



## DAVID NEWMAN-WHITE

A master of pastel describes his passion for capturing the 'walking masterpiece' that is the older face

David Newman-White is a painter of portraits, a master of pastel, and a teacher and facilitator of the Norman Lindsay Gallery's annual life drawing workshops. He presently teaches at Nepean Art and Design Centre and holds drawing demonstrations and workshops in figure drawing, portraits and landscape around the country, including at Rosby Vineyard in Mudgee.

Born in Nowra, New South Wales, David's interests always lay in art. His earliest portrait was of a classmate, Jeffrey Streeter, painted in 1962 at just 10 years of age—oil on linen, Gauguin yellows for the skin, David recalls.

Teaching is his forte, indeed it is his passion, and David is acknowledged as an exceptional teacher, respected by his peers, with a dedicated following of students and admirers. Teaching in the TAFE system has occupied most of David's working life with long periods spent at Western Sydney Institute, Penrith & Kingswood TAFE and Meadowbank &

Nepean Art and Design Centre, Kingswood, and currently, Nepean Art & Design Centre.

After completing diplomas at Alexander Mackie and Sydney Teachers College he went on to an MA Honours degree at the University of Western Sydney. Mentors have included many of the best known in Australian art, among them Kevin Connor, Stan De Telliga, Alex Tromp, Brian Dunlop, Sydney Ball and Rodney Millgate. Influences over the past few decades have included Andrew Wyeth, Lucien Freud, Francis Bacon, Frank Auerbach, Chuck Close and Jenny Saville, while from the historical past David acknowledges the great Baroque influences of Vermeer, Hals, Caravaggio, Velasquez and Zurbaran.

Participation in exhibitions began early with the first, The Art School, at Sydney Opera House in 1975, then on to Sydney's Hogarth and Coventry Galleries and later to many galleries around the country. In 2004 David exhibited at Agora Gallery in Manhattan, New York, and in 2012, at Swiss Art Space in Lausanne, Switzerland. Among his early subjects were Alma Timms, Australian historian, in 1974, and

Jack Munday of the Builders Labourers Federation, famous for the Green Bans, in 1975.

David acknowledges that for the portraitist life is never smooth. The pay is poor and erratic and the work is fraught with emotion—not only for the artist but also in relation to the temperament and needs of the sitter and the commissioner of the portrait. Of course this has been the lament of artists over the centuries.

'For the love of the human form' is the motto which inspires him. 'It is the very shape of the human form, body and head, which inspires me. A childhood dream I had was altering the facial features of people as if their skin was plasticine, contorting their faces with my fingers.'

David's portraits feature many well known identities, artists and friends, and most often men. Men are more likely than women to accept with fortitude the scars of experience and the marks which evidence the passing of the years.

'Personally I prefer to portray the downtrodden rather than the well off, the old rather than the young,' he admits. 'And although I am an opportunist, when I see an interesting head I nevertheless approach my potential subject with caution. I have been known to discretely stalk a prospective subject, waiting for an opening to ask if they would allow me to paint or draw them.'

### The quintessential Australian male

Max (below) was such a subject, first observed walking along the road from his house in Inch Street to the shops in Main Street, Lithgow. 'I saw a larger than life character, eighty-something, a hat like none I had ever seen before. For me, he was the quintessential Australian male and I wanted to draw that character. One day when I was walking through Marjorie Jackson Plaza I saw him sitting alone on a bench. This was my big chance. I introduced myself and politely asked if he would allow me to use him as a subject for my drawings. 'If it will keep you off the streets then OK!' he said. Wow, I thought, I've done it!'





Left: Sydney artist **Stephen Hall** was very generous with his time allowing me to do preliminary drawings and to take many photographs to research his face. Altogether I produced five paintings and one major drawing of Stephen over a period of about twelve months. The portrait pictured is now in Melbourne, another is in Perth, and the drawing was purchased online by a collector from Raleigh, North Carolina, USA.

My palette for Stephen was burnt sienna, burnt umber, alizarin crimson, Naples yellow, yellow ochre, cadmium red, cadmium orange, cadmium yellow, purple lake, ultramarine blue and titanium white for softer shadowing in the eyeballs, warm and cool violets elsewhere.

