Q: I PERSONALLY WAS DRAWN TO THE ABANDONED SPACES PORTRAYED IN YOUR ART. I LOVED EXPLORING LEFT BEHIND HOMES AND DISCOVERING THE FRAGMENTS LEFT OF FAMILIES FROM ANOTHER ERA — I REMEMBER FEELING AN ODD COMBINATION OF INSPIRATION, FASCINATION AND A BIT OF SADNESS. WHY DO YOU CHOOSE THEM AS THE SUBJECT OF YOUR ART?

JP: Abandoned homes fascinate me. I can experience a part of someone’s life and history, without feeling like I have intruded. Before I even start a painting, I go exploring! I have been in hundreds of buildings, each with their own personality. No matter where I travel, I am amazed by the things that I discover when I choose to look.

Abandoned buildings also seem to have a calming effect on me. A lot of times I visit them by myself in the solitude of the countryside. People have told me that there is a spiritual or otherworldly presence in my paintings, which is something I didn’t intend. My paintings, without a doubt, capture my emotions that I experience when I am in them.

Q: WHO IS JILL PETERSON?

JP: I grew up on a farm near Hillsboro, North Dakota. In 6th grade, my first job was picking rocks in a field. My second job was probably sweeping sheds. In junior high, I worked my way up to driving the grain cart and my first job away from the farm was working road construction. Truly, some of my best life lessons to this day were gained during that time.

I obtained a BFA in art and a BS in Art Education from Minnesota State University Moorhead. Currently, I am in my 3rd and final year at the University of Idaho at Moscow, in the MFA program for Fine Arts. I teach undergraduate classes at the University as well as special needs students at a local elementary school.

I am passionate about many things, so I express that on canvas. I have a deep love of traveling and seeing different ways of life.

I enjoy the outdoors, sports, and music because they keep my life balanced. Being active is important to me, whether it’s snowboarding, hiking, or running. The quiet solitude of painting in my studio for hours and being able to hurtle down a trail on my bike — is the key to balance.
YOU WERE RAISED ON A FARM, NEAR HILLSBORO, NORTH DAKOTA. HOW HAS THAT IMPACTED YOUR LIFE?

JP: As an artist, the subject you portray is a huge indication of what inspires and influences you. Before I even started painting, I was sitting on the back of a 4-wheeler with my dad exploring abandoned buildings around the countryside. Dad would tell me the stories about the people that used to live in them. From then on I was hooked! I think it is my natural curiosity and the buildings mysterious qualities that attract me. Even without the background history, I find it fascinating because I create stories based on objects I find inside. Because of my upbringing in rural North Dakota, I will always love wide open spaces and the solitude that it brings. People are so attached to their homes there. My parents still live in the farmhouse that my grandparents built. To my parents, it’s not just a house. It’s a legacy and a way of life.

JP: I think it would be that art doesn’t have a ‘right or wrong’ to it. People ask me what my paintings mean, especially when it comes to the objects within them. I usually ask them what they think it means, and it’s amazing to me how many different answers I can get. I will always have a certain bias to what the paintings mean to me, but part of the enjoyment I receive by exhibiting my art is hearing what people think my art means to them.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR JILL PETERSON?

JP: This year might see some big changes for me. I am at a bit of a crossroads. Since high school I wanted to be a teacher or professor, so that may be the next step. Working this year with special needs students in the elementary schools introduced me to occupational therapy. I was able to combine my love of teaching and helping others with my creative arts. This winter, I plan on applying for my masters in occupational therapy as well as academia jobs — God will decide from there which road I take! No matter what I end up doing, I will always be an artist and incorporate art into my life.

For more information visit www.jillpetersonartist.com.

See Jill’s work locally at Underbrush Gallery, 1450 25th Street South in Fargo. *

IF YOU WERE TO NAME ONE PERSON WHO ENCOURAGED YOU ALONG THE WAY... WHO WOULD IT BE?

P: That’s really hard to do... but I can narrow it down. My grandmother, Lorraine Czar, was the first person to introduce me to oil paints when I was in 6th grade and I haven’t stopped painting since. In West Acres, I have a painting in display titled “Overseeing the Crops” which portrays my grandmother’s father-in-law.

IF THERE WAS ONE THING, ONE IMPRESSION OR ONE IDEA THAT YOU COULD LEAVE WITH EVERYONE YOUR ART TOUCHES... WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Inspirations: Art is beauty, color and story mixed together.