

Fine Art

Written by Deb Egenberger

Thursday, 08 July 2010 21:30 - Last Updated Thursday, 08 July 2010 21:33



At almost 94 years old, the masterpieces keep coming.

Rarely a day goes by when DeVere Appleyard goes without picking up a paint brush, a charcoal pencil or an art pen.

“I really feel better when I’m working on something,” he says.

Today’s piece may be an abstract collection of colors pulled from the depths of his imagination and dabbed here and there with a palette knife.

Or it could be a realistic oil portrait inspired by a photograph.

It might even come together as a collage that incorporates pencil drawing, clippings from magazines and paint.

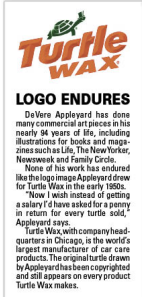
“I don’t like to repeat myself,” Appleyard says.

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That's apparent from the vast collection of his works displayed in his small Stone Hearth Estates apartment.



But he will go back and change a piece he painted years ago.

The canvas on his small kitchen table holds a vibrant colored caricature of Appleyard's late wife, Bettie.

He painted the work 35 or 40 years ago when the couple lived in suburban Chicago and Appleyard still worked as a studio artist.

When he moved to Stone Hearth a year and a half ago, it was in a frame prominently placed on a living room bookshelf.

"I was never really happy with it," Appleyard says. "It was just not right. I'm getting closer."

Appleyard, who will turn 94 later this month, grew up on a farm north of McCook. He's been painting and drawing all his life.

As a kid, he sent in a line drawing for a contest advertised in a magazine. When the judge's

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comments came back, Appleyard says he was encouraged to take the sponsoring company's art class.

With \$100 loaned to him by his aunt, he took the class and became skilled at sketching.

"I'd take my sketch pad to parties or anywhere people gathered," he says, "and I'd draw them."

Appleyard did many caricatures during his four years in the Army but he knew he wanted more out of his art.

With the G.I. Bill, which provides education benefits to veterans, Appleyard applied and was accepted to the Art Institute of Chicago.

"Finally, I felt like I was in my element," Appleyard says.

He wanted to be a commercial artist but professors directed him more toward fine arts.

After leaving the Art Institute, Appleyard had a variety of jobs including work as a caricature artist. Through that, he met a man who owned a struggling car wax company in Chicago.

Businessman Ben Hirsch was having trouble making a living selling his Plastone Auto Polish.

After a sales call near Turtle Creek at Beloit, WI, Hirsch renamed his wax and asked Appleyard to draw the product's new icon.

"I argued the point," Appleyard says. "It didn't seem to me like Turtle Wax was a good name for

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car polish.”

Appleyard has spent his life making a living with his creativity.

He says he first got his name out and his professional work known through doing caricatures.

“But I felt like I was getting burned out,” he says. “That’s when I began to really appreciate (Vincent) van Gogh and all of his turmoil. I could feel some of that doing caricatures.”

He soon realized studio work suited him a little better. It was through a studio in Chicago that he got hired to do advertisements, commissioned pieces for individuals and illustrations for a variety of books.

“The nice thing about doing work for a book or a magazine is you get a month or two to work in it,” he said.

Advertising, on the other hand, may have a couple days or a couple of hours turnaround time.

And being in a studio meant a salesman took samples of Appleyard’s work to get contracts with clients.

“It can be a hellish life,” he says. “True artists are so intense about their work and deal with heavy emotions. That can wear on you.”

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Appleyard believes the last five or six years before his retirement were his best.

“I really got into my work, I was doing well.”

At age 71, Appleyard retired from the commercial business of art.

He and Bettie kept busy but there was always time to create new works.

The couple moved from their suburban Chicago home that they shared for 30 years into

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