

PORTRAIT OF AN



ARTIST

RAY PIEROTTI

BY KK SNYDER

PHOTOS BY DAVID PARKS PHOTOGRAPHY

*A world-renowned artist is spending his golden years
in the tiny town of Shellman.*





Ray Pierotti often creates large-scale pieces in an outdoor space at his studio.

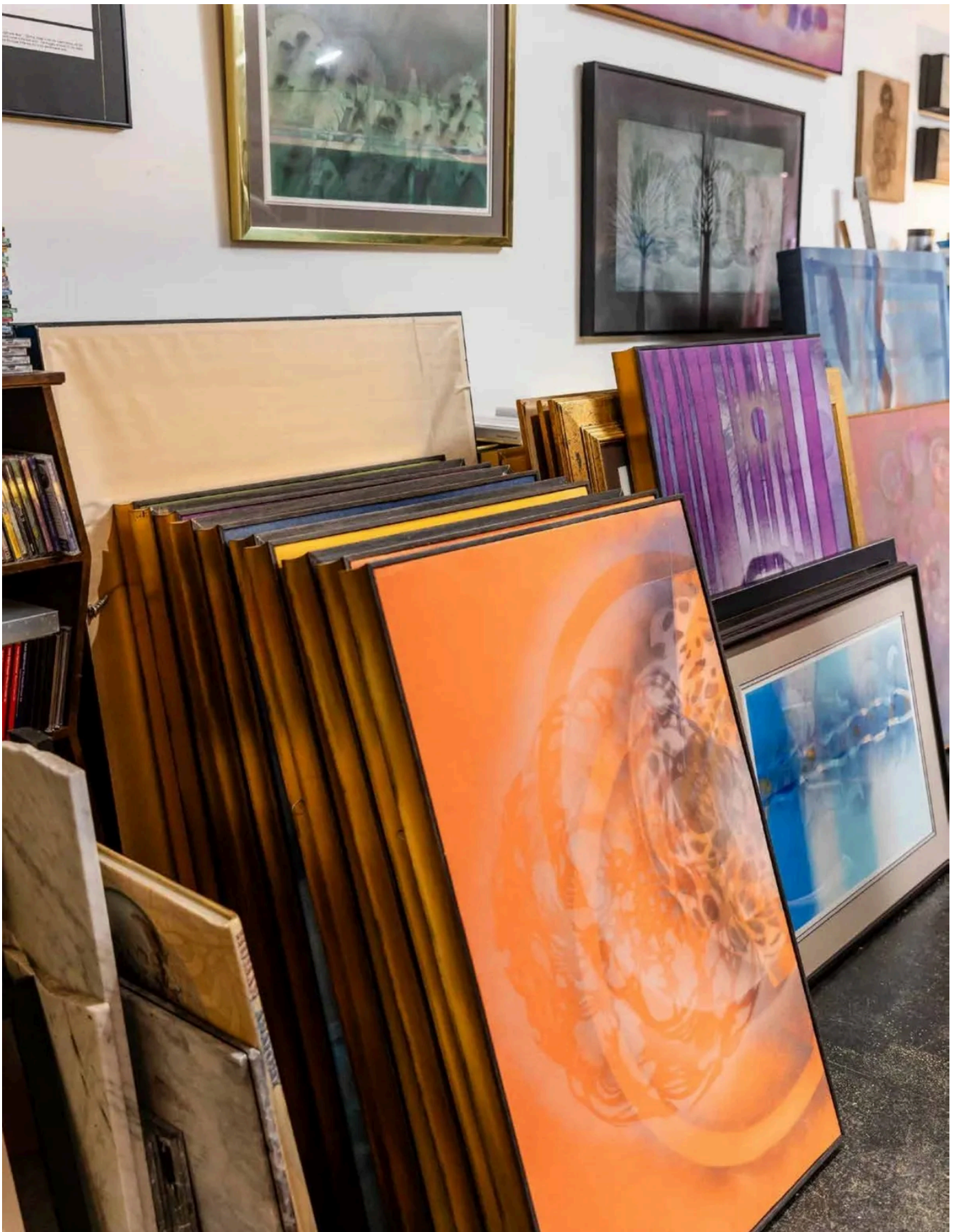
In his 92 years, independent studio artist and composer Ray Pierotti has received well-deserved recognition and accolades from around the globe. His paintings hang in nearly 1,000 private, public and corporate art collections throughout the United States, South America, Europe and the Far East. He is catalogued in the Archives of American Art and listed in Who's Who in International Art & Design. After all his worldly travels, he now lives and creates in the tiny town of Shellman, Georgia, population 824.

