

visual

Arts

Portrait Painting

by Elizabeth Smily

Portrait painting is the most demanding and exacting of all the visual arts, but also, I think, the most exciting and rewarding one. I am constantly aware that a job well done can give an enormous amount of pleasure not only to oneself, but to others as well. When someone has a well-executed portrait of a person they love, they have something they can enjoy now, and also hand down to future generations. We all hope to be remembered, and remembered at our best and most attractive. A portrait provides a touch of immortality.

But a portrait is more than just a subject and a paint brush. Training, studio conditions and techniques must all be considered.

I was most fortunate in that the school I attended at age 11 had an excellent art teacher. Because of her interest in me, my parents were alerted to my early potential and I started private art lessons immediately. I therefore had the benefit of early and comprehensive training that served as an excellent precursor to my later formal schooling.

Not everyone, however, has such early opportunities. If you are a late starter, the most important consideration in developing your skill as a portrait painter is the study of drawing.

It is essential to learn how to draw. By drawing I mean more than just applying pencil to paper. The discipline of academic drawing techniques and constant application of them cannot be overemphasized for anyone seriously interested in becoming a portrait painter. There are really no shortcuts.

The importance of the life class, or drawing from the human figure, cannot be overemphasized. Life class develops your ability to catch the essential lines. Prior to life drawing, it is necessary to learn some anatomy. Then one goes through the process of learning about bone structure and musculature from life classes. Thus, sessions involve both quick sketches and long poses.

Once you can draw and paint a human figure, you can draw or paint anything. You can more readily understand the subtle nuances that differentiate one person's face and body from another's.

It would be wonderful indeed if one could have the perfect studio conditions at all times in which to execute a portrait. The ideal situation would provide the high north light in a large room. The studio would allow you to have everything well organized with all the essentials at hand. However, the perfect studio, as wonderful as it can be, will not guarantee good work, although it can help to reduce the stress of working under less-than-perfect conditions. I have had this ideal setup just a few times in my life.

One of the biggest problems of portrait painting is that of continuity. It is rare that the subject is able to give sittings close enough together so that you can paint "wet into wet," which is so ideal with oils. Moreover, the sittings may be as much as a week or more apart, and by the completion



Vancouver businessman
Murray Goldman

human portraits are the real challenge. They are especially exciting and enormously fulfilling. All the same, I am almost never completely satisfied with any painting I do, and know I never will be. I am still learning, and know there will be always something more to learn as long as I can still hold a brush.

Elizabeth Smily is a long-time West Vancouver resident and portrait painter. She recently completed a portrait of Vancouver haberdasher Murray Goldman.

Women Artists to Play Major Role in Monument Project

by Cate Jones

The Women's Monument Project is going to build a monument naming the 14 women who were murdered in Montreal on December 6, 1989 and dedicated to all women affected by male violence. The project is sponsored by Capilano College Women's Centre.

Each year, thousands of women are murdered by men. The Monument Project Committee believes that new methods of coping with the fear, anger and pain caused by violence against women are needed. The monument will provide a focus for healing and a symbol of remembrance. It is only one part of the overall strategy to end violence against women.

The Women's Monument Project plans to erect the monument in Vancouver's Vanier Park. The design will be the outcome of a Canada-wide competition open to female college and university students. Incorporated into the monument's design will be a surface made of slate, upon which visitors can write—in chalk—something of significance to them. A pathway leading up to the monument will inscribe the names of all the project's donors.

The design competition will target entries from art, architecture and engineering students. All entrants must be enrolled full-time in a college or university. Single entrants as well as cooperative efforts by two or more designers are welcome. It is anticipated that the entry deadline will be December 1, 1992.

The competition advisors will consist of an artist, an architect and an engineer. The jury will be made up of two 3-dimensional artists, one engineer, one architect and one feminist historian.

For further information on the Women's Monument Project, call Cate Jones at 254-3831 or Kelly Phillips at 988-0025.



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