

Portrait Artist who captures Character: Jules Sevelson

‘The human figure has always fascinated me in capturing its rhythms, shapes and colour. Although I have also enjoyed the landscape and still life in the past, the figure and portraits are my major interest now,’ Jules Sevelson says, stroking his bohemian silvery grey beard. As he smiles, his eyes connect with the people in the Victorian sitting room. He is definitely a people person, as well as an observer of human nature.

Ever since Jules Sevelson’s early school days he had a natural ability to draw leading to a career in graphic design. He studied at Michaelis School of Art, University of Cape Town, South Africa and later migrated to the USA. After two years as a draftee in the US Army preparing training aids graphics, he studied advertising design at the Art Centre College in Los Angeles later to become a graphic designer in San Francisco. Despite his work as a graphic designer, his passion for portraiture never diminished. He painted portraits of friends, was constantly sketching and kept up with life drawing, experimenting with different mediums. Even when he and his family migrated to Sydney, where he established an advertising and design studio, he continued his portraiture. He painted in the evenings at the Ku-ring-gai Art Centre, Roseville, then Waverly and Brandling Street Artists focussing on the figure and portraiture. Soon after he became deeply involved with the Portrait Artists of Australia where he was invited to exhibit with many of Australia’s most recognised artists. Jules has won a number of prizes including the Ku-ring-gai Art Society, Waverly Art Prize and Mosman Art Prize with his portraits exhibited in Parliament House in Sydney, The Hughenden Woollahra, high profile exhibitions and private collections.

Influenced, by the works of the great masters Rembrandt, El Greco, the impressionist and expressionists such as, Vincent van Gogh and more recently by Arthur Boyd, Brett Whitely, Lucian Freud, Zai Kuang, Bill Leak, Evert Ploeg; Jules Sevelson seeks to capture character and body language in his portraits. Sevelson says, ‘Capturing the soul and personality of the sitter is the greatest challenge for me. I find the infinite variety of proportions, expressions, body language endless and never dull.’

His recent paintings include prominent Australians such as singer Kate Ceberano, actor and satirist Dame Edna, singer-song writer Tory Gervay, NSW Treasurer The Right Honorable Michael Costa, children’s author Moya Simons and boxer Kostya Tszyu..

When asked what he wanted to express in his portrait of Kate Ceberano, he said that he wanted ‘to capture Kate as a singer and entertainer rather than just a portrait.’ He found the portrait of Michael Costa challenging as he sought to balance his human emotional side with his authoritative role as Treasurer. He most enjoyed the portrait of Moya Simons with her wide eyes and imagination engaging her audience of children. The stories of rainbows and characters sprouting from her curly dark hair create the whimsy that are part of her writing and her character.

Sevelson seeks to uncover the unique quality of people in his portraits. In the exquisite painting of Tory Gervay, he delicately details her favourite dress revealing her fragility, innocence, yet underlying sophistication. This is in contrast to the powerful, raw portrait of Kostya Tszyu. with his boxing glove raised and the red tones

pulsating aggression and victory. Sevelson's painting of Barry Humphreys portrays the duality of Barry Humphreys as actor and social commentator, and Dame Edna, a caricature of the house-wife and mother. Through blending of images in his painting he reveals the humour and complexity of Barry Humphreys.

Sevelson's portraits reflect his interpretation of characters with some being cheeky and satiric, others serious and reflective. Painting in oils, he reaches for depth through colour, tone, textures and expression and dimension. He admits that while he is passionate about his painting, it is hard work requiring thought, reworking, rethinking reaching for integrity and honesty. His portraits are successful in unveiling real characters on canvas.

The portraits of Barry Humphreys and Tory Gervay are on view to the public at The Hughenden Boutique Hotel, 14 Queen Street, Woollahra in Sydney.

Susanne Gervay

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