

ARTIST PROFILE:

BARBARA HARTIGAN

Based in Castleconnell, Barbara Hartigan has mastered watercolours, monochrome and pastel, landscapes, figurative, still life and portraiture. In December she launched her first book, "Putting Names on Faces: Confessions of a Portrait Painting Stalker," a series of signed portraits of famous people, ranging from Gay Byrne and John B. Keane to Bill Clinton and Willie Nelson. We spoke to Barbara about life as an artist, experimenting with styles and chasing autographs.

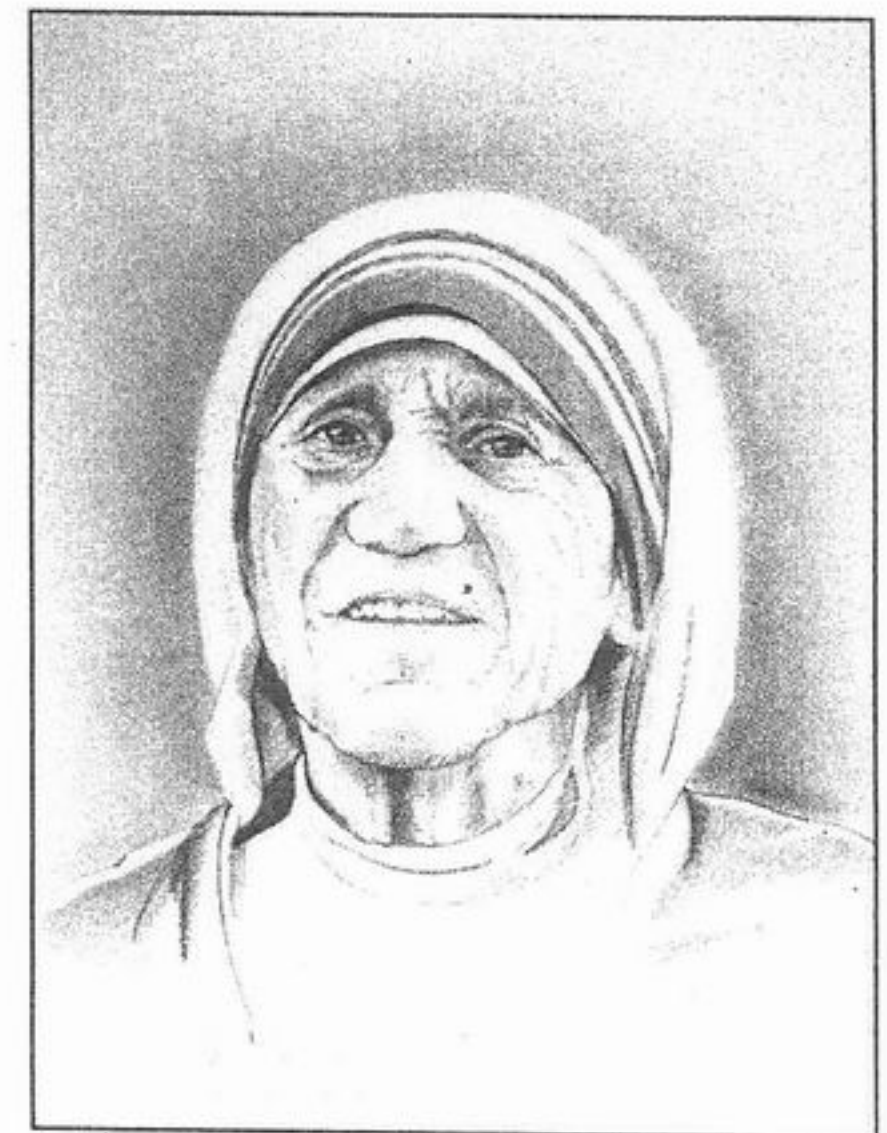
Barbara's interest in art began at a very young age: "As an only child, you have to find ways to amuse yourself on a daily basis. I loved to draw, paint and create things. I have never actually bought Christmas card, instead I always made them, and now that I am 70, nothing has changed!" Creativity is in her genes. "My mother was very artistic and she had secured a place in the Royal Academy in London, but due to family circumstances, she was unable to take up the position. My Mum's interest in the arts always encouraged me."


Barbara says her artistic style is always evolving. "I enjoy experimenting and I am constantly trying out different mediums and techniques. I remember when I attended the Limerick School of Art and Design in Mulgrave Street many, many years ago, they always said "You should develop a style and stick to it." I personally don't agree with that, I think it's nice to experiment and to branch out. Some things work, some things don't, but everything is a learning experience. I'm very much influenced by my surroundings and it's amazing how simple things can spark off ideas. I think to myself 'how can I interpret that?' – that to me is truly being creative." She has even created her own oil technique, CreArtigan, which involves building up many transparent layers of colour and removing them.

"It's something that I absolutely love doing. It's a very exciting technique that creates incredible movement and looseness to the artwork. I like something that captures the moment, that's why this style works for me."

The highlight of Barbara's career has been the publication of her book, Putting Names on Faces. The book is a collection of portraits that she has painted over 35 years. She began writing the memoirs with well known Limerick journalist, Dermot Walsh. However, sadly Dermot passed away and then due to the recession a book publishing deal fell through, leaving her without much hope for the book to be completed. Little did she know that on the lead up to her 70th birthday she was to be given a great surprise: Barbara's four children worked behind the scenes and completed the book. Using their own skills from photography to graphic design, they found a self-publishing company in America who facilitated this dream to become a reality. With such a diverse range of faces, how does she choose who to paint? "People I admire, people with interesting faces. People who might be coming to Ireland, that I feel that I could make a contact with them, but mainly I'm influenced by people I admire and people who have given me pleasure and joy over the years. I keep an eye out on who is performing locally or nationally and who would be accessible to me – sometimes I write to them, and I ask their permission, perhaps they have a particular photograph they like and sometimes they supply the images for me.

When all is done, I generally go to the concert or to the venue and I send the portrait back with a note requesting them to sign it and if they don't like it, then they can just tear it up.





Sometimes the security is the biggest issue, particularly the Americans as their security can be very tight, but it's always worth a shot! It doesn't cost them anything and most people are flattered that you've taken the trouble to do something. I have loads of great adventures, all of which feature in the book. Some of the stories are unbelievable, you couldn't make them up!" Barbara speaks frankly of the struggles artists face: "It's not easy making a living as an artist, there are a lot of hurdles one has to overcome and it can be very, very soul-destroying. Even when you get rejected from an exhibition sometimes it's hard to pick yourself up, but if you believe in yourself and if you keep going then that's what it takes. It doesn't come easily, it's not a rite of passage that you will succeed, it's hard work and you need to take on board criticism, listen to the public, listen to what they like, look at what you like yourself and be strong enough to stick with your own ideas." And her advice to aspiring artists? "One of the things I would advise them is to do is to learn a little bit about how to represent themselves, as well as to develop their own thoughts, initiatives and to learn the techniques properly. I would say be professional; get a business card and present your work properly."

Barbara Hartigan's book, "Putting Names on Faces: Confessions of a Portrait Painting Stalker" is available now from O'Mahoneys bookstores and online at Amazon.com

Article by: Laura Duhan