



Living With Children
John Rosemond talks
kids and rebellion.

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WEEK END

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Editor: Corey Tierney, 574-6276, ctierney@dnronline.com



Courtesy of Gregory Staley

One of Andrei Kushnir's paintings depicts Court Square in Harrisonburg. Kushnir paints en plein air, meaning outdoors in real time.

Scenic Shenandoah

Painter's Landscapes Of The Valley To Be Shown At Duke Hall Gallery

By **ALEDA JOHNSON**
Daily News-Record

It's said that art imitates life, and Washington, D.C.-based artist Andrei Kushnir was doing just that as he spent more than 10 years getting lost in the Shenandoah Valley with his paints and easel.

What began as a suggestion from an art gallery director in Front Royal in 2004 became an obsession for the oil painter whose focus is landscapes.

"When I was picking up a painting from a show, the director mentioned a new state park that had opened up just down the road," Kushnir said. "Luckily, I had my paints with me, so I went out along Route 340."

Kushnir, who regularly paints en plein air, was enthralled by the gentle bend in the Shenandoah River with the mountains looming in the distance. It was picturesque Americana.

The theme of picturesque Americana stayed central to the resulting 263 paintings, which explored the natural and cultural landscapes in the Shenandoah Valley.



Courtesy of Gregory Staley

Another painting depicts the North Fork in Shenandoah County.

All the paintings were compiled into a book: "Oh, Shenandoah: Paintings of the Historic Valley and River," with photos of the paintings done by Gregory Staley and historical analysis of the area by Warren R. Hofstra.

A portion of the series will be on display for the "Painted Shenandoah: The Works of Andrei Kushnir," opening May 1 in the James Madison University

Duke Hall Gallery.

The paintings, varying in size from small studies to large canvas paintings, depict popular landmarks such as the Shenandoah County Fair, Route 11 Potato Chip factory, the Shenandoah Valley Golf Club, the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum and the auto mile of car dealerships along U.S. 33.

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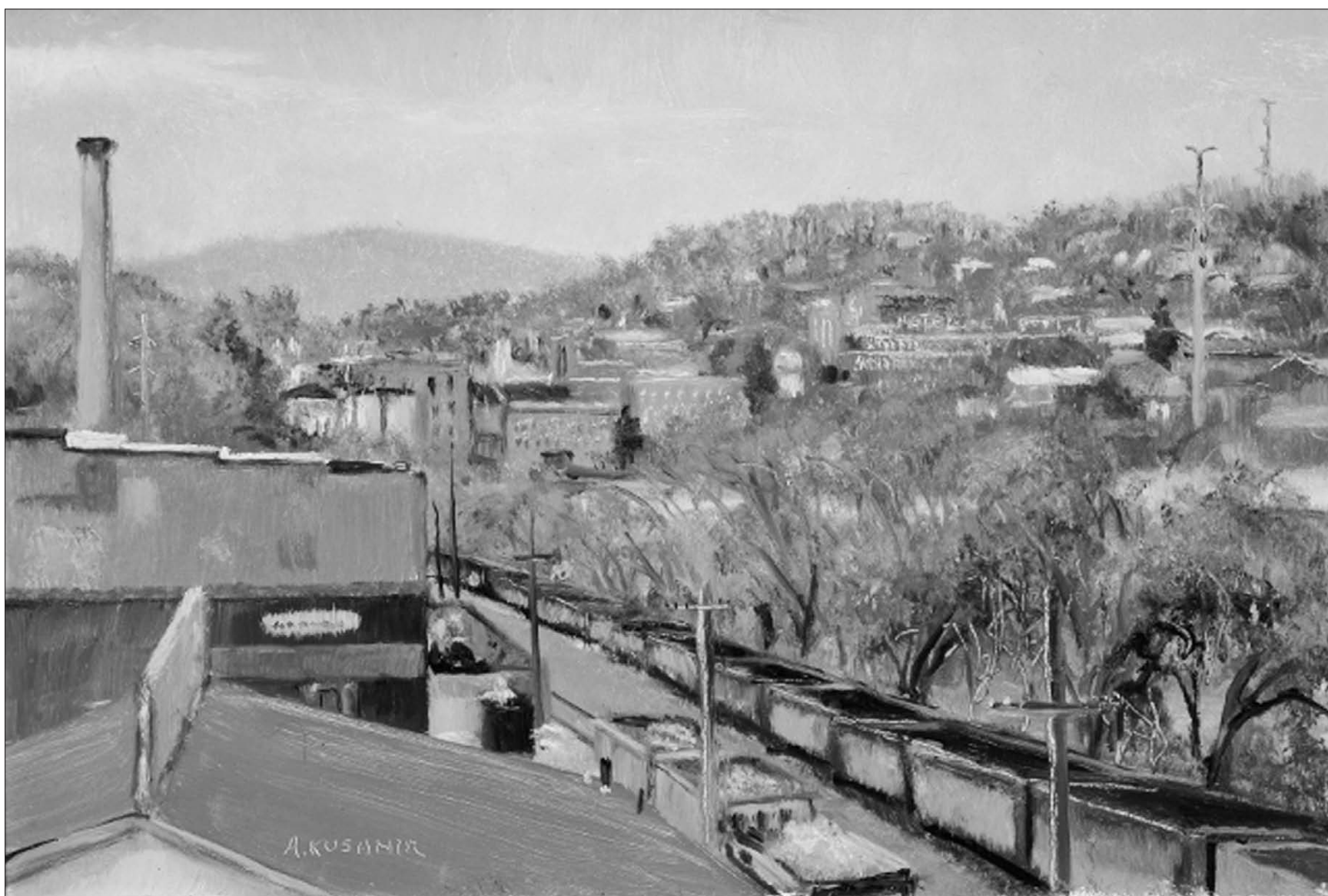
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Kushnir painted a scenic view of Staunton.

