

Focus on artist Fred Jamar: A life of travel and oil paint



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Fred Jamar with one of his paintings at the Robert Lange studio in downtown Charleston. Photo by Sandra Stringer.

James Island resident Fred Jamar is the Artist in Residence at the [Vendue Hotel](#) downtown where he has a studio. The studio is bright and airy with a view of the comings and goings on Vendue Range.

He also has a studio at his home on James Island where the ample space allows him to work on large wood cut out paintings and big canvas pieces. In that studio he has made great practical use of the space.

Fred uses rollaway tables and carts to move his equipment as needed for each project. He has perfectly organized shelves for supplies behind sliding doors on which many of his current pieces hang.

His beginning



Fred Jamar's painting of McLeod Plantation on James Island. Photo by Sandra Stringer.

Fred is originally from Stembert in southern Belgium, near the site of the Battle of the Bulge. But when asked when he grew up there, the answer is “not exactly.” His father was a state police officer in Belgium so the family moved every two years, “not far away, but we had to change schools, to change friends and house...”

Add to that the family's love of taking camping vacations in surrounding countries, and you have the nomadic beginning which became the norm for him throughout his life.

His father's position allowed Fred and his brothers to attend a state boarding school in a chateau within a park. The school was based on the scout system, “so we camped, we hiked, we cooked...and that's where I learned to paint”. There were no formal art classes, but the materials were there and readily available to the students. Fred took advantage of this lucky stroke and began to paint.

Figuring out the future



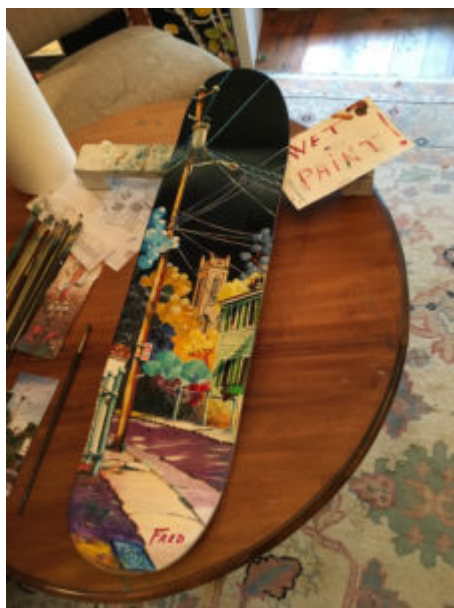
A painting of the Market in downtown Charleston by Fred Jamar. Photo by Sandra Stringer.

When he graduated high school, he really didn't yet know what he wanted to do with his life. But Belgium had compulsory military service, and he chose the officer track in the Belgian Army.

He became a Military Police lieutenant and fulfilled his military duty but came out of the Army still unsure of what he wanted to do.

He worked for eleven months in a paper mill. His father told him, "you learn what life is about, and you can think about what you want to do later".

During that time two friends of his came to see him. They were applying to the Maritime College and convinced him to apply too. As it turns out, he was the only one of the three who was accepted. He was immediately put on the School ship and right away found that he loved it.



Skateboard painted by Fred Jamar. It will be sold at a special Gibbes Museum event, and the proceeds will go towards the 1858 Prize. Photo by Sandra Stringer.

After college Fred worked at a Belgian shipping company for a time and traveled extensively – Africa, the Persian Gulf, South America, Europe – “and it’s a beautiful life, if you want to have a crazy life”.

He decided to ask the company if it would be possible to continue to work for them without working on a ship. They told him if he got a degree in finance, he would have a job with them that was not on a ship.

He went back to college for five years at a satellite campus in Brussels, Belgium of the Université catholique de Louvain where he obtained a Master’s in Finance.

A profession in the finance sector

While in college he was hired by J.P. Morgan in Brussels, which would become his professional home for 30 years. He never went back to the shipping business.

Through J.P. Morgan he became involved in computer projects for the company. “They wanted to create a clearing house for Euro bonds. Brussels at that time in 1968 was the center for Euro dollars”. After 6 years in Brussels having successfully managed the computer project, he was asked to move on a different project in Paris.



A painting by Fred Jamar of J.P. Morgan in New York City, at his studio at the Vendue Hotel. Photo by Sandra Stringer.

Their computer, which filled an entire room, only held 48kb of memory. To compare, the iPhone on which this interview was recorded has more than 60gb of memory (or 60 million kb)!

During the course of his next twelve years at J.P. Morgan, he lived in Paris, New York, London and Frankfurt.

Then, in 1980, the company asked him to do six months in Hong Kong, then six months in Tokyo, and he said no. “I had four children by then...I need[ed] at least one year in one place”.

So they sent him back to New York, and he was put in charge of a group that quickly grew and became worldwide. He moved to Paris in 1990 to run the group in a location that was central to the United States and Asia. His job there led him to travel the world.

In 1993 he moved back to New York. J.P. Morgan asked him to be in charge of the Y2K project in 1997. He wasn't interested in that project, so he decided to retire early.

Retirement turns into a new way of life

He had bought a house in Charleston in 1996 that he was renting out. When he chose to retire in 1997, he moved into that house. He sold the house in Charleston in 2007 and moved to a townhouse on James Island. “It's kind of tucked away, so it was perfect for me.”



Fred Jamar's home studio. Photo by Sandra Stringer.

Throughout his entire life, including his 30 years at J.P. Morgan, "I always painted". He never had any real formal training.

He only works in oils. "I've tried acrylic, pencils and watercolor" but oil is his favored medium. "I like the texture, the way it works."

If you are interested in seeing more of Mr. Jamar's paintings, visit the Robert Lange Studio in downtown Charleston, Café Framboise on Market street, Halo restaurant on Ashley Ave (across from MUSC Campus), and during the Piccolo Spoleto Art Festival at Marion Square (every year for 16 days starting on Memorial Weekend). He is also represented by the Marty Martin Fine Art Gallery in Naples, Florida.

Sandra Stringer is our Editor.