Right:  
*Looking like a criminal?*  
In 1954 Graham Sutherland had famously painted a portrait of Winston Churchill which did not survive once it reached the hands of Lady Churchill. The trust between the artist and sitter had clearly reached rock bottom and Lady Churchill put a match to the portrait.

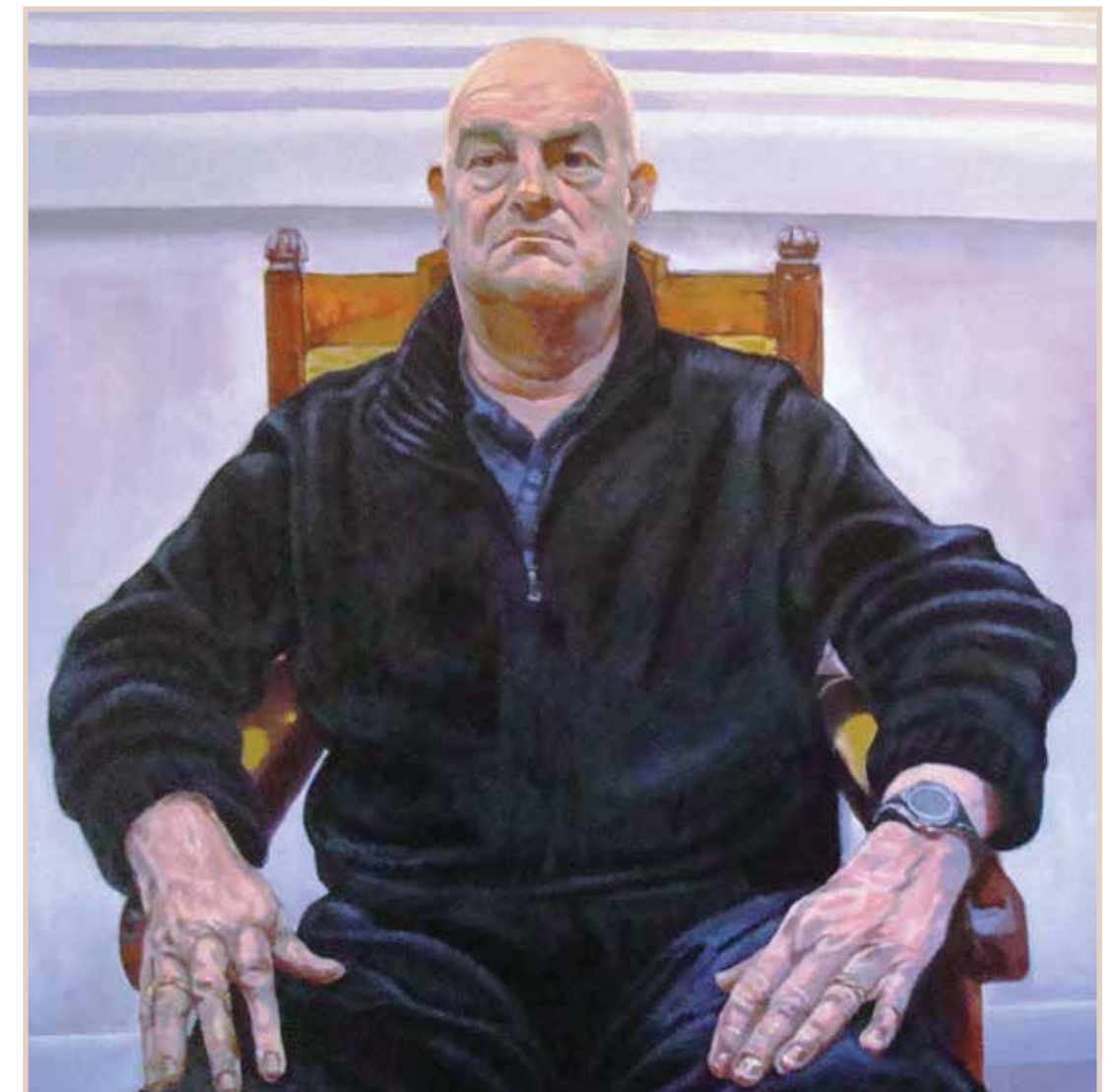
Last year I painted a portrait of another **Graham** which fortunately still survives, although I received this comment from his wife on seeing an image via email: 'You've made my husband look like a criminal!'

