

Capturing that revealing look in the eye Show opens of Ostrander caricatures

By *Jerry Stein*
Post contributor

An artist who specializes in caricatures has a double challenge: nail the subject's likeness and capture the essence of the personality through clever and selective exaggeration in the artwork.

Score a win for Ryan Ostrander on both counts.

Ostrander, who has been an illustrator and graphic design artist for The Cincinnati Post since graduating from the Columbus College of Art and Design in 2000, estimates he has done 400 caricatures for the newspaper between 2000 and this year.

Twenty caricatures are featured in the exhibition "Funny Men" opening Friday at Manifest Gallery in East Walnut Hills.

Subjects of Ostrander's revealing brush include a wary looking President George W. Bush, a pensive Bob Dylan, a blunt Rep. Henry Waxman depicted in front of a demon's shadow and the character-lined face of the late Joe Nuxhall.

Whether working in acrylic, oil or, in the last year, digital imagery on the computer, the Colorado-born Ostrander's caricatures are not dashed-off studies.

Whether working in black and white or color, his art is full of physical detail and is emotionally dense.

The color work is especially effective because, just as in formal portraiture, Ostrander is meticulously attentive to combining the coloring of his subject's feature with light and shadow play across the planes of the face.

The result achieved is a vibrant illusion of three dimensionality that seems to thrust itself out from Ostrander's illustration board and canvas.

For instance, with Sen. John Kerry, Ostrander's rendering of the shadowy deep-set eyes dominate this caricature. And when coupled with the drawn, chiseled structure of Kerry's elongated face, Ostrander manages to encapsulate a thoughtful man perhaps wracked with some inner stress and conflict.

This is not superficial observation of character.

Ostrander's love for caricature began to be fully realized when he was in college.

"I've always really loved drawing," he said.



ZOOM JASON GEIL/The Post

Cincinnati Post illustrator and graphic designer Ryan Ostrander prepares for his art opening at Manifest Art Gallery. "Funny Men" includes selections by Ostrander and former Cincinnati illustrator Gabriel Utasi.

MORE ABOUT THE SHOW AND THE GALLERY

Exhibition: "Funny Men."

Contents: Caricatures by The Cincinnati Post illustrator and graphics designer Ryan Ostrander and former Cincinnati illustrator Gabriel Utasi.

Gallery: Manifest Creative Research Gallery and Drawing Center.

Location: 2727 Woodburn Ave., East Walnut Hills, near DeSales Corner.

Executive director and chief curator: Jason Franz.

Additional exhibition: "Trick of Light," an exhibition of photography curated by Dennis Kiel.

Exhibition season: The 2007-2008 exhibition season at the Manifest Gallery includes 12 shows within a calendar of eight exhibitions. Shows address painting, drawing, wall and ceiling sculpture, and photography.

Budget: \$50,000 for 2007, up from \$26,000 in 2006.

Gallery visitation: about 2,200.

Artists presented: 126 artists in 2007. Since 2005, Manifest Gallery has shown the works of 214 artists.

Mission: The center policy is to show 50 percent student work in its exhibitions. Work from 33 international academic institutions has been shown in the exhibitions over the past three seasons.

Publications: Manifest produced 21 full-color exhibit

"It really wasn't specific until I was maybe a sophomore or junior.

"One of my biggest influences has always been the chair of illustration at Columbus College of Art & Design, C.F. Payne," Ostrander said.

One of Payne's most ambitious works is housed here in Cincinnati. It's a 100-foot mural in the lobby of the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park featuring actors and directors associated with past productions at the Mount Adams theater.

"I've always been amazed at what Payne can do with the caricature - the human face," Ostrander said.

Ostrander, who turns 30 in January, said he has set an artistic standard for himself with each caricature he creates.

"I think the biggest goal of the caricaturist or somebody who does portraits is to make them look more so like that person than you could do with a photograph."

While Ostrander's caricatures are entertaining, the work does not go for the cheap laugh at the expense of capturing the total personality.

"That's something I try to avoid if I possibly can," Ostrander said.

"It's not just picking out the features that are commonly distorted. I look for something that is much more specific to that individual in their face and their personality, too."

In describing how he constructs a caricature, Ostrander points to a piece that he did of his colleague, The Cincinnati Post photographer-journalist Melvin Grier.

"I think when I look at people on a day-to-day basis, I sort of see how I would work a character in my head," Ostrander explained.

In regard to Grier, Ostrander said, "there definitely is sort of a wisdom, a keenness and sort of just a sly 'I'm-cooler-than-you kind of look.' "

Ostrander said, for him, the physical quality to capture to reveal the personality would be the eyes.

"Just about anybody you do, their inner personality is going to come out mostly in their eyes," Ostrander said.

Ostrander said, for the most part though, he has not met most of the subjects he draws personally. When deprived of first-hand observation, he has to take another tack.

For instance, he recalled the process he went through to create Bengal quarterback Carson Palmer's caricature.

"When Palmer was drafted (in 2003), they were extremely cautious with him," Ostrander said. "He didn't start for a year.

Publications. Manifest produced 21 full-color exhibit catalogues and its second National Drawing Annual this year.

Staffing: Since its founding in 2004, Manifest has operated with an all-volunteer staff. The Manifest board will hire a paid staff in the 2007-2008 season.

Exhibition dates: Friday through Jan. 11, 2008.

Gallery hours: 2-7 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays, noon-5 p.m. Saturdays, and by appointment. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

Information: (513) 861-3638.

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Ryan Ostrander's drawing of Bengals' quarterback Carson Palmer was based on a scene from "Good Will Hunting."

"So, the story we were doing for our special section on the Bengals was about how this was Carson's year to sit back and learn the offense, learn about the Bengals, learn everything he possibly could about the team before he was handed the reins as the starting quarterback."

The art shows Palmer using chalk to draw an offense play diagram.

"It was my depiction of Carson Palmer studying," Ostrander said. "It was something that I got from the movie, 'Good Will Hunting,' with Matt Damon where he is drawing on the mirror with chalk."

"Sometimes, it's kind of fun to throw in some pop culture," Ostrander said with a smile.

If you want to establish an immunity against the probing eye of a caricaturist like Ryan Ostrander, he says the best defense is a pretty face.

"I've always found that's the toughest character to do is somebody who is classically attractive," Ostrander said.

"Everything is where it's supposed to be. Everything is symmetrical. There's really nothing to draw from as far as really distinct characteristics although not entirely."

But Ostrander reconsiders.

"I think a lot of people would say that Paris Hilton is a pretty attractive girl, but sometimes very attractive people do have very distinct characteristics."

The co-artist who will be sharing the "Funny Men" exhibition with Ostrander is a former Cincinnati illustrator Gabriel Utasi.



ZOOM

In his caricature of Post photographer Melvin Grier, artist Ryan Ostrander said, "there definitely is sort of a wisdom, a keenness and sort of just a sly 'I'm-cooler-than-you kind of look.' "