

Meet Our Faculty: Grant Drumheller

Saturday morning art classes painted his future

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Editor's Note: This is the latest installment in a series featuring UNH faculty telling their stories in their own words.

Grant Drumheller, professor of art and art history

"I grew up in Toledo, Ohio. They have an incredible museum — there's one great painting by everyone. I would go over on Saturday mornings and take art classes. I'd get on the bus — I was about 7 or 8 — and get off in this rough neighborhood, take my class and leave. I did that for five consecutive years. I was just wowed by all this great art. That early experience of being in a museum was key.

I was the last of four boys to be educated. My father was a chemical engineer. He said, 'You can go to school anywhere you get in.' I was the only one who took him up on it. My brothers all went in Ohio. I wanted to go to NYU.

He took me to New York. We stayed at the St. Moritz Hotel on Central Park South, and he let me go down to the school by myself. When I got back, he took me out to dinner and said, 'What do you think?' I said, 'I can't wait to come.'

I stayed a year. I knew pretty quickly it was the wrong move for me. So, that summer, I'm living in New York, my parents were in Mexico City and I decided to apply to BU (Boston University) because I heard it was a good art school. Later, I called my father to tell him I'd applied, and he said, "I know, I got the acceptance letter, and I sent the deposit." I always say my father is the one who decided I was going to be an artist.

I really loved my education, I was so into it. I learned to draw; I learned technique, and then I learned how to use it to create my own work. I had some wonderful professors. I still see my 93-year-old professor, Reed Kay, when I am in Boston.

I learned so much from my professors. If you are well-trained, you can learn how to do almost anything. I really embraced that challenge. However, that said, it takes a lot longer than four years to become an artist.

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Then I met my wife, Karina. Talk about luck. I had this woman who was so interesting, so positive, to spend time with. I went to grad school; she went to grad school. I applied for a post-grad Fulbright and got it. We got married that fall and went to Florence, Italy. We lived in a nice apartment where I painted in the front room. It was a great year of art and travel.

We returned to Boston, and in 1981, I got a part-time job teaching at BU. And then I taught at the Art Institute of Boston. I was looking for a full-time job — I started to think it would be easier to be a painter who didn't teach — and then I applied to UNH. I got hired for one semester. The next year, I got a contract for the year. Then there was a full-time opening, and I got it. It was like a miracle; I was so fortunate. I made \$17,500 that year. We lived hand-to-mouth, but we had hope.

UNH was a great place to be an artist, with Boston so close. I got a show in New York, and one of my paintings ended up in an art book. It was a big painting of Zeus on top of a mountain throwing a thunderbolt. There was a stormy sky with lightning. I was contacted by the curator for an anonymous collector in Switzerland who was interested in the painting. She called me and asked if it was still available and how much it was. I

turned to Karina. She said \$10,000, but I knew I'd need to pay taxes on it, so I said \$12,000. We still had our apartment in Boston — my work was still stored there. The curator flew in from Zurich, and I showed her the painting and she said, 'Yes, that will do.' We were living in a little place in Portsmouth, (New Hampshire), with two babies, and that changed things for us. We were able to put a down payment on our first home.

It's great to make \$12,000 on a painting, but that's not the thing that keeps me painting. Painting answers a need I seem to have to create. That I can still summon this genie, this magic — well, it's something of a miracle."

That magic has been shared with UNH students since 1986, including as co-founder of the UNH-in-Italy program in Ascoli Piceno where he taught painting and intensive drawing for seven summers. A gallery of his work can be [viewed here](#).

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