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San Gabriel Division 9 Mechanic John Hill repair buses and creates art, but not at the same time. The 25-year Metro employee started using his workspace as an art studio about 10 years ago. He comes in early each day to make time for his hobby.

- Photos by Jimmy Stroup

San Gabriel Division 9 Mechanic John Hill Makes Art at Work

- He comes early to create with pencil, ink, oil or acrylic

By JIMMY STROUP

(July 10, 2007) The industrial smells of grease, oil and solvent hang in the air of John Hill's art studio – because it's the maintenance bay at San Gabriel Valley Division 9.

Inside John Hill's toolbox studio



For the last 10 years or so, Hill – who's a mechanic "A" – has been coming in to work a half hour early each day to toil at his toolbox, creating pencil and ink drawings, and oil and acrylic paintings.

"I get here a few minutes early every day and instead of watching the news and scribbling up in the break room, I decided to go out there and paint," Hill said.

Not formally trained (the last art class he took was in the 12th grade), Hill's art is graceful enough that it's in demand among his fellow mechanics. He holds a raffle every now and



then, he said, to make it fair to give the art away.

"If it's a piece of art that someone wants and that I don't really want, I'll trade him," he said. "He gives me a couple of canvases and I give him the painting."



Work tools become art tools

Hill's art ranges in subject from classic pastoral scenes to the mildly gothic and the almost surreal, though Hill keeps the art strictly G-rated, careful not to offend any of his fellow mechanics.

"I mostly use pencil and ink, but recently I've been picking up my brushes and painting in oil and acrylic," he said.

Painted in the top section of the toolbox itself, each creation is lit with a work light normally used in shedding light on engine troubles or oil changes.

The 25-year Metro veteran paints without the aid of a model or photo of whatever his subject for that week may be. It normally takes him a week or two to complete a piece. Works in progress are either hung on the sides of the tool box or laid flat in its empty drawers.

"I draw from memory," Hill said. "Places I've been, places I make up. Whatever turns me on at the time."