*David and his wife Lesley presently live in the historic coalmining town of Lithgow on the Blue Mountains. They moved there in 2004 with the objective of establishing a multifaceted arts business providing services for artists within the local community and this they did for almost three years. The business included art tuition, day and evening classes for adults and weekend classes for children, an artist supply shop and an exhibition venue for solo and group exhibitions, art workshops and website exposure.*

*David has a keen interest in the historical architecture of the Greater City of Lithgow which includes Old Bowenfels, Historic Hartley, Lithgow Valley, Wallerawang and Portland with some buildings dating back to the early 1820s. Favourites are Collit's Inn at Hartley 1823, "Cooerwull" 1824, Andrew Brown's Flour Mill 1837, "The Hermitage" 1829, "Esk Bank House" 1842 and many Inns along the Old Bathurst Road from Hartley to Lithgow, some of which date back to the early 1830s.*

*This is an area which has seen a well-off population invest in homes of substance, such as the sixth prime minister of Australia Sir Joseph Cook who changed his fortunes by coming to Australia and in particular those of Lithgow in 1886 where he worked in the mines, built a meagre slab hut in Macauley Street, became secretary of the Vale of Clwydd branch of the Miners Union, then representative on the Board of the Union and was later to make his mark representing Lithgow in State Parliament. He built a large house in Lithgow for his wife and nine children and his political career culminated in his election as Prime Minister of Australia on June 24th, 1913.*

*Other houses of interest along the Great Western Highway often obscured by mounds of earth or trees are Emoh Ruo (1830s), Ben Avon (1845), Somerset House (late 1830s), Tricks Umera (1840), Ferntree (1856), Sweet Briar (1840s), The Donnybrook/Royal Hotel (1830s), Methven on the old highway (1870) and Fairview (1880s). In Lithgow's centre there is Gels House, otherwise known as St. Helens (1878) and many more that predate the 1890s including most of the old pubs.*



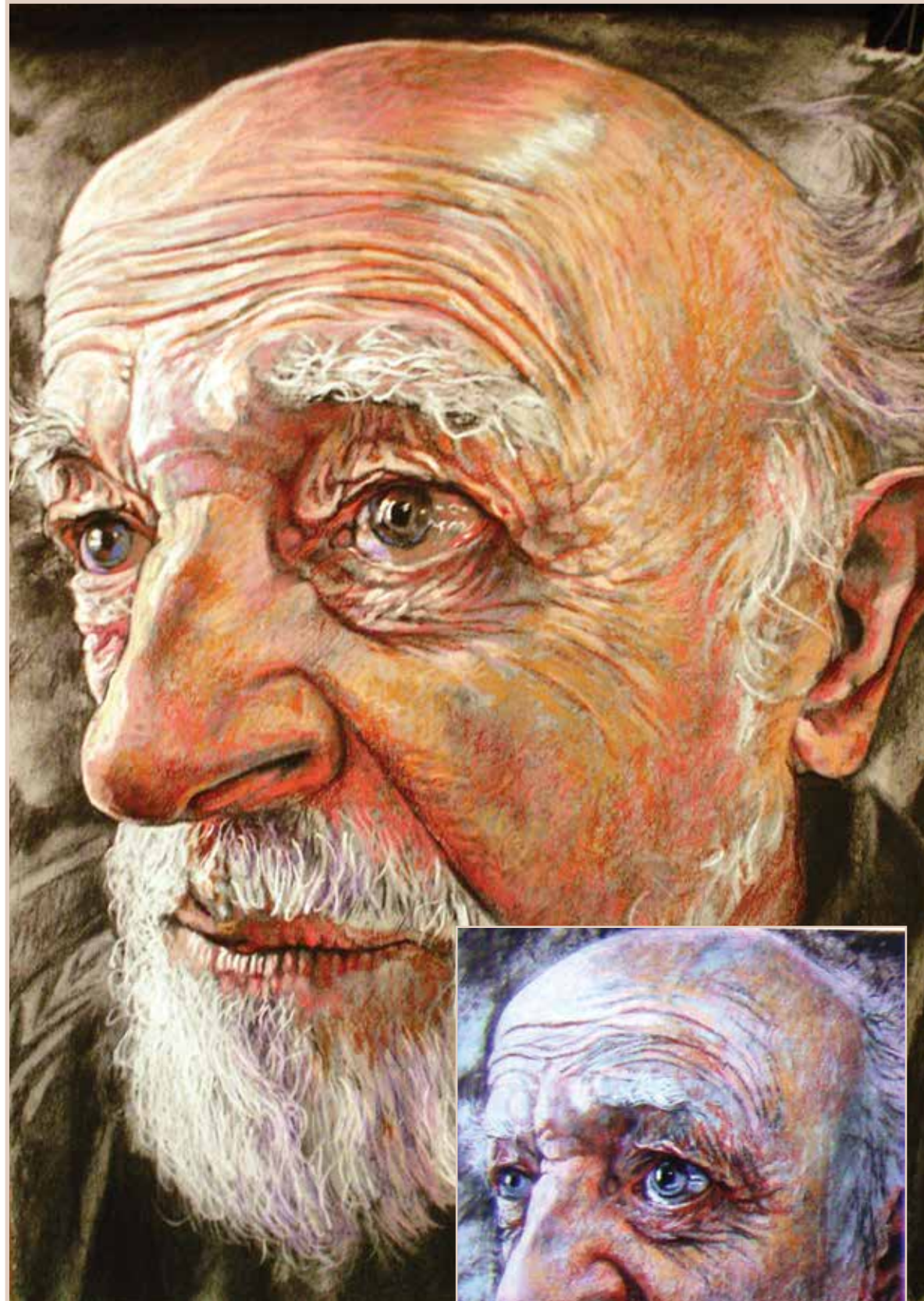
From previous page:

