

Art career keeps him busy

By CORINNE ABATT

If Bill (W.P.) Lucas has retired as he claims, he's one of the few who believe it.

Closer to the truth is that he's simply shifted gears within his chosen field, art.

Lucas was a designer in styling and graphic arts for Chrysler for 27 years. While with the company, he was portrait painter on call whenever one was needed for a special occasion or retirement celebration.

Now, with more leisure time, he is concentrating on commissioned portraits. One of his biggest projects is a series of 15 portraits for Crittenton Hospital—former board presidents, present and former staff.

His painting of K.T. Keller, former Chrysler board chairman, hangs in the Keller Building in Highland Park.

Paintings of Lucas's wife, Betty, their daughter, Jan, and her husband Jack Stonecipher, hang in the Bloomfield Hills home along with others which serve as a portfolio.

LUCAS MAJORED IN ART at Ohio Wesleyan University and later attended classes in his hometown, New York City, and at the National Art School in Washington D.C.

But, he credits the teacher he had when he came to Detroit, George Rich, with being a major influence on his work and his continuing interest in painting.

The couple treasure a Rich still life of a fish which hangs in their dining room. There are also a lot of Lucas still lifes about the house.

"I love to paint and I feel painting still lifes helps me with my portraits," Lucas said.

Although he particularly enjoys working with a live model, Lucas said that in many instances he is limited to working from photographs.

Ideally, he likes to meet his subject, do a color rough in oil, take black and white photographs and work with the subject once more before the portrait is complete.

Sometimes, as in a recent portrait, he likes the color rough well enough to take it past the basics. However, it remains a study rather than a finished portrait.

"IT'S A REAL joy to paint from life," Lucas said rather wistfully, "but, most people don't have time these days to sit for a portrait."

When he isn't painting, there's a good chance that Lucas and his wife may be either bowling or involved in a Franklin Players production.

Mrs. Lucas is a singer so musicals always tempt her. Lucas likes straight roles, especially those calling for a dialect.

"Dialects are my bag," he said recalling with a smile the reviewer who commented that he did a good impression of a New Yorker—perhaps not knowing that he is from New York.

He enjoyed his role as Prof. Von Helsing in "Count Dracula," but still considers Scrooge his best role.

It may be the years of experience in automotive styling or possibly just a fine inborn eye, but Lucas has excellent color sense. He likes to use closely related tones of one color in combination. But he still delineates skillfully, so they are never muddier or confused. The background in a portrait may be only one shade different from the dress of the subject, but the differences are subtle and well-controlled.

THE ARTIST'S FAVORITE PORTRAIT is the one he did of his son-in-law, Jack Stonecipher. Yet the one which may capture the viewer's attention for the longest period of time, is a full length portrait of a child who lives near the Lucases. The artist has caught the feeling of what it is like to be a child in a world controlled by adults.

Lucas is an energetic person and his energy seems to stem from a total enjoyment of life and being able to do something in which he finds satisfaction.

He puts it succinctly, "I just love to paint."



Behind Bill Lucas is a color rough in preparation for a portrait. (Staff photos by Stephen Cantrell)

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