Courtesy of Gregory Staley

An Opening Reception For Andrei Kushnir's Exhibit Is Scheduled For May 1

Scenic FROM PAGE E1

But Kushnir also captured lesser-known places treasured by residents that showcased the variety of the Valley's communities, farms, mountains and waterways.

Doing the paintings en plein air, or outdoors in real time, allowed Kushnir to capture whole scenes instead of focusing on one landmark, sometimes taking up to 10 days to complete one painting.

"Plein air paintings are a good size to be able to get the whole scene," he said. "The first three quarters of time you know the painting is there, and you're bringing it out, but it takes a while before it starts looking like anything."

When first embarking on his project of documenting the Valley, Kushnir only meant to paint anything within sight of the Shenandoah River.

"But once I would get into these places,

it was too hard to resist," he said. "So, the radius got larger until I thought I might just try to paint the whole Valley. I was going to need a lot of paint."

Kushnir never had a shortage of landscapes.

First, he took the advice of friends and colleagues and sometimes complete strangers, stopping at their favorite swimming holes and fishing spots from their childhoods.

Other times, Kushnir would stop in one place and see another spot that would be perfect for the next painting.

"Sometimes I'm going to a place and see something before I get there and paint that instead because I would feel a good relationship with the spot," Kushnir said, attributing his change of spots to a touch of Attention Deficit Disorder.

In an attempt to present an accurate representation of the Valley, Kushnir varied the seasons as well as the landscapes, which

made for some hostile work environments.

While painting the Shenandoah Valley Golf Club at sunset, the mosquitoes and biting flies made painting difficult.

"You never saw a guy painting so fast," Kushnir said with a laugh. "I didn't want to lose any more blood than I already had to those critters."

He could be found painting a portion of mountains in blustery winds and 20-degree weather after the man who showed him the area lent him a balaclava.

"I did a smaller study, and I was still shivering," Kushnir said. "But he said, 'You're lucky painting here right now,' because I couldn't paint it in the summer because a generation of rattlesnakes live under those rocks."

Kushnir thinks locals will enjoy the variety of his paintings as they offer an almost complete slice of Valley life.

"I like to have a smattering of things you

would see in the Valley and share it with folks who might enjoy seeing them," he said. "People really seem to like seeing their little neck of the woods captured by someone who liked it just for itself, [and] not to build a building there or exploit it for another reason."

Kushnir has works in the permanent collections of the U.S. Coast Guard, the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, and Virginia Historical Society; his solo exhibition at the VHS was the first granted to a living artist.

An opening reception for the exhibit will be May 1.

The exhibit runs through June 23.

To learn more about the artist, visit andreikushnir.com. For more information, visit jmu.edu/forbescenter.

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