

## **Materials, Methods, and Me**

For Christmas, a few days after my 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, I received a set of oil paints made by Permanent Pigments. (Unfortunately, that line of paints no longer exists. I now mostly use colors prepared by Williamsburg, Old Holland, and Daniel Smith.) Through experimenting, reading, and observation, I learned how to use the paints and developed a style that combines elements of realism and Impressionism.

My training includes art classes in high school and college, and self-study. My work has been exhibited in Detroit, Lincoln (NE), and Oklahoma City. I have visited most of the major art museums in Europe and the United States—for pleasure, to stimulate my own creativity, and to decipher the methods chosen by other artists. (How did they handle composition? How did they apply their paint? How does one approach differ from another?).

Most of my paintings are based on photographs I have taken. In portraits, I try to present more than a standard pose, to capture a moment, an expression, or a mood. The painting can depict a favorite activity, a significant accomplishment, or the achievements of a lifetime.

For commissioned portraits, I usually want to meet or talk with the person I will be painting to learn more about their personality and interests. Generally, I will take reference photos and initial sketches. We may also look through family photos to see if any might suggest an appropriate composition or if they provide elements for the final composition.

For my own work, I generally prefer to paint on a white surface to allow more of the pure colors to reflect back to the viewer. I have mainly painted on canvas or linen I have primed with acrylic gesso or rabbit skin glue and lead-based white paint. Recently, I have been using birch or oak plywood that I sand and finish with layers of acrylic gesso. I outline the main areas of the composition on the board or canvas, then complete sections at a time. For some paintings, I begin by applying a thin layer of paint to show the main colors and features of the composition. Later, I'll add depth and detail with additional layers of paint.

Oil paints can take several weeks to dry to the touch, and even longer to dry more completely. Consequently, it may be several months to complete a painting. After the painting has dried at least six months, the surface should be coated with a layer of picture varnish to help protect it from dust and air pollution. You should have the painting professionally framed. The ideal location to hang your painting is a room where the temperature and humidity are moderate and stay relatively constant. Avoid hanging a painting in areas exposed to direct sunlight.

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