



# The Hand of the Artist

ARTIST PAINTS AGAIN AFTER FINGERS REATTACHED

“I would describe my paintings as thoughts emerging from my finger tips.” That’s what local artist Jonathan Grauel said about his work on a gallery Web site, posted before an accident almost cost him three fingers nearly a year ago.

By day, 39-year-old Grauel (pronounced “grawl”) is a director of media design at carbonhouse, inc., the leading digital marketing firm in the nation for sports, hospitality, and entertainment. But his home studio, named Blue Studio, is where he turns his endless black-and-white sketches of meal conversations, sermons, and reflections into colorful fine art that is displayed in galleries and private collections around the world.

## INSPIRED ART

There are two main themes to Grauel’s work: “Villages” and “Table Top Theater.” Villages paintings present a crowded community of buildings, pathways, and arches filled with life’s decision points. A “traveling man” icon is hidden in every piece facing a moral crossroad for the viewer to figure out.

“I paint to declare and understand better the freedom and joy of life in God’s mercy,” he says. His wife, Angela, and children, Abby, 10, and Jace, 6, are also artistic inspirations.



The Table Top Theater paintings look at imagined harmony and controversy on the table between silverware, salt and pepper, plates, and mugs that jockey for position and pursue hopes and dreams. Coffee mugs are Grauel’s favorite member of the table top cast as they represent comfort and times of warm discussion with good friends.

## THE ACCIDENT

On December 1, 2007, Grauel was in a friend’s garage using a table saw to help with a shelving project. He doesn’t know exactly what happened, but he remembers

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putting his left hand down on a board to keep it steady on the table as it bowed up. The saw pulled the board and his hand into the blade and amputated his thumb, index, and middle fingers.

With Grauel's son, Jace, in the back seat, his friend drove him to the emergency room as both tried to remain calm for Jace's sake.

At the hospital, Glenn Gaston, MD, a hand specialist from OrthoCarolina's Hand Center, was called in to surgically replant the fingers. "With a reattachment or replantation surgery, I use a microscope to meticulously reattach tiny blood vessels, nerves, tendons, and muscles," says Dr. Gaston. "In a case when multiple fingers and the thumb are involved, the first priority for reattachment is the thumb because of the functionality our thumbs add. Then I move to the middle finger, followed by the index finger."

After the seven-hour surgery, all three fingers initially survived. However, in May 2008, it became clear that the index finger was not regaining sensation or good motion, and a partial amputation was required. Also in May, due to the severity of the initial injury, Dr. Gaston completed work on the middle finger by fusing one of the knuckles, or PIP joints. Grauel points out that with this surgery, "Glenn watched me hold my pen and brush and then custom-designed my middle finger to help me hold them better." He adds, "Glenn has become a

supportive friend. I can e-mail him pictures of my hand any time, and he checks my progress."

"Jonathan has been a pleasure to care for and get to know on a personal basis," says Dr. Gaston. "He has a wonderfully supportive wife who has also been a joy to get to know. During his rehab for the hand, he learned to paint with his opposite hand (similar to Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel), and he really did some outstanding work with his other hand alone. He has worked hard and regained full use of his thumb and excellent function of his middle finger as well."

### A NEW CHAPTER

On Friday, September 26, 2008, Grauel opened his first post-injury art show at The Gallery at Warehouse. His friends, family, and other art enthusiasts were there, including Dr. Gaston, who lightheartedly commented, "The knife is conspicuously absent from Jonathan's post-injury work." "I tend to have to focus a bit more to get the level of control I want," Grauel says. "But I think that will even out with time. I grip the pens, brushes, and pastels differently than before, so I am learning to adjust to new angles and pressure needed. As far as the work itself, I'm not sure there is any real difference in composition."

Today, Grauel tells his story with a sense of humor and thankfulness. He jokes that he can't make the double quotes sign or point directions with his left hand any more. But in the grand scheme of things, that's okay.

