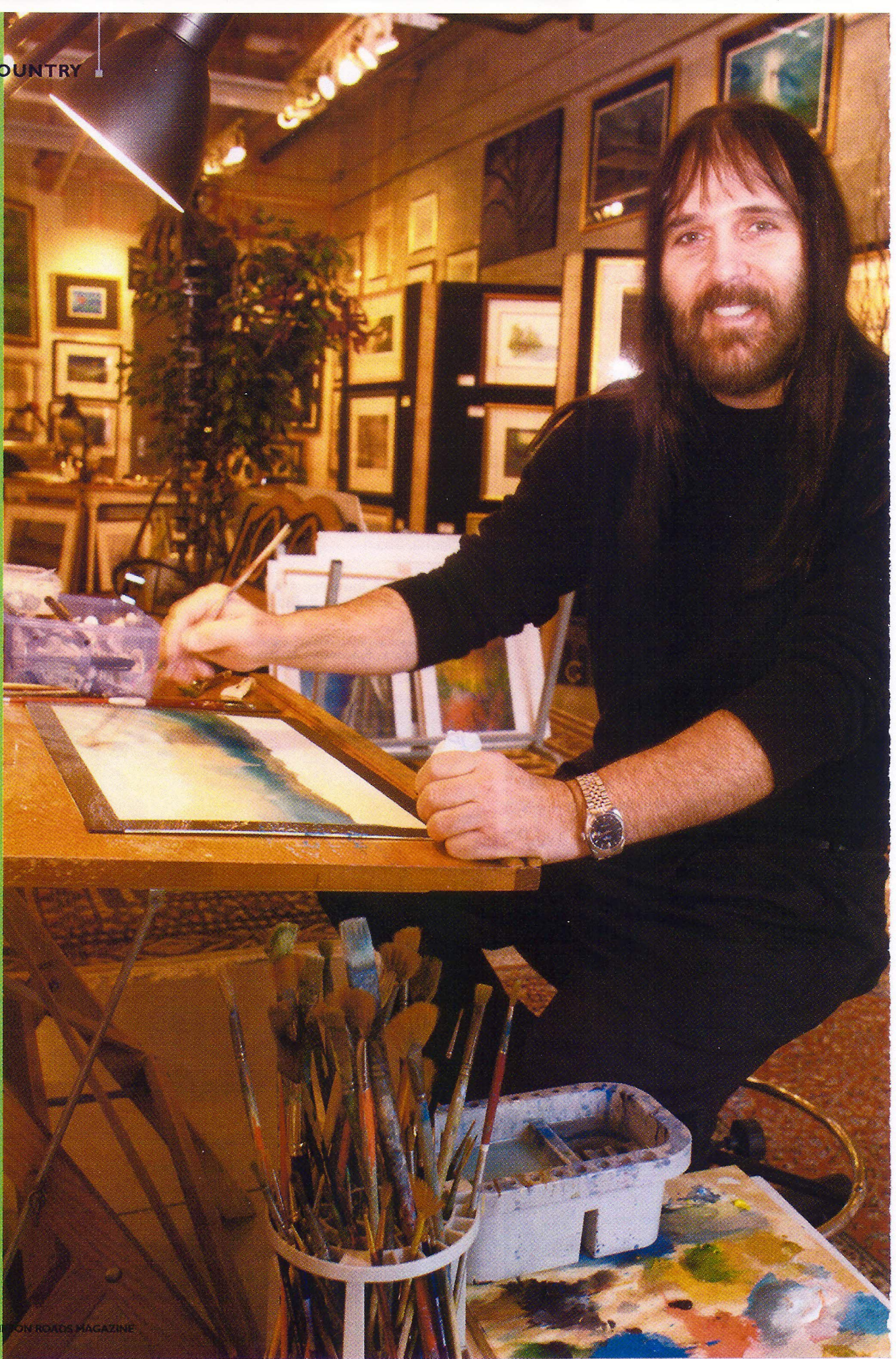


ART PARTS  
COVERING IT ALL

LOUIS  
JONES  
PUTS  
HIS ART  
IN THE  
WHOLE  
WORLD'S  
HANDS





Louis and his wife, Susan, flip through a handful of his illustrated books in their studio at Virginia Beach Town Center.

