



**Untitled**

**Oil on canvas, 30 inches by 24 inches**

**By Jeffrey Cohen, M.D.**

Dartmouth neurologist Jeff Cohen is unabashed about the fact that he loves to paint but that a couple of family members who are “really accomplished artists”—his father-in-law and sister-in-law—“tell me it is very good that I chose medicine, not art, as a career.” The painting above, which was included in a recent exhibit at Dartmouth’s Dana Biomedical Library, was inspired, says Cohen, by a work he saw some years ago at France’s national museum of modern art, the Centre Pompidou. Cohen has been painting “off and on” since he was about 20 years old. He started trying his hand at art because a lot of his friends in college were art students. “Then when I was in medical school, my best friend actually taught art . . . and when I was in New York in my training, one of my best friends was an artist. . . . So I’ve always hung around people [for whom] art was really important.” But he’s resisted taking art classes because, he explains, “in medicine, we’re constantly evaluated, constantly graded, constantly analyzed.” Painting offers a release from the structure of his work environment, and he fears that taking classes would make art feel too much like an assignment. He says his goal is “not so much trying to master technique as trying to do something that expresses my feelings.” In his artist’s statement for the show at Dana Library, he wrote that “my usual day as a neurologist is spent in trying to support patients who have horrible diseases such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig’s disease), where there is no hope, no cure, and inevitable death. My art is a way for me to cope with all the sadness and fear I take on each day. I feel the best physicians are [those] who can take on and experience their patients’ feelings.” He says he makes the time to paint “when I feel the need or feel the desire. . . . I really find [it] very liberating.” So Cohen may sound a bit dismissive when he refers to his painting, and his writing of poetry and short stories, as “creative stuff.” And he may feel “really self-conscious about” those pursuits. But his face lights up when he says that painting “is something that I really enjoy.” ■