

Seeing the Light: A Local Artist and His Palette

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Carefully adding strokes of color to a demure young girl's portrait, artist Bob Way pauses to examine the curve of her cheek. Wielding his brush easily and precisely, he touches up a line here, removes some color there. Then he steps back from the easel, comparing the developing image with the photograph he's working from. Even at this early stage, the life-like similarity is striking; the subject's smile sweet, her eyes sparkle. It is the kind of portrait that captures something beyond just a likeness, a painting her family will cherish long after she's grown.

"As an artist, I see much that is often taken for granted by many people," says Way, who recently took up residence in Pinehurst. "Whether in the human form or in nature, variations of design, composition, color and value reflect the essence or spirit of all we see."

In one corner of his studio, Hereford cows graze contentedly in a sprawling Carolina landscape, a painting that took First Prize and the People's Choice Award from the Fine Arts Council of Moore County last year. Today, morning sunshine hanging easy on the towering pine trees outside fills the room with soft north light, washing works in progress with the glow of spring. On one of the walls hangs a tricycle – really it's just the image of a tricycle rendered on canvas - but the detail is so fine, the color so crisp, the mind has to work to recognize this as a two-dimensional object. A flash of foliage is reflected in the shiny bell mounted on the handlebars, tassels dangling lazily as if caught unexpectedly by a gust of breeze.

Someone unfamiliar with the finer points of American Art History might find this an odd subject choice for so intricate a work. Those versed in American 20th-century art will recognize this piece as an example of Photo Realism, an art movement that focused on the thorough reproduction of detail. Often subjects were chosen not for their intrinsic beauty but for the abstract sake of replicating things as they appear. Early Photo Realists studied subjects that ranged from chrome to shop window reflections to ordinary people.

Way started drawing in sixth grade, and over the years has had a varied education that included studies under Tom Blackwell, one of the first Photo Realists, though his education was primarily in Classical Realism. Way's work is certainly a form of Realism, but lacks the abstract focus of Photo Realism. When pressed to define his style, he chuckles. "I don't know that I can pinhole myself. It's just Realism." His Realism is one that encompasses landscapes, objects, like the tricycle, and portraits. Collectively, he calls his work "exercises in light".

"I have been asked many times, "What do you paint?" My answer is not "Portraits, landscapes, barns or a child's toy," but rather, light."

The artist was active duty in the United States Special Forces for 21 years, and continued to draw and paint throughout his time with the military. Stationed in Germany before the Berlin Wall fell, Way was part of a group of artists who painted a segment of that infamous landmark near Checkpoint Charlie. Eight feet either side of the Wall was considered East German territory, so in this artistic endeavor there was also an element of danger. "People were snatched by guards on the Wall," explains Way. Two men painting a white line around the wall were taken by guards when they got close to one of

the secret doors set into this concrete monolith. He has since returned to the relative calm of his studio.

Now, at home in Pinehurst, Way continues to teach art classes and private lessons in drawing and painting as he's been doing since the 1971. He works with a variety of mediums, though emphasizes the importance generally of developing drawing skills. "Drawing is the foundation of every painting," says Way. And anyone can draw if they can learn to see. "I teach people how to see," Way explains, "which is harder than it sounds." His vision is one of light and the beauty of reality. "Although it is important for me to capture a realistic likeness of my subject," says Way, "I find I interpret, reveal, and clarify the real likeness residing below the surface." Find more of Way's work www.professionalartists.com.