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SOULFUL PORTRAITS

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By Richard Halstead

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The radiologist, Dr. Chad Goodman, said he learned of the policy in April 2010 when a stroke patient he expected to be

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MARIN NEWS

Novato's Culver lets her imagination capture a person's essence in her whimsical portraits



Photos provided by Jill Culver

Novato artist Jill Culver (bottom) paints whimsical, surrealistic likenesses of people and animals that she calls 'soul portraits,' depicting her subjects based on imagery she intuits about them.



LJ photo/Robert Tong

SOULFUL ARTIST

By Paul Liberatore

Marin Independent Journal

JILL CULVER CONSIDERS herself a nonsense person. "I come from Michigan," she said. "I'm really grounded. I'm not super woo-woo."

That's what makes her "soul portraits" so mysterious to her and to the clients she paints in oils, filling her canvases with surreal images, "intuitive hits" about them and their lives that come to her through meditation.

"I can't explain it," she said one afternoon in her Novato studio (

Provided by Jill Culver

Artist Jill Culver juxtaposed a rescued dog named Tulip beside Life Savers candy.

as an engineer, he laid eyes on his soul portrait for the first time.

culver.com). "The imagery has nothing to do with what I know about them, and I prefer not to know much. I can guarantee clients two things: That they won't get more than they can handle, and it won't be what they expect."

Doug Peck, a 64-year-old retired corporate executive who's trained

I have days when I look at my paintings and I'm amazed at what comes through. I don't now how it happens."

Jill Culver, NOVATO PAINTER

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PORTRAITS: Capturing a person's essence

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"It was startling," he recalled. "It set me back on my heels for a minute."

Beck's portrait included an apple with a bite out of it hanging by a wire from a picture frame.

"I'm an engineer, a mind kind of guy. The apple could be about Newton and science," he said. "From the bite out of the apple, you can make a reference to Eden. I have a degree in art history, and I'm creative, so the picture frame could be a reference to art. There's an eccentricity to it. It's unusual, and I'm frequently coming from a different place than other people."

Peck, who now works as an executive coach, jokingly titled his portrait "Sex and Engineering" and hung it proudly over the fireplace in his Terra Linda home.

"It's so rare that we get to see what we look like to others in the world," he said. "It takes you to a much deeper place about questions like, Who am I? How am I seen? What's it like to be me? It deepens when you contemplate it. It's a delightful introspective journey."

Culver, who's 54, has no formal art training. And she never imagined herself as an artist before she was laid off from her job as facilities manager for a Brisbane tech company in 2001.

"When I got laid off, my mom also died, so it was an intense time," she remembered. "I didn't know what to do with myself. I knew I couldn't go back to my old career. I was burned out. But there was this little voice that said to paint. I had been in corporate America, and before I was laid off, I'd never painted a canvas. But when I started to paint, it was such an intense experience. I have days when I look at my paintings and I'm amazed at what comes



Paintings by Jill Culver

We & We: 'Our painting reminds us of our intimate partnership as a couple and our connection to the grander global WE of humanity. It represents who we are together at our best, and reminds us how much joy and love we have for each other.'



Choosing Joy: 'My Soul Portrait is a vibrant reminder of my choice to see things and situations in their best light. It acknowledges the decision I've made to lead with love and inspires me to continue to make that my focus. The joyful nature of the portrait confirms that I am on the right path.'

through. I don't now how it happens."

At first, Culver began painting people and animals from her imagination. After four months, she decided to take a chance at painting portraits of real people.

"I got the feeling that if people came and sat for me I would get intuitive information about them," she recalled. "Quite frankly, I thought it was crazy, that it was nuts, and I didn't want to do it. I thought, 'Who do I think I am?' I worried that no one would take me seriously,

that it would damage my credibility. But the feeling wouldn't go away. I thought, 'If I can do this, it's a gift, and I should at least give it a try.'

Her first paying client was a woman she knew who had the ability to communicate with animals.

"She was dialed into other realms," Culver said. "If it was going to work, I thought, it would work with her. I did a very bizarre painting of her. When she saw it, she said it validated everything she knew about herself. It was



IJ photos/Robert Tong

Novato artist Jill Culver in her Novato studio paints 'soul portraits' of clients, depicting them based on the surreal intuitive images she receives telepathically.



Sensuality and Enlightenment, Sex and Engineering: 'This portrait brought me home to what I've been about all my life: integrating the experiential power of my right brain with the intellectual knowing of my left. Jill's intuition about my experience of the world and my purpose in it was ahead of my own, and she has captured it with a clarity that is beyond language.'

fascinating."

After that, she's had a steady stream of clients who come to her through word of mouth. When they arrive at her studio, she has them sit on a hand-carved throne that she bought in a San Rafael antique shop.

"It has a red velvet seat and pillows, and you can't help feel special when you sit in it," she said. "It adds to the experience."

Once seated, they're

removed so I don't judge or censor what comes in any way. I get out of the way. And then I ask for the image for the client's highest good, for their healing, for something that will benefit them. Other than the face, I'm pretty much making up everything else. It's all out of my head."

In one portrait, a bald woman has a clown jumping out of her head. She painted a former priest with a little man whispering in his ear. A portrait of a dog named Tulip, who had been rescued from a shelter, has a Life Savers candy visible in the background.

A soul portrait usually takes about a month. When it's done, Culver calls her client in for its unveiling.

"That's my favorite part," she said. "I have them close their eyes while I leave the room. I let them have their first moments with the painting alone. There's usually a moment to get over the shock factor. But everybody has resonated with the images they've received."

asked to turn their faces until, in Culver's words, "a pose jumps out."

There's no conversation about who the people are in their lives, or what will go into the portrait, Culver said.

After that initial sitting, she works from photographs, without the client in the studio, painting the face first.

"Then I do a meditation process," she explained. "I ask for my ego to be

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