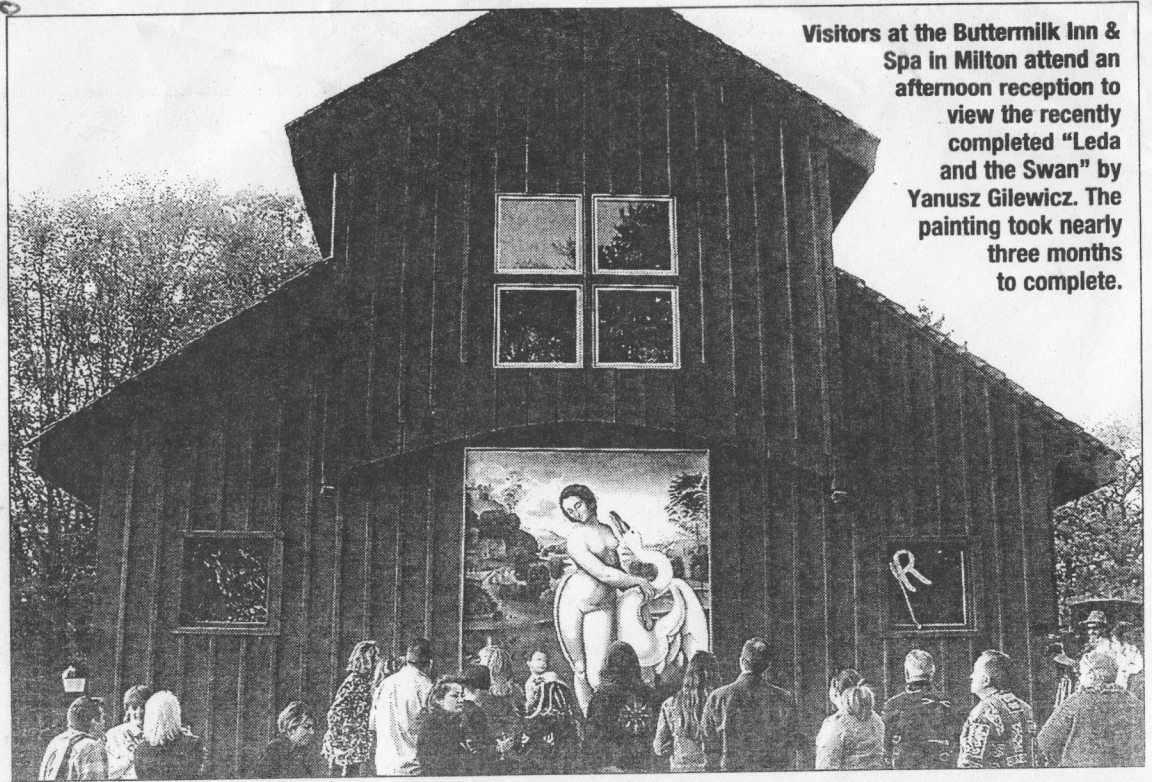
When Poland came under martial law in 1981, he escaped to Italy. His artistic nature drove

him to sketch people in the streets and eventually got him a job working in an Italian artist's studio. Later in Rome he was a "madonnari," or sidewalk chalk painter. Madonnari render classical religious images on the sidewalks and streets for festivals. The art form has been a tradition in Italy since the 16th century. A filmmaker commissioned Gilewicz to do 20 paintings for an Italian/American documentary. That contact gave him the connections to eventually make his way to America, where he has lived since the mid-1980s.

Gilewicz is now in negotiations to do a reproduction of the uncompleted "Adoration of the Magi," which hangs in the Uffizzi in Florence.

For step-by-step instruction in techniques used in reproducing "Leda and the Swan," go to yanuszedavinci.com.

Visitors at the Buttermilk Inn & Spa in Milton attend an afternoon reception to view the recently completed "Leda and the Swan" by Yanusz Gilewicz. The painting took nearly three months to complete.



Yanusz Gilewicz at work, with "Leda and the Swan" standing in the background.

Photo provided