

Easton Courier

Celebrating A Living Legend

By Larissa Lytwyn

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In five decades of capturing the nation's most eminent leaders in paint, portraitist Everett Raymond Kinstler has become a leader of his own craft.

Although he recently turned 80, Kinstler maintains the vigorous schedule of a man half his age. In addition to dividing his time between his Easton and Manhattan home studios, he travels extensively lecturing, teaching and painting.

Five presidents have posed for him: Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. His works of Ford and Reagan are the official White House portraits.

Kinstler will present "Sixty Years in Sixty Minutes," a slideshow retrospective at the Mark Twain Library in Redding Sept. 24 at 4 p.m.

He is the latest luminary to be featured in the library's Hermes Art Series, established by Redding philanthropists Allen and Helen Hermes. Allen Hermes, who died in 2004, was a noted sculptor. His wife, a former journalist, still works to preserve the town's culture and environment.

"We are so fortunate to have such a treasure in our midst," said Jennifer Wastrom, a member of the Hermes Art Series.

The discussion will be followed by a book signing during which Kinstler will sign copies of "The Artist's Journey through Popular Culture" and "A Brush with History."

In addition to presidents, Kinstler has also brought many well-known personalities to the canvas, including Katharine Hepburn, Peter O' Toole, Paul Newman, James Cagney, Jason Robards, Tony Bennett, Carol Burnett, Gene Hackman, Gregory Peck and John Wayne.

Author Tom Wolfe and vocalist Tony Bennett, an old classmate, are among his closest friends.

Still, Kinstler is dedicated to maintaining a down-to-earth lifestyle. In addition to his wife, Peggy, he has his three golden Labrador retrievers: Norman, Jack and Wyatt to keep him busy.

A native of Manhattan, Kinstler's only extended education was at New York's Music and Art High School and later the High School of Industrial Arts. At 16, he left to study at the prestigious Art Students League and begin his professional career inking comic books.

"Unlike his illustrious predecessors, Kinstler did not study in Europe," said Andrew Phelan, director of the University of Oklahoma's School of Art. "His education was knitted together in a personal way, and his career has evolved in the same idiosyncratic fashion."

Kinstler attributed much of his artistic success to his parents.

"I was fortunate to have the support of my family, particularly my father," he said.

One of his early portraits was of James Montgomery Flagg in 1956. Flagg, best known for his role as Uncle Sam in the World War II recruiting poster, "I Want You for the U.S. Army," was one of Kinstler's earliest mentors through the league. Kinstler also studied with the eminent painter Frank Vincent

DuMond.

"I was lucky to be able to do what I have," he said. His favorite subjects included Cagney and Hepburn.

Cagney was "terribly genial," Kinstler said. Hepburn was as imperious as her reputation.

Both actors served as inspiration for lithograph portraits Kinstler sold to benefit the then financially burdened Players Club of New York City.

Founded in 1888 by actor Edwin Booth (brother of President Abraham Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth), the Players Club was established to provide a place for intellectual and artistic discourse.

"Each lithograph was signed by the subject," Kinstler said. "When we brought the lithographs to Hepburn, she was appalled we expected her to use a red pen to sign her name."

When Kinstler asked her why, Hepburn replied, "Well, if I sign in red no one will be able to see the Kinstler name."

Kinstler had warm words for virtually all of his hundreds of subjects. These have included authors Elie Wiesel and Theodore Geisel (Dr. Seuss) and playwrights Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, in addition to presidents and actors.

Kinstler has also done portraits of several Miss America winners, including Vanessa Williams, and First Ladies Betty Ford and Lady Bird Johnson.

More recently, he has done portraits of Donald Trump and currently is painting the portrait of former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Kinstler described Giuliani as "incredibly warm and gregarious." Next up is a portrait of former presidential candidate, U.S. Sen. Robert Dole.

Kinstler first photographs his subjects then invites them to return to his studio for subsequent painting sessions. Although Kinstler has frequently done portraits within hours-long demonstrations, it typically takes weeks for a portrait to be completed, he said.