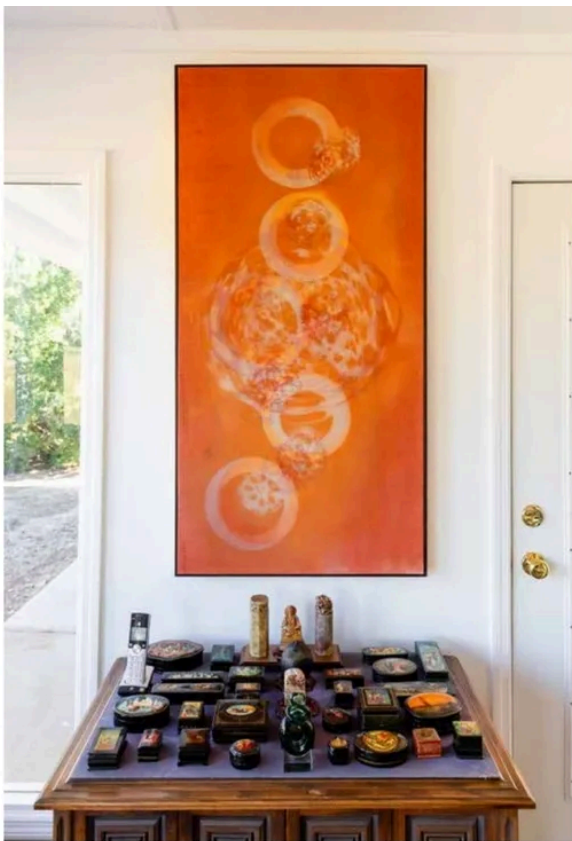
EARLY YEARS

His work and reputation took Pierotti to all corners of the earth before he made his way to Southwest Georgia 14 years ago. A native of Utah, he joined the military during the Korean War and served in both Korea and Japan. He then made his way to France, where he studied languages at the prestigious Paris university La Sorbonne and received an undergraduate degree. Following Paris, Pierotti returned to Utah and studied music composition, earning a bachelor's and a master's in music composition and musicology from the University of Utah.

"He was invited to California to be an actor, but they wanted him to work on Sundays and Ray was a devout Mormon," shares his partner of 38 years, Gene Lewis, who would eventually be the catalyst for Pierotti's move to Shellman. Pierotti suffered a stroke several years back and often finds it challenging to speak. Lewis is a devoted representative, filling in the blanks when the words just won't come for the artist.

Instead, Pierotti headed for the opposite coast in 1963, to live and work in New York City, where he supported his love of painting by teaching design at the New York School of Visual Arts and serving as assistant director of the American Craft Museum.





ARTIST

He had his first solo exhibition in New York's Sawdust Gallery, followed by exhibitions at the South Carolina Museum of Art, the Hunter Museum of Art, and the Fine Arts Museum of the University of Idaho.

In 1987, Pierotti was invited to reopen the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts in North Georgia. He moved from Winston-Salem, NC to Rabun Gap, GA but spent the winter months in Atlanta, where he lived with Lewis and had his studio in their home. While living in Atlanta he was commissioned by Tiffany's to create screens for their window displays at Lenox Mall just as he had been commissioned by them in 1963, while living and working in New York, to create screens for their NYC location.

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FINDING HIS GROOVE

Pierotti and his expertise were often sought after by art and academic institutions, including the invitation to become director of The Arrowmont School of Arts & Crafts in Gatlinburg, TN, and an academic appointment at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. He was also invited to open and direct the Sawtooth School for Visual Arts in Winston-Salem, NC. Lewis, who grew up in Shellman, inherited property with his sister when their parents died. Thus, the opportunity to relocate and open The Center for Arts & Rehabilitative Energies.

"This was our daddy's onion shed," says Lewis of the center, which also houses Pierotti's current studio, perfect for the many large-scale pieces he creates. "(Ray) started coming down here when he had bigger pieces. And this place had holes in the floor and had a few animals in it. We even had one art show here with it in that condition. We had cans in the

floor saying, "there's a hole here," and it was great fun."

Serious renovations began when the pair moved to Shellman full time in 2011, starting with the barn. "We opened in honor of Miss Dorothy Payne, who was a famous artist here in Shellman who lived down the street," says Lewis, of the painter known for her portraits, landscapes and florals. They've since done lots of entertaining in the space and have hosted nearly 20 art shows there.

Pierotti's work is in over 1,000 collections.

STILL CREATING

The stroke hasn't kept Pierotti from continuing to create his abstracts. In fact, he's

in the studio every day, unless he has an appointment to keep. It's not a coincidence that music is typically playing while he paints. In fact, Pierotti combines his love of art and music by composing songs to complement some of his paintings.