She was not alone. One of my female students at first sight of this image also said, 'He looks like a criminal!' What do we see when we think of someone as a criminal? I decided to make another attempt, this time producing a triple portrait with the sitter in prayerful poses, but I was totally floored yet again when another female student told me that he looked like a criminal! My personal objective is to portray interesting and engaging people as I see them, not to turn innocent people into criminals.

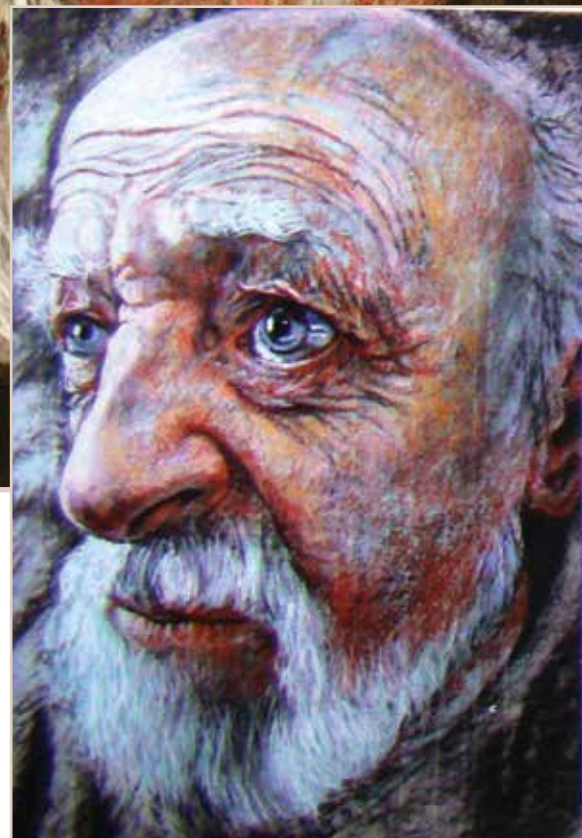
Right:

My drawing titled **Jerome** is of Mt. Irvine artist Ray Harrington. In real life Ray is the complete opposite of my portrayal. I worked extremely hard to achieve this image and I am very pleased with the outcome. Whenever I am creating a study of a balding man I tend to reflect on the Albrecht Durer painting of *The Four Apostles* (1526).

The drawing technique used here is a mixed media of willow charcoal and wash of Paynes grey watercolour overlaid with Sennelier oil pastel on Stonehenge paper 300 gsm. This work has been purchased through the Saatchi online gallery by a resident of Calgary, Canada.