**H**e's been held in a million hands, tossed on hundreds of beds and left in countless airports. He is Louis Jones, prolific artist and illustrator of no less than eight *New York Times* bestseller book covers or frontispiece illustrations—and you've likely given him much of the same treatment.

"It's kind of weird, sometimes, to think how many strangers have this piece of me," says Jones, owner of Jones Art Gallery in Virginia Beach's Town Center. "There's always that moment when you relinquish a painting to its new owner, but this is different. I have no way of knowing what, if anything, it means to people."

Norfolk born, Jones is part of a family quaterfoil of local artists: son of the late Herb Jones, husband to Susan Jones, father to Ryan Jones (all painters). "They are an amazing family," says Julie Jenney, producer for *Living the Life*, a daily show on ABC family that did a segment on Jones Art. "Their work is exceptional, their story unique, and they are warm, loving people."

How warm? Believing in a man on the street is how Jones shot to fame in the book business. In 1993, publisher Jonathan Friedman dropped into his then Norfolk gallery to ask if Jones would consider painting a book cover. "The guy who'd written it had been homeless," Jones remembers. "I agreed to read his rough manuscript, and that was it. I ended up doing paintings for all the books."

Published by Hampton Roads Publishing with Jones' *The Lake* on its cover, *Conversations with God* sold 100,000 copies, was acquired by Putnam, and went on to become a *NY Times* bestseller. It catapulted unknown author Neale

Donald Walsch to fame, was translated into 22 languages, and launched more than five million copies, including subsequent volumes *Book II*, *Book III*, *Meditations and Questions and Answers*, bearing Jones' paintings *The Lake II*, *The Lake III*, *New Dawn* and *The Lake V*.

It also catapulted Jones into court. In 1998, he filed a \$1 million copyright infringement against the distributors of the movie *What Dreams May Come*, claiming the visuals were from *Conversations with God* paintings *The Lake* and *The Lake II*. The movie won a 1998 Oscar for best visual effects. In 1999, Jones amended the damages to \$2 million, adding *The Lake III* and *New Dawn*, and eventually settling out of court for an undisclosed sum.

Recently, *What Dreams May Come* producer Stephen Simon contacted Jones for usage rights of the same paintings for his upcoming movie *Conversations with God*. "It felt great to speak to him, man to man," says Jones, who granted permission. "We moved beyond the ugliness. I have real respect for him."

Doubleday Broadway Publishing Group introduced Jones' art to millions more through his title page illustrations for two John Grisham novels and one Ian McEwan. "When I was told we were publishing John Grisham's first literary novel, I wanted something that looked elegant, and I knew Louis could do that," says Maria Carella, director of interior design

for Doubleday. "A couple of years prior to Grisham, Louis had done a small title page illustration for me, for a book called *Awake My Soul*, so I felt very comfortable calling him to do *A Painted House*."

Jones went through seven revisions until Grisham settled on his eighth design. "He kept rejecting drawings, saying 'Read the book,' and I'd re-read it, desperately seeking a clue to what he wanted," Jones laughs. "Finally, reading about a character hearing rain on the roof, I realized it was a single-story farmhouse. And that was the drawing he accepted."

Following *A Painted House* in 2001, came *Bleachers* in 2003, for which Jones used Old Dominion University's Foreman Field as the model. "Granby High used to play football there," he says. "I got a kick out of putting my alma-mater in the book."

In 2005, Carella asked him to draw a title-spread illustration of London's Fitzroy Square for *Saturday* by British author McEwan. "Publisher Nan Talese, who has her own imprint within Doubleday, approved Louis' style, and away we went!" Carella says. "Louis is a really good guy and has contributed to making the books he's done for me look very special."

"There's no point to this unless it touches people," Jones says. "There's more love in my art than I can contain."

Just watch where you spill the coffee.

*Jones Art Gallery is located at 4549 Virginia Beach Boulevard in Virginia Beach's Town Center. Visit Louis Jones' website at [www.jonesart.com](http://www.jonesart.com) for more information and to view some examples of his work.* **HR**

—Irene Bowers