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Consider him the Leonardo of limulus, a salty Jackson Pollock with a prehistoric canvas.

For five years, Greg Vaughan has liberated the shells and carcasses of dead horseshoe crabs from the sand and seaweed around Pleasant Bay. All in the name of arthropod art.

He calls his colorful creations Killer Krabs. And they are actually kinda kute.



"I pick them up off the beach and give them a face and attitude," said the 45-year-old funky folk artist, who operates Vaughan Art, his sign painting and airbrush studio, in Brewster.

Using just a hand brush and enamel paint, Vaughan embellishes his cartoonish creations with bug eyes, large teeth and wacky grins. Think goalie masks with spiny personas.

"I have more fun painting on horseshoe crabs than anything else," said Vaughan, a 1984 graduate of Nauset High School. "They have no guidelines to them, no barriers or boundaries."

Vaughan said he's sold about 200 of his horseshoe crab creations, which range in price from \$100 to \$150, or more, depending on the size. He also looks forward to the family bonding experience of collecting the exoskeletons with his two young sons.

Each horseshoe crab can have a custom design, and Vaughan has created Boston Bruins and Red Sox-themed pieces. The walls at Wellfleet Town Pizza are adorned with several of Vaughan's Killer Krabs, which are available for purchase there.

"We've had a lot of people come in and comment about how awesome they are," said manager Carrie Luhmann. "They are kind of ingenious. Real tattoo art that is very original."

Horseshoe crab painting doesn't pay all the bills, however. Vaughan has spent 20 years putting his outrageous art onto all sorts of custom-made signs, race cars and motorcycles.

He honed his craft at Butera School of Art in Boston and while at school worked on some high-profile projects including gold-leafing the Copley Plaza and airbrushing the guitar bar at the Boston Hard Rock Café.

Vaughan has also contributed to several feature films and even nabbed a small role in the Tom Hanks movie "You've Got Mail" as a sign writer. After a stint working in California, Vaughan moved to New York City at the urging of a friend, actress Goldie Hawn.

"She wanted me to help design and paint her penthouse," Vaughan said. "We did a kind of Indian demigod theme; it was pretty cool." But now, instead of Vishnu, it's horseshoe. Crabs, that is. "These are like my little monsters," said Vaughan.