*'The face is the mirror of the mind, and eyes without speaking confess the secrets of the heart.'*  
(St. Jerome)



*Portraying older people is a pleasurable pastime. I love Rembrandt's portraits of his elderly relatives and his self portraits, particularly the ageing Rembrandt. I enjoy the way he paints flesh with thick daubs of paint giving a crusty and tactile surface. **Portrait of the painter as an old man** (1669) and **Tobit and Anna** (1626) are works by Rembrandt which I reflect upon when creating drawings and paintings of older people.*

Many older people think of themselves as not being particularly attractive, they see themselves as passé and suffer from low self esteem. My perception is that they are walking masterpieces. Toni from Barceloni is such an example (right).

*Toni from Barceloni*  
**Toni Cornet** modelled for me at a number of workshops in 2015 and early in 2016. His head is simply amazing. My drawing was done using Art Spectrum chalk pastel on Claire Fontaine, Pastelmat 300gsm paper. Thankfully this drawing does not need fixing. It is a beautiful surface to work on and although the first layer does not blend, subsequent layers more than make up for this. It comes in several colours. I chose dark grey for Toni. (The Australian importers of Pastelmat are a company called Notemaker in Melbourne.)





Opposite page:

**The eyes which speak of a life journey**

My wife Lesley was flying home from Queensland in 2011 after staying with her sister and found herself in conversation with a fellow passenger who was carrying an art book. With an interest in art in common they fell into animated discussion and Lesley told Deb of my work in portraiture.

Deb was a publicist and the book was about an artist from New Zealand, a man she had been working with for some years. Delighted at this serendipitous meeting, Deb said to Lesley: 'I know the perfect subject for your husband.'

His name is **Harold Hunt**, he is an Aboriginal author and activist and he has eyes that speak of his life journey.'

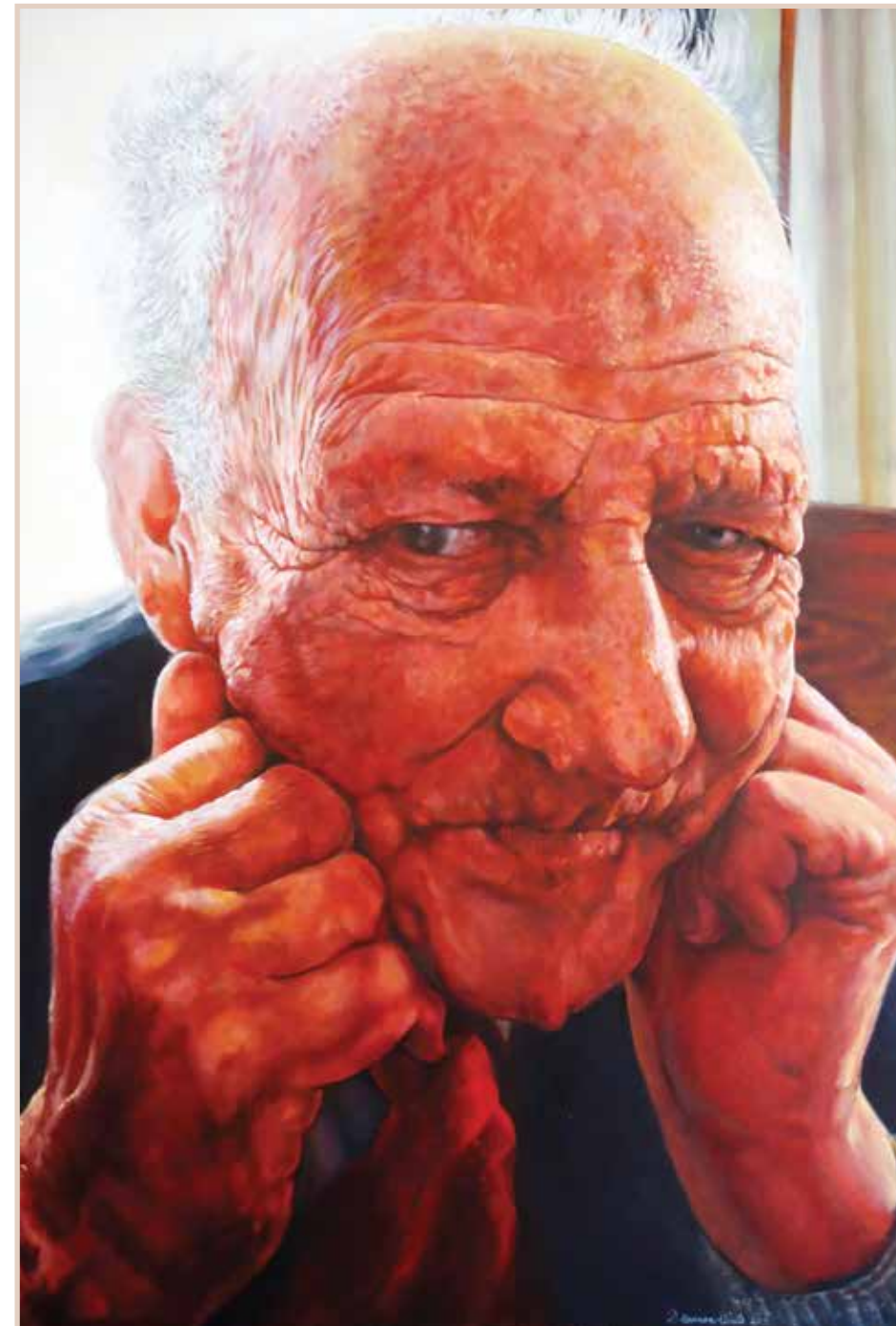
Harold is a true treasure. I was not able to make direct contact with him without the agreement of his family and so Deb was our intermediary and as soon as the family had given their approval she gave us Harold's phone number.

