

America Creative  
Portraits by Everett Raymond Kinstler

Edited by Joseph S. Mella and  
Margaret F. M. Walker

With a contribution by Amy Henderson  
and an interview by Margaret F. M. Walker

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*America Creative: Portraits by Everett Raymond Kinstler*  
Edited by Joseph S. Mella and Margaret F. M. Walker  
With a contribution by Amy Henderson and an interview  
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### Exhibition Itinerary

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Collection of the artist

## Director's Introduction

During a career of over seventy years, Everett Raymond Kinstler has grown to become America's foremost portrait painter of the second half of the twentieth century. He is still widely considered to be one of the leading portraitists of our time. Kinstler's artistic roots as an illustrator contributed to his ability to capture the character of his sitter in an economy of line and brushstrokes. Whether his subject was a president of the United States of America (he has painted eight of them) or the iconic author and children's book illustrator Theodor Geisel, "Dr. Seuss," his success as a portrait artist today is unrivaled. Artistically, he shares affinities with such masters of portraiture as John Singer Sargent and James Montgomery Flagg, studying with the latter for a period of time and working to hone his craft.

Meeting Kinstler for the first time at the home of Michael Shane Neal, who has for many years been mentored by Kinstler, was a memorable experience for me. Engaging and inquisitive, with a wry sense of humor, Kinstler wanted to know as much about me as I did about him. Having myself grown up in the shadow of Chicago, I enjoyed the direct, straightforward manner in which he delved into his personal history. He left me with the impression that here is a man who has witnessed the better part of a century and has come in contact with many of its most prominent individuals, be they heads of state, writers, actors, artists, composers and musicians, educators, leaders in business, or socialites. His very personality welcomes engagement with everyone he meets. There is a kind of honesty that one feels immediately upon meeting him that encourages conversation. Kinstler is a supreme storyteller, and the art of conversation is a gift he employs to great effect during a portrait session,

almost as much as the skill he brings as an artist to the actual portrait. This trait puts his sitters at ease, making Kinstler's job of capturing them on canvas that much more successful. It helps, needless to say, that he is a master of the medium at hand.

There have been many exhibitions of Kinstler's portraits over the years. Some have focused on Hollywood, others on the American West and those larger than life actors such as Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. Still others highlighted the full range of his career, as the title of one exhibition suggests, from "pulp to portraits." Given that Nashville represents one of the creative capitals of the country, we thought it would be interesting to feature the many leaders of the creative arts he has painted over the past sixty-some years, beginning with a portrait of his mentor, James Montgomery Flagg (1956).

*America Creative: Portraits by Everett Raymond Kinstler* is a remarkable window into the lives of numerous leaders in the arts in America and, equally, an outstanding opportunity to experience the genius of one of the best portrait artists working today. The Vanderbilt University Fine Arts Gallery is honored to bring Kinstler's own creative vision here to Nashville.

—Joseph S. Mella  
Director, Vanderbilt University  
Fine Arts Gallery

## Everett Raymond Kinstler: The Storyteller's Art

As a historian, I'm always drawn to great storytelling. Stories are what "history" is all about. It is a tradition as old as human interaction, and our cultural DNA still responds instantly to ideas that capture our attention. But for subjects to engage and attract us, the storytelling itself needs to *dazzle*.

In our social media age of fragmentation, storytelling plays an unintended but consequential role as a cultural unifier. The idea of "E Pluribus Unum" depends on somehow keeping the "unum" functioning in a world of "pluribus," and the narrative thread provided by storytelling is one of those communal connectors that provides a national glue.

Great storytelling depends on the artfulness of the "telling," no matter what medium conveys the story. Happily, we live in an age that celebrates this art across the board: J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series continues to inspire a frenzied outpouring of young readers after more than twenty years. In nonfiction, David McCullough's histories always resonate, whether describing the causes of the Civil War or the Wright brothers' journey to flight. These writers have the ability to tell stories cinematically, so that readers are able to conjure up moving images in their own imaginations.

Storytelling can also be literally "visual." Documentary filmmaker Ken Burns is a master of cinematic storytelling and is

noted for using a scanning method to bring still photographs to life through *movement*. Burns understands that viewers respond to action more than to static presentation, and the technique he invented to make pictures move is now known as the "Ken Burns effect." Oscar-winning filmmaker George Lucas is such an advocate of storytelling that he is dedicating \$1.5 billion to a new museum focused on narrative art, from prehistoric cave paintings to contemporary digital film, scheduled to open in 2021 in Los Angeles.