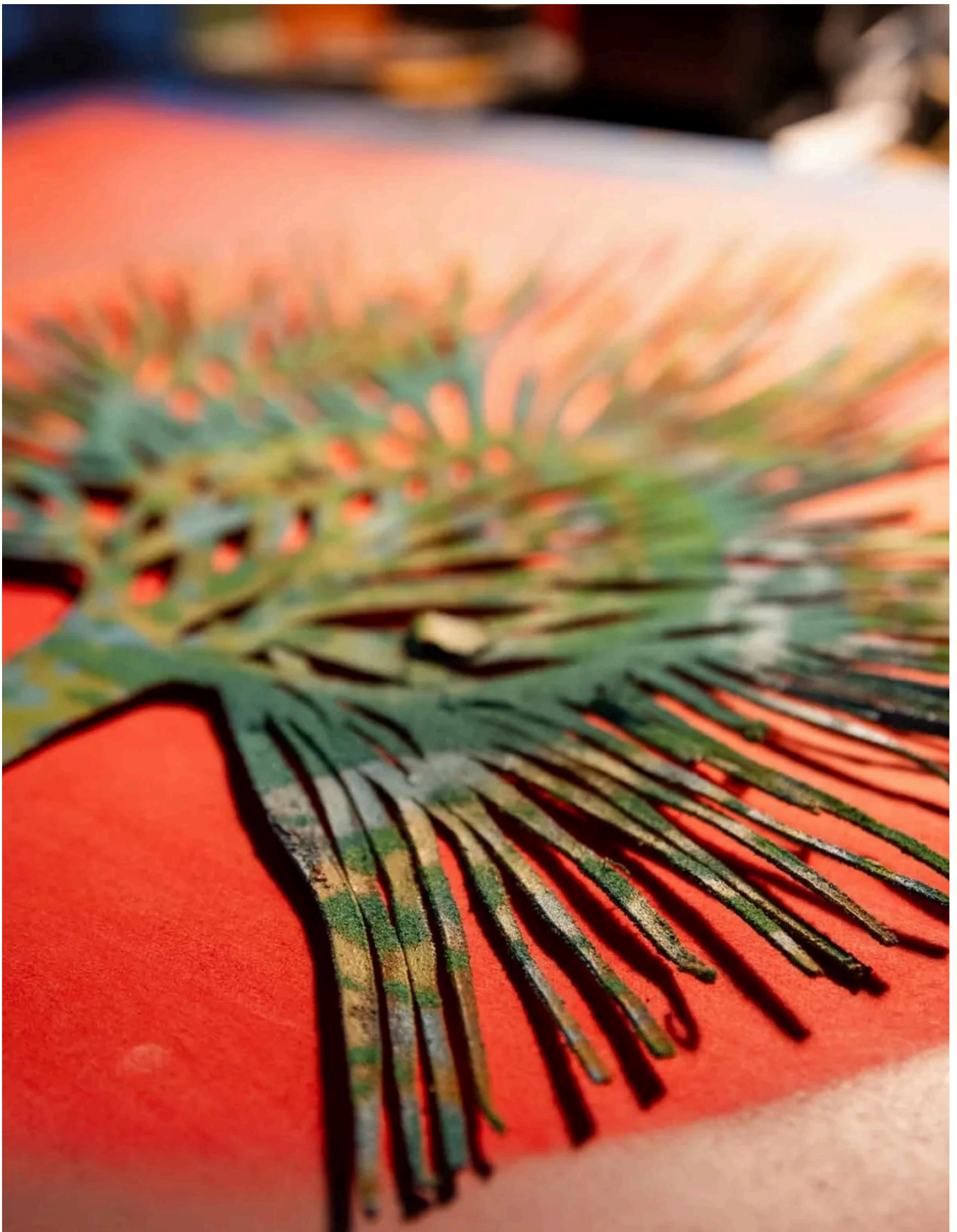
"He's always been musical," shares Lewis. "He was even a radio DJ in high school!"



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ARTIST

The artist says he has a full image of a painting in his head that he “downloads” as he paints.

His space is full of hundreds of pieces of his work, from 20-foot canvases rolled up and stored, to the hundreds of pieces lying flat in shallow drawers of several metal cabinets designed for just that purpose.

His abstracts are created with layer upon layer of Inko dye, acrylic paint, color pencil and occasionally soft pastels, often using large intricate stencils he designs and cuts out himself. A covered area connected to the studio allows him to work on large canvases that he can roll out into the sun to dry, often 80 layers thick with paint.

“If those were under a light and you dimmed it, the painting changes,” explains Lewis. “The layers go deeper and deeper, lighter and lighter.”

Pierotti’s method includes having the complete concept



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ARTIST

Pierotti is represented by galleries in Glasgow, Edinburgh and the Netherlands. An exhibit in Shellman of Ray Pierotti's most recent work is planned for March 2 through May 31, with an opening reception on March 2. The center always has an exhibit, featuring individual artists from across the country. Located at 3696 Pearl Street in Shellman, the center is open 2-6pm most Saturdays and Sundays. To visit by appointment call 229-679-5069 to make a reservation. Groups are encouraged to visit. For more information on Ray Pierotti and The Center for Arts & Rehabilitative Energies, visit raypierotti.com and the center's Facebook page.



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or final picture in his mind before he even picks up a brush, knowing what he's going to do before he even starts. Pierotti says it's like downloading the paintings from top to bottom.

"He knows when to stop, and he knows when to touch up, but he can't explain it," says Lewis, adding that Pierotti is also an extensive reader.

"We invite people to come because it's all about sharing it, right? One summer we had 300 and something children to come through in four or five bus-loads.

"This is a good place to get old," Lewis says, of their decision to remain in Shellman. "There's no traffic light, and you can get help." **SGL**



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