After my first meeting with Harold I felt very comfortable with our working relationship and created several drawings and paintings over a period of about two years. Harold has become just like family. He reminded me of my

mother's brothers, easy going and great conversationalists. My palette for Harold was earth tones, burnt sienna, burnt umber, yellow ochre, raw umber, mars violet, while purple lake in the shadows I found mixed well with the earth tones; alizarin crimson, ultramarine blue mixed with titanium white for highlights, sometimes pink and blue violets.

**Left: Not a pretty picture**

**Leslie Kemeny** was a slippery fish to catch. His face reminded me of Medieval and Renaissance pictures I had seen of clerics—artists Albrecht Durer and Grunewald come to mind, along with Peter Bruegel the Elder. Leslie kept putting me off, so it took months to get my first sitting. He was a shy man and aware that while the result would be artistically pleasing it might not be a pretty picture once in my hands. He had a fascinating face. Leslie's occupation was connected to the nuclear industry—he had been running a campaign for the pro-nuclear lobby for as long as I can remember. His work took him into higher political circles during the Cold War where he would meet with international nuclear researchers and presidential and prime ministerial representatives to discuss nuclear energy during the early sixties. Later he visited sites such as Chernobyl after the nuclear disaster there to research and report.



*'My main focus now is to continue to develop my skill as a portrait artist without being subjected to time restraints set by exhibition or major art prizes. Producing a portrait is like giving life to someone, it grows and develops over time and every day another element of the subject's character comes to light.'*

Right:

**The small man with presence**

I can see it now, but I didn't realize how sick Chris was getting until much later. He came to my Mort Street studio in Lithgow to model for me on two occasions. He would appraise my work every time I gave him a break and then grunt—whether approval or disapproval I could never tell which. He was not the same Chris we first met when we came to Lithgow in 2004.

Chris would always be preceded by his booming voice with a rich, deep Australian accent. He could be heard a block away so even before he entered the room you knew he was on his way. He was a slight man with beret

atop his head, silver whiskers and tanned complexion from his day job. An avid painter in the artistic sense, he would arrive to inspect my progress like a drill sergeant. Beneath this bluff exterior he was kind, considerate and very supportive of my artistic progress. Bare headed he reminded me of a gold prospector or a shearer and with his beret on he became a French provincial farmer or a patriarch.

A recent achievement was David's selection into the French publication entitled '40 Masters of Pastel' by Pratique des Arts. He is currently working on portrait commissions, and running workshops in regional areas to the west of the Blue Mountains.

References

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