

Artist Sees Beauty Despite Challenges

By JACKIE PUGLISI, The Winchester Star 04/02/2016

BERRYVILLE — Visually-impaired artist Timothy Chambers enjoys capturing beauty that others don't see.

Despite hearing and vision challenges, the 52-year-old has been painting portraits professionally for 25 years. In his years of experience, Chambers said he has never met anyone who is not beautiful.

"There is beauty in everyone when you get to know them," he said.

Chambers said when he gets up in the morning and goes into his studio, he goes from thinking about everything to just thinking about painting.

"I do it because I get excited about what I see," he said.

His main medium is oil paint, but he also uses pastels.

He describes his style as impressionistic realism, meaning he paints what the eye can see in real life while also focusing on the color of a scene. Chambers was

introduced to the world of art through his father, William, who is also a professional portrait painter. Growing up in Arlington Heights, Ill., near Chicago, he recalls going into his father's home studio and drawing while he worked. Starting in 1983, at the age of 19, Chambers spent nine years studying art and working with other artists including American portrait painters Cedric Egeli, Joannette Hoffman Egeli, Richard Lack, and American Impressionist Henry Hensche. During that time, Chambers said there were moments when he felt like he was ready to start painting on his own. "My dad used to say, 'The moment you start, you are competing with me.'" After these times, Chambers said he would always decide to keep studying.

"I was always taught to keep honing my skill," he said. "Dad was always reminding me to keep working and be humble." Chambers finally started painting professionally in his late 20s. His father currently lives outside of Chicago. The two talk often about painting.

Chambers said his father is an amazing painter and guided him early on. "He blessed me with finding the best artists in the country to study with," he said.

Chambers has never let his hearing or vision impairments stop him from pursuing art.

It wasn't until Chambers was 5 years old that his parents found out he was almost deaf. It was brought to their attention by one of his kindergarten teachers. Chambers said his parents just thought he was well-behaved and quiet. Chambers uses hearing aids, which slightly improve his hearing loss from 80 percent to 70 to 60 percent. He hears words, but not consonants. Though not exactly the same, he compared hearing words to the sound of the mumbled-voice teacher in the cartoon "Peanuts." He is able to read lips, which helps him in conversations.



Figure 1 Berryville artist Timothy Chambers works on a painting in his home studio on Friday. Chambers is both hearing and visually impaired, but that doesn't stop him from painting and leading classes. SCOTT MASON/The Winchester Star



Figure 2 Timothy Chambers talks about the process of painting. The Berryville artist uses hearing aids, which slightly improve his hearing loss from 80 percent to 60 percent. Chambers said he is losing his peripheral vision. Each of his eyes only sees 15 degrees to each side. SCOTT MASON/The Winchester Star

One benefit to his hearing loss is he is able to focus on his artwork.

“I get in my own world,” he said. “It helps with creativity. I can turn off my hearing aids, and I’m in a completely quiet place with no distractions.”

When Chambers was in his 30s, he went to the eye doctor for a routine checkup. He said his doctor seemed concerned and sent him to a specialist who told him he had Retinitis Pigmentosa, a degenerative eye disease that causes severe vision impairment.

During that time, he also found out he had Usher Syndrome for most of his life, which has symptoms of hearing and vision loss. Although his hearing loss happened as a child, Chambers said he was blessed that the vision impairment was slow moving.

Today, Chambers said he is losing his peripheral vision. Each of his eyes only sees 15 degrees to each side.

“I can still see what I’m painting,” he said. Although having recent cataract surgery helped to remove his feeling of looking through a haze, he said there is no corrective surgery for his vision loss. As he gets older, his sight will continue to get worse.

However, he isn’t anywhere close to giving up painting. He is starting to paint more landscapes, especially since he sees better in bright light. “I’ve thought, ‘What happens when I can’t see color?’” he said. “I may shift to more monochromatic painting, taking more liberty to create paintings without focusing on color.”

As a way to share his love of art with others, Chambers started the Iguana Art Academy in January 2014, an online art school for junior and high school students as well as adults.

Some of the classes offered include drawing, painting, film screenwriting, video, photography and engineering.

The academy also reaches out to mission groups and orphanages worldwide to help bring art to places where a brush and paint aren’t easily accessible. Chambers said he is working to find sponsors to provide art supplies as part of the school’s outreach. In the future, Chambers wants to work with area schools to bring art into the classroom. The purpose behind starting the school was his desire to help other people.

“What I’m doing is giving the tools to express what is inside,” he said. Chambers has also taught classes in the area. Wendy Kedzierski of Berryville said her daughter, Sophia, was in one of his portrait classes at the Barns of Rose Hill when she was 14.

“He was so helpful and insightful to the students in that class,” she said. She said Chambers is a tremendously gifted artist with a gentle soul. “He’s a wonderfully patient teacher, and I just think it’s amazing that despite his many challenges that life has thrown his way, he is so optimistic, undeterred and continues to live life to the fullest.”



Figure 3 Berryville artist Timothy Chambers works in his home studio. Chambers started the Iguana Art Academy in January 2014, an online art school for junior and high school students as well as adults. Some of the classes offered include drawing, painting, film screenwriting, video, photography and engineering. SCOTT MASON/ The Winchester Star

Kedzierski also commissioned a charcoal portrait of her daughter from Chambers.

“He did a fabulous job,” she said. As another way to pass on his knowledge, Chambers has an assistant, Micalah Harris. She had never painted prior to working with him. Now, he said, she is a talented artist. Chambers lives in Berryville with his wife, Kim, to whom he has been married since 1989. They have three children: Lindsie, Drew, and Chloe.

For more information about Chambers’ art, visit **www.timothychambers.com**. Or visit **www.iguanaacademy.com** to find out more about the Iguana Art Academy.

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