

Purrr-fect Pet Portraits

by Nina McDonald

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The vibrant colors, bold brush strokes, and perfectly captured expressions jump off the canvas. You can almost hear the meowing or barking and see the tails wagging. For an animal lover, owning one of Marna Schindler's pet portraits is almost as good as having the four-footed model.

"I just couldn't get away from her style; it's so energetic," said Susan Farrell, president and CEO of USO San Diego and former newscaster. Farrell walked around with Schindler's card in her pocket for weeks, determined to order one her paintings after seeing her display in Coronado's Art in the Park. "My brother and sister-in-law own two Siberian Huskies. I wanted to get their portraits done for them for Christmas. She was really able to capture the dogs' personalities and spirit. We even had greeting cards printed up with the dogs' pictures," added Farrell. "I now have a list of things that I want to have Marna paint. I love [her style.]"

Schindler's happy depictions of man's best friends are on display at Crown Veterinary hospital where Dr. Peter Speir has filled the walls of his waiting room with Schindler's creations. Discovering Schindler during last year's San Diego Art Walk, Speir couldn't resist the paintings and offered to hang them in his office so she could gain some more exposure. "I am not an art connoisseur, but personally I think they are great. I feel like her paintings really capture the vivaciousness of these animals. There is a combination of emotional expressionism and realism that makes them look like they are almost alive."

A University High School student and San Diego State University graduate, Schindler is a longtime graphic artist. While at SDSU, she served as the Aztec's (SDSU's student paper) only editorial illustrator. In 1993-94, she won two California Intercollegiate Press Association Awards for Magazine/Art Graphic and Editorial Cartoon. Her knack for drawing whimsical characters blossomed while working for six years at local software company, Lightspan (now Plato Learning, Inc.). In one of her last assignments, Schindler developed several cartoon characters the company used in its educational software.

Feeling that her creative satisfaction still wasn't being fulfilled, Schindler yearned to follow her dream of a career in fine art. Taking a painting class at Miramar College was the first step on her journey. "I was in tears from happiness at the experience," said Schindler. "I thought, how am I going to do this [make a living as an artist]? I had gone to [San Diego] Art Walk for so many years and wanted have my own booth, so I finally went for it. You know how the universe just turns sometimes and everything falls together?"

In 2005, with the help of some friends, Schindler finally launched her career at Art Walk. Schindler's collection included a variety of topics, including still-lives, landscapes, and all types of whimsical animal figures. However, one painting in particular stopped the crowds in their tracks. "Happy Hank," a 24" x 24" Van Gogh-like portrait of a

grinning yellow Labrador, drew raves from the crowd. “It got such a reaction. I still get calls from people who saw me that year at Art Walk. The impact is still reverberating.”

She knew she had struck a chord with the public and began taking commissions from passionate pet owners who wanted to immortalize their animals. The rest, as they say, is history. In April this year, Schindler was a featured artist at the San Diego Art Walk, one of 12 selected as stars of the show. She was the featured artist for the 2007 Spring Festival of the Arts in Tempe, Ariz. Schindler’s “Funky Chicken” portrait was the logo that decorated the Festival’s banners and flyers. She is also a member of Coronado’s Art in the Park.

Working primarily from photographs of her subjects, Schindler describes her style as abstract impressionism. “I use an intuitive approach. It’s almost as if I stop seeing in the traditional way. I’m not out to compete with the “old masters.” If this is what I have to offer and people like it, why not keep painting like a kid?” she said with a laugh. “It’s art, but it’s fun.”

Schindler cites her inspirations as Wayne Thiebaud, Mark Rothko, and, of course, Van Gogh. “Thiebaud has a real marriage of painterly style and pop art. He brings inanimate objects to life. I also like that whole fauve period in the early twentieth century. I’m influenced by the art that I feel. I feel the color wash over me. It makes me happy. This is art that you feel on a more visceral level; you feel it in your gut. It’s realism, but it’s pushed to the limit.”

“What started as a side thing has now become my main source of income. I have done over 65 commissions without even trying. I am making my expenses by doing my art full time. I feel very fortunate.”

Schindler paints in both water-based oils and acrylics. A 12” by 12” animal portrait (Schindler will do any animal, not just dogs) starts at \$395 and takes two to three months to complete due to her current volume of work.

“I’m already getting bookings for Christmas presents,” she explains. She also feels that it is important that her art is affordable and accessible to the average citizen and understands that her clients need to be satisfied with their commission. “It’s neat to work with people who aren’t super rich; to give them an opportunity to own a piece of original art. With a pet, you have more liberties when you paint them, I think. They are such a source of joy to us. And, I know what it’s like to come home with something you don’t end up liking, so I offer a money-back guarantee, but so far I haven’t gotten any complaints.”

Farrell adds, “It’s so great that we can take advantage of local artists and make them part of our collections. You don’t have to spend \$10 million on a Van Gogh, we have such a vibrant art community here in San Diego.” However, Farrell believes Schindler may one day become so well known, she too may not be affordable eventually. “She is so talented.

I better get my orders in now with Marna, before she really becomes famous,” Farrell added.

Schindler’s paintings will be on display during Coronado’s Art in the Park on September 30. To commission a portrait or order a giclee reprint of one of Schindler’s paintings, visit www.doggonitart.com or www.marnaschindler.com or call the artist at 619-838-0012. Schindler also supports various charitable causes and makes her paintings available for auction.