In painting, the art of visual storytelling is wonderfully exemplified by America's pre-eminent portrait painter, Everett Raymond Kinstler. Early in my museum career, I was struck by the liveliness of his work: it stood out so evocatively amidst a cavalcade of static portraiture. For me, faces frozen in time are very ho-hum indeed.

There is nothing static or stultifying about Kinstler's art because it is full of life. Somehow, his brushstrokes capture personality in sweeping gestures; his paintings are more character "portrayals" in a theatrical sense of revelation than frozen-in-granite "portraits."

This is because Ray Kinstler is a consummate storyteller. He cannot help himself—it's the way his heart, soul, and brain function. The magic of his artistry is that his storytelling flows from that inner source onto the canvas in broad brushstrokes of portrayal. His work

is not for the timid, nor for people entranced by life's ugly and depressing underbelly. What fascinates Kinstler, and what his work evokes, is the utter joy of life's possibilities. His portraits come alive with a *flourish*.

Kinstler's portrayals are often compared to those of John Singer Sargent, the most prominent portrait painter of the Gilded Age. In 2015, when an exhibition of Sargent portraits was organized by the National Portrait Gallery, London, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, one reviewer quoted Henry James describing why Sargent's work was so appealing. In an 1893 essay, James praised his friend Sargent for his "extraordinarily immediate" ability to translate his perception of a sitter into a portrait "as if painting were pure tact of vision, a simple manner of feeling." He especially noted Sargent's ability to see "deep into his subject" in a way that "enlarges and humanizes" the portrait.<sup>1</sup>

Portrait painting reflects an artist's personality as much as a sitter's. A 2017–18 exhibition on Paul Cézanne's portraits (organized by the Musée d'Orsay, the National Portrait Gallery, London, and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.) emphasizes that Cézanne "wasn't a conventionally social person" and was "not interested in creating pleasing likenesses."<sup>2</sup> Cézanne's focus was on color and composition, as it was in his still lifes and landscapes. Consequently, his portraits convey emptiness, with his figures reflecting blank, masklike faces that yearn to be anonymous.

Thankfully, a desire to celebrate human emptiness has never intruded into the vibrant Kinstler imagination. It's not because he had an easy path, either. He grew up on New York's West Side and started to sketch when he was about ten. Neither of his parents displayed any artistic ability, but they encouraged him to follow his interest. He soaked up the popular culture of his youth and was especially drawn to the graphic arts. He has said that beginning when he was six or seven, he "used to look at illustrations of movie actors in the *New York Sun* that were done with Crowquill pens. I loved the sports cartoonists...I really loved looking at those images and anything else that showed imagination in the sense of illustration. Even at that age, illustration was what I loved."<sup>3</sup>

When he was nearly sixteen, he left school and began drawing comic books for 15 dollars a week. Comic books were a fairly new invention in 1942, but World War II made the demand for comics soar—just as men who had been creating them were being drafted into service. Kinstler successfully answered an ad for a job as a comic book inker and was supported by his father, who told him, "You're a very lucky young man because you're going to be able to earn your living doing something you love. Don't ever forget it."<sup>4</sup>

In an introduction to *Everett Raymond Kinstler: Pulp to Portraits*, Stephanie Haboush Plunkett wrote that Kinstler immersed himself in pop culture in years when "richly illustrated books and magazines were a constant presence" and "a lifeline into the larger world."<sup>5</sup> The



James Montgomery Flagg, 1956  
Oil on canvas, 31" x 25½"  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
Gift of Everett Raymond Kinstler  
© Everett Raymond Kinstler

popularity of illustrated magazines like *Collier's* and *The Saturday Evening Post* in the 1930s and '40s made them a natural showcase for such major artists as Charles Dana Gibson, James Montgomery Flagg, Howard Chandler Christy, and Norman Rockwell.

