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Quincy native Dean Mitchell, a nationally known artist, prepares for his "Journey of an American Painter" show at the Gadsden Arts Center.

Quincy native has made lucrative art 'Journey'

'I'd be making art even if I didn't get paid a thing'

By Mark Hinson
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

QUINCY — On Wednesday afternoon at the Gadsden Arts Center, the painter Dean Mitchell was sporting a gray T-shirt with the slogan "REAL ARTISTS DON'T STARVE" in bold black letters across his chest.

In his case, this is very true

Mitchell, 44, is one of the top artists in the field of American traditional painting. His name is often mentioned in the same sentence with Winslow Homer, Andrew Wyeth and the rest of the Wyeth painting dynasty. Collectors and museums alike seek Mitchell out in his studio in Overland Park, Kan.

His original paintings can go for anywhere from

- **What:** "Journey of an American Painter" exhibit by Dean Mitchell.
- **Where:** The Gadsden Arts Center, on the Courthouse Square in downtown Quincy.
- **When:** Opening reception tonight from 7 to 9. Show runs through April 15.
- **Cost:** \$1 general public; free for members and children.
- **Phone:** 875-4866.

\$2,000 for a miniature watercolor piece not much bigger than a postage stamp to \$50,000 for one of the major oil works. And they do sell.

He's been commissioned to paint a portrait of Louis Armstrong for a U.S. stamp, and he's been invited to dinner at the White House.

This is one artist who is definitely not going hungry.

"I have a friend who wanted to change the stereotypical image of 'the starving artist' so he made these T-shirts," Mitchell said and laughed. "He also made another that said: 'Non-starving Artist.' He wanted to show that artists make money, pay taxes and

are a part of the community just like everyone else. If you are a *real* artist, you will find work. If you're starving, maybe you're not a real artist."

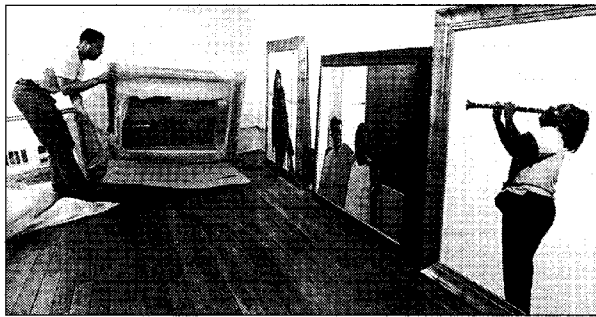
Tonight, the highly successful artist will return to his hometown of Quincy for the opening of "Journey of An American Painter." It's his first one-man show in the newly refurbished, 6,000-square-foot Gadsden Arts Center.

"I never thought I'd never see anything like this in Quincy," Mitchell said of the gallery. "They really stepped on it. I'm impressed. I wouldn't have predicted a place like this."

Getting started

The full-circle trek started not far from the gallery on Courthouse Square.

Mitchell grew up in a concrete-block house on Clark Street in the all-black Pepper Hill section of Quincy. He was raised by his grandmother, Marie, while his mother was away at college. His grandmother, whose dignified portrait is



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Mitchell has been eliminating the backgrounds from his paintings of people.

ARTIST

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included in the "Journey" show, encouraged the young Mitchell's artistic gifts.

Mitchell also got inspiration from teacher Tom Harris, who worked with a group of budding young artists that included Mitchell and North Florida artist Pete Hinson.

"Pete was the star," Mitchell said. "He won everything. I almost quit art because he won every competition."

When Mitchell began winning shows in Panama City and selling work in Fort Walton, he decided to stick with art.

To help make ends meet during art school in Columbus, Ohio, Mitchell held sales of his drawing and art

assignments from class for cash.

"I was so naive I didn't know that no one does that," Mitchell said. "Sometimes it helps to be a little naive. But I sold a lot of work. I needed the money."

After college, Mitchell moved to Kansas to work as a low-paying commercial artist for Hallmark Greeting Cards. He soon began making more money by winning art competitions and quit the day job. He's been painting full-time ever since.

"I never expected to make any money, especially as an artist coming out of Quincy," Mitchell said. "It's been nice that it worked out, but I'd be making art even if I didn't get paid a thing."

Face the faces

Besides the homecoming aspects of "Journey," the show also showcases Mitchell's amazing dexterity and

range with a variety of charcoal nudes, figurative works, still-lives, landscapes, seascapes, beachscapes and his powerful portraits of everyday people.

"I always wanted common people to be able to relate to my work," Mitchell said. "That's always been important to me."

Lately, Mitchell said, he has been altering the way he paints his subjects, most of whom are black or other people of color.

"I've almost eliminated the backgrounds completely

so that it is just the person you're seeing," Mitchell said. "I want to remove everything that might suggest class or certain economic levels. . . . When you look at one of my portraits, you're looking at the soul of that person."

Spoken like a real artist.

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Friday, March 2, 2001

LIMEIGHT ■ TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

The Gadsden Arts Center cordially invites you to attend the opening reception of

DEAN MITCHELL:
Journey of an American Painter

Friday - March 2, 2001 - 7 to 9 pm

Continues through April 15, 2001



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