

Even artists must learn to paint signs

This is another in a series of lessons on art and drawing by special columnist David Messing. He has taught for eight years and operates an art store, Art Store and More, 18774 Middlebelt, Livonia. Messing encourages questions and comments from readers. You may write him at his store or c/o Observer Newspapers, 23352 Farmington Road, Farmington MI 48024.



Artifacts

sign, if it were not for our pride or the money. Most people assume that an artist can paint signs more easily than draw. Just by looking at our signatures they should know that this is quite the contrary.

PRIDE ALONE forced me into my first few signs. Someone would say "Boy you're really a good artist. So I know you would have no problem with a quick sign for my club." With a toothy grin I would say, "Sure, no problem." Then for the next six hours I would hide in my bedroom trying to get the two O's in "moose" to look the same.

Carefully I would outline my sign in felt tip pens and then begin slowly filling in the letters, praying my felt tip pen would not dry up. Overcome by the felt tip fumes I would stumble out of my room looking much like Casper the Ghost. Then delivering my sign with a confident smile I would say "Oh yeah, I just knocked it out today, no big deal . . . for an artist."

After struggling for years with signs I found that there is another good motivation other than pride alone. Money. You know that stuff that separates the "starving" from the "artist." Usually signs are commissioned from businessmen and the word business has two dollar signs.

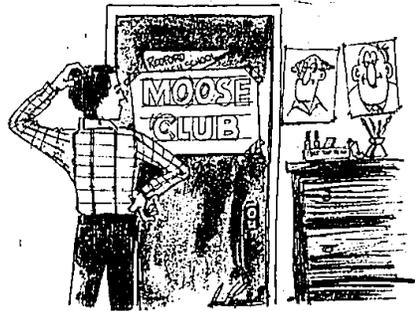
Here is a good example. I recently painted a sign on canvas that required

little artistic talent. The customer was very happy and thought \$350 was a very reasonable fee. I could pour my heart and soul into one of my animal paintings and in order to receive \$350 I would have to throw into the deal a year of free car washing. It doesn't seem fair, but that is the way it is. Most paintings hover between agony and ecstasy until the finishing touch is applied and the visual expression is complete. Ventilated and satisfied, we artists look upon the creation and smile, forgetting all about the effort spent to produce it. It is truly a shame that this artistic effort is not appreciated financially as it is a sign that is merely as they say, "knocked out."

LET ME quickly say that I am by no means discounting the sign painter. I, more than most artists, appreciate the art of sign painting. Because I have struggled over "O's" labored with a "D" and practically lost my sanity over an "S," believe me I appreciate the ability of a sign painter. Since most artists are not sign painters (and by the way, most sign painters are not artists) I would like to give you some tips for

your inevitable, first sign commission. The most common sign order would probably be paper signs or "banners." Now there are two types of paper signs. The first type is what is called "meat market" signs. You have all seen these. They are loosely and boldly painted signs that might read "HAM SPECIAL." Then a price per pound. These signs are painted with a wide hair brush or more recently with the inexpensive foam rubber brushes. The paint used is simply a water base tempera thinned down. If you look closely at meat market signs you will see that the water based paint has caused the banner paper to ripple. This type of sign is inexpensive and is only intended to be used for a week or so.

The next type of paper sign is more commonly seen where stores require a better quality semi-permanent window sign. Here, the sign painter lays out the sign on the paper with a vine charcoal stick. Any mistakes or unwanted guide lines can be easily removed by rubbing them with a chamois. So even us artists can "work up" or should I say "sweat up," a pretty decent layout without



anyone knowing how many attempts it took. Now with the charcoal layout accurately completed, all you need to do is paint perfect lines with a floppy

brush. Sound hard? That's right I am not even going to try to make it sound easy. On the better paper signs you must use oil base poster paints.

By David Messing special writer

Solomon in the Bible asked many questions in his search for wisdom and understanding. I too, ask many questions though they seem simple compared to Solomon's. For instance: What are these little things in topica pudding? What do they really put into eggrolls? Do solicitors ever read "no solicitor" signs? How do they put stripes in toothpaste?

I also wonder how the ozone layer is doing now that I stopped using aerosol cans. And where is the bathroom in those little photomat buildings? One of my sons, (when 5 years old) asked, "If orphans don't have parents, then how did they get borned?"

Well, here is an interesting question, whoever said that an artist can paint signs? Let me take this occasion to officially state that 99% percent of artists can not, do not, and would not paint a

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