

What are friends for?

Guennadi Kalinine is drawing portraits of people he knows



REGINA HAGGO
OPINION

“People have always been the most interesting subject for an artist,” says Guennadi Kalinine. “I don’t know any artist who never tried to paint or draw the human face.”

Kalinine recently embarked on drawing portraits of people he knows in pencil, pen and ink on paper. Many of them, like him, live and work in Dundas.

“With the portraits, I say thank you to people for being with me: my friends, teachers, colleagues.”

A painter, printmaker, art teacher, restorer of paintings and religious icons, he also builds and decorates ukuleles and other stringed instruments, adorning them with wood carvings. As a painter, he tackles the human figure, still life and landscape. And as someone who cares passionately about horses, he has added them to his repertoire.

Portraiture is another one of his strengths. A portrait is first and foremost about reproducing a likeness, whether lifelike or idealized. Kalinine has painted portraits before. This new series displays his drawing skills.

“It is always a big challenge for me,” he tells me. “Painting or drawing a portrait is not an easy process.”

Because it’s difficult for people to be still for several hours, Kalinine opts to work from photographs.

He says drawing from a photograph is not about merely copying what’s there. For one thing, the materials and method are quite different.

“It is also a chance to get to know the person better. It allows me to discover some features and personality which I could not see before.”

Kalinine’s format for his portraits is economical: a head and neck pose with a bit of clothing at the base of the neck. He captures Jennifer Wilson laughing, a state typical of the vivacious manager at McMaster Gallery and Custom Framing. The turn of her head conveys animation and energy.

Drawing demands repeated effort and discipline. It involves translating volume into line. Kalinine likes drawing, he says, because it “shows real skills of an artist, has its own aesthetic values and allows the



Guennadi Kalinine, “Self-Portrait,” mixed media on paper.

quick formulation of a visual idea.”

He uses short thin lines running in many directions to build up Wilson’s cheeks and neck. The massing of these lines creates a contrast with the lighter upper parts of the face. Darker areas recede, lighter ones leap out. Different lines — darker, denser and curlier — define the hair. And Kalinine pays attention to small details, like Wilson’s earring and the button in her collar.

In a portrait of Laura Brandreth, curator and gallery administrator at Dundas’s Carnegie Gallery, Kalinine gives Brandreth a frontal pose and a big smile as she gazes confidently at the viewer.

A variety of straight black and white lines bulk out the hair. These contrast with the softer, paler lines on her face, some of which are cross-hatched around the cheeks.

“His line work is extraordinary,” Brandreth says. “I normally don’t like my picture taken, but I felt extremely flattered by his rendition.”

Kalinine gave a similar head and neck pose to his portrait of Stephen Landers, the owner of McMaster Gallery and Custom Framing. Landers looks directly at the viewer.

Kalinine adds a tiny white highlight in the iris of each eye that anticipates a smile about to break



Guennadi Kalinine, “Portrait of Jennifer Wilson,” mixed media on paper.

out.

“I also did a number of self-portraits just because I am the most reliable and easily accessible model,” Kalinine says with a laugh.

Self-portraits have traditionally been about creating a persona. In one selfie, Kalinine shows himself



Guennadi Kalinine, “Portrait of Stephen Landers,” mixed media on paper.



Guennadi Kalinine, “Portrait of Laura Brandreth,” mixed media on paper.

wearing a beret and steampunk goggles that he — not surprisingly — made himself. The goggles are tools of his trade. They protect his eyes when he’s sanding wood or restoring artwork.

“But they look very stylish and people like them, especially kids,” he says.

The beret keeps him warm when he’s in his basement studio teaching online. Not only that — he definitely looks more artistic in a beret.

Kalinine says he’d rather draw portraits than paint them. “It takes less time and I have the chance to make more portraits. I already have about 150 portraits and I plan to make many more.”

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