Inspired by these artists, Kinstler launched his own career in illustration. James Montgomery Flagg was his artistic hero, and Flagg graciously tutored the young artist on the importance of capturing a subject's essential spirit. The graphic arts placed high demand on visual storytelling, and Kinstler's early career went from inking comic books to creating his own comic strip. He had always been an avid drawer, and comics gave him enormous experience working quickly in all kinds of

media. "We used pen-and-ink, casein, gouache, watercolor—everything. And I painted every subject—western, romance, detective, anything that was going."<sup>6</sup>

By his twenties, he had built a career freelancing as an illustrator for children's books, pulp magazines, and the emerging paperback book market. In a 2017 collection of his sketchbooks, Kinstler explained that "There were more than 200 pulp publications in the forties. I turned out thousands, literally thousands of jobs."<sup>7</sup> He became one of the major illustrators in the "golden age" of comic book artists, and his strongly-defined illustrations have been credited with influencing Pop art. Roy Lichtenstein has said, "Ray Kinstler was creating Pop art before Pop art became a recognized art form."<sup>8</sup>

By the mid-1950s, though, the publishing market moved away from the kind of "hard-boiled style" he excelled at. "I was getting phased out," he said, as publishers were looking for a "flatter, more designed look."<sup>9</sup> Television and the *Mad Men* of Madison Avenue were having an enormous impact on everyday visual culture, and, while photography continued to hold sway in such magazines as *Life* and *Look*, the large demand for illustration declined.

Kinstler began to look around for something new. "There are two things that mean a lot to me: survival and doing what you love." He had always loved painting, and he had "a flair for the figure."<sup>10</sup>

Portrait painting was the brilliant Kinstler solution. His transition to portraiture suited his rapid method and, most important, his ability to reveal a sitter's defining core. He does not get bogged down in teeny grains of sand, but bursts forth with sweeps of dramatic purpose.

Dramatic purpose also influenced his choice of sitters. He once told an interviewer, "When I first got involved in portraiture, I had the chance to paint people who made a cultural difference." In the seven subsequent decades of his life as a portrait artist, he has consistently painted people "who have contributed to American life in the best possible way."<sup>11</sup> Movies always played an important part in Kinstler's life, both as an enjoyment and as a medium that helped shape his creative sensibility. "Motion pictures had a profound influence on my art, as I responded to the visual images accompanying the narrative. Film making and the actors interpreting characters stimulated my imagination and affected my portrait painting..."<sup>12</sup>

Because his portraits illuminate a visual cultural history of America, his vision has been a perfect match with that of the National Portrait Gallery, which is mandated by Congress to represent people who have made "a significant contribution to American life and culture." The gallery has more than one hundred of Kinstler's works, including his portraits and sketches of presidents, first ladies, artists, and a wide range of performing artists; in 1989, it awarded him the Copley

Medal, its highest honor. Eight presidents have posed for him, and his portraits of Gerald R. Ford and Ronald Reagan are the official White House portraits. His work is represented in museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of the City of New York, and the Norman Rockwell Museum. The Players in New York has dedicated an entire room to Everett Raymond Kinstler and includes notable portraits of such great acting figures as Alfred Drake, José Ferrer, Jason Robards, James Cagney, Katharine Hepburn, and Christopher Plummer.

My own work has focused on movies, theatre, and music, and Kinstler's portrayals of these creative figures are my favorites. He has said that portraying movie stars especially has been a connection to what has meant the most to him from his earliest years, once saying "I have marvelous memories of working as a visual storyteller and, as a fan of cinema, I've loved painting many of the people I've seen in the movies. John Wayne, Marilyn Monroe, Gary Cooper, Katharine Hepburn, James Cagney—this is really where I come from."<sup>13</sup>

In addition to stars of the silver screen, his paintings in the National Portrait Gallery collection include characters with bigger-than-life personalities, such as sculptor and bon vivant Alexander Calder. In 1971, Kinstler depicted Calder working in his Roxbury, Connecticut, studio. Calder was then a neighbor of Kinstler's, and Kinstler has said that the two visited one another's studios with great enjoyment, noting that this kind

of "personal portrait" gave him greater freedom of expression than his more formal commissioned works.<sup>14</sup>

A 2017 publication, *Impressions & Observations: The Sketchbooks of Everett Raymond Kinstler*, gives delightful insights into his work. Drawing is the first step in his entire artistic process, and he explains that the joy of recording impressions is that "it builds and enlarges the artist's power of observation and thinking. There is a difference between looking and SEEING."<sup>15</sup> Even today, in a world of digital cameras, Instagrams, and photoshopping, he cautions that there is "NO substitute for training the eye, whose vision grows sharper and, where it is used, stimulates the imagination. We are all of us students, chewing on a bone."<sup>16</sup>

Kinstler used his sketchbooks to develop ideas. Because his sketches are records of his first impressions, they reflect his acute ability to observe almost instantly what is most important about a subject. With Gregory Peck, it was his square jaw—a face Kinstler's notes say evoked "his classical structure, strong features, and expressions."<sup