

Portrait artists prepare for 'Face Off'

Box Factory event offers rare insight into the artistic process

By **JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO**
Sight & Sound Editor

ST. JOSEPH — Bob Williams' artistic career has often included an audience.

Unlike many artists who choose to work in solitude in their studio, carefully crafting pieces, Williams has a long history of creating portraits in a public setting, whether setting up a booth at firefighter's carnivals when he was starting out, to partnering in an anti-bullying program to make charcoal sketches of students in area schools, to passing the time as a frequent participant in the Krasl Art Fair on the Bluff.

"I remember one time I was doing a portrait at the Krasl, and there was a lady behind me who said, 'I don't know how he's doing this; that little girl's not sitting still at all,'" Williams says. "Another guy, who had seen me at Leeper Park in South Bend happened to be there and he said, 'If you think that's bad, I saw him do this in South Bend where the girl was standing on her head half the time!'"

Williams hopes the models he's gathered for The Second Great Box Factory Face Off, which takes place Saturday at the Box Factory for the Arts, will be a little better behaved. The event, which debuted at the venue in 2014, will feature some of the area's best-known portrait artists drawing and painting from a live model while visitors are encouraged to enjoy a beer or a glass of wine, watch the process and even bid on completed pieces.

"It's interesting because it's people looking at the same thing and not seeing the same thing," says artist Elaine Harju, who also is participating in the event. "That is what's fun for the viewer, whether it's 'Are they looking at the same thing I am?' or 'I didn't notice that.' ... That's what I do to poor Bob. I'll stand behind him and look at the model and say to him, 'The nose is too big.'"

In addition to Williams and Harju, artists scheduled to participate are Joe Suk-up, Matt Payovich, Nathan Margoni, Jessabelle O'Neal, Tom Fehlner, Jon Rosengren, Angie Mamouzellos, Emily Rhoads, Alexandria Foster and Janet Frakes. About three artists will gather



Photo provided / Box Factory for the Arts

Artists Chantelle Allen, from left, Matt Payovich and Bob Williams, participate in The Great Box Factory Face Off in 2014. Saturday, Payovich, Williams and about 12 other area artists will participate in The Second Great Box Factory Face Off at the Box Factory for the Arts. The event offers the public a rare behind-the-scenes glimpse as a who's who of local artists create live model portraits within a three-hour window.

around a live model working in an array of mediums, including oil painting, pastels, charcoal, watercolors and more.

While the event is free, donations raised will support two matching grants awarded to the Box Factory — The Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs \$18,000 grant for operations (new events, programming, concerts, etc.) and The Frederick S. Upton Foundation's \$4,000 grant for a classroom upgrade. So every dollar donated is like giving \$2.

"It's a cheap date," Harju adds.

While helping raise funds for the venue is one of the evening's goals, Williams says he originally came up with the idea to attract other Berrien Artist Guild Members to spend more time at the Box Factory.

"The Berrien Artists Guild used to have meetings a couple times a month," Williams says. "Once we built the Box Factory it was primarily about art shows and art show openings and studio artists but people who are members, particularly older members, we didn't see them as much. Kristin (Hosbein) and I started talking about that fact, and I felt kind of

IF YOU GO

What: The Second Great Box Factory Face Off

When: 6:30-9:30 p.m. Saturday

Where: Box Factory for the Arts, 1101 Broad St., St. Joseph

How much: Free, but donations will be accepted

Contact: 983-3688 or www.boxfactoryforthearts.org

guilty that we didn't have as many events for our members."

Williams, who belongs to the Portrait Society of America, occasionally attending their national convention, says one of his favorite events was the Face Off.

"They have 15 of the world's best artists and they have models and they all paint those models at the same time," he says. "The rest of the membership stands around and watches. It's a fabulous event for me because I'm getting to watch the best in the world. These are artists you

read about and hear about and now you get to see them work."

Williams took that same approach in creating the Box Factory event, although he concedes that he and his fellow artists may not be as celebrated.

"Most people in St. Joe haven't even heard of us," Williams says laughing, prompting Harju's rebuttal.

"I want to say something about Bob," she says. "When Bob does his portraits, especially his pastels, he can see color in a way that other people can't. I know I can't see color the way he does."

And that's sort of the point of an event like this, offering insight into the artistic process.

"When we did it the first time, to tell you the truth, I thought we would get some members and some artists but I didn't think anyone else was going to show up," says Williams, who also happens to be the namesake of the Robert K. Williams Gallery at the Box Factory. "I was surprised with the crowd we had, and I hope we have more this time."

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