

The Master at Work

by Liesel Schmidt



Belin Landry doesn't simply want his clients to have a painting. He wants them to have a masterpiece, an heirloom. A memento capturing time on canvas, but in a way that seems so real that his subjects almost appear to draw breath. Their life is reflected in the light of their eyes, so expertly caught by brush strokes and oil.

Initially beginning his foray into the art world by learning fine photography, Landry honed his skills in capturing both movement and energy, conveying a sense of vitality and grace that seemed somehow more like a painting than a photograph. And people took notice. In light of the fact that he refined his camera skills by studying the works of master painters, the comparison was apt—and, perhaps, a foreshadowing of things to come.

"I always wanted to do what I could through lighting, posing, and composition to help my subjects look their very best," says Landry of his early days as a portrait photographer. "I trained privately with different masters of photography in both classical and outdoor Portraiture, but I also studied the paintings of master artists to learn the techniques they used and began to apply those techniques to my own photography studio portraits," he recalls. "People began to comment that my portraits reminded them of paintings, and I find that interesting—like a glimpse into my future."

The time he spent behind a camera was far from lost. In fact, it would prove to be almost foundational

for the canvases he soon created and became renowned for. "Photography alone was just not enough for me, creatively," he says. "I felt the need to bring the completion of a portrait to new levels, so I began to hand oil black and white photographs." Yet the exacting artist felt that his completed pieces were missing something: "They still seemed to lack the depth I desired."

Ever the insatiable student, Landry once again delved into the classics, determined to refine his craft and learn how to capture that missing sense of depth. "I studied artists of the Renaissance and was introduced to a technique called *chiaroscuro*, which refers to a strong, self-conscious juxtaposition of light and shade to create a stunning visual effect in a work of art," Landry explains. "The technique was pioneered by Leonardo da Vinci, further developed by Caravaggio, and finally perfected by Rembrandt."

And while he appreciated the three-dimensional depth achieved by *chiaroscuro*, he believed it to be too stark. "As I continued to study, I found that a more delicate approach used by Raphael in the shadow to highlight areas of skin was exactly what I was looking to develop in my paintings. I wanted to preserve the realism of the subjects and still develop the depth that I could only achieve through the many layers of oil paint so inherent to the process of *chiaroscuro*. After several sessions; many hours; and layer upon layer of oil paint,

I was finally achieving what I set out to accomplish—a masterpiece oil painting that projected off of the canvas and maintained the realism of the subjects."

It is precisely that almost prolific ability which sets Landry apart from fellow artists in the world of portraiture. He is a visionary, a creative who finds satisfaction only when he brings his canvases to life, when the heartbeat and the soul of his subjects are communicated to the viewer. He offers no mere vanity piece, but a treasure to celebrate and pass from generation to generation, witnesses to family history and silent storytellers whose eyes dance and dazzle as they watch and wait.

Camera and canvas are under his command, paint and pallet subject to his every whim as he creates his masterpieces. While he may be self-taught, Landry wields his brushes with precision and proficiency that speaks of natural talent and passion—two qualities which cannot be taught in any classroom. He views the world through the lens, his own eyes like a filter of light as fingers grip brush and the picture begins to take shape. A master at work, released from the darkroom into marvelous light.

For more information, contact Joyce and Belin Landry at (337) 309-2099 or (337) 526-1935. Visit the artist online at www.belins.com or email mymasterpiece@belins.com or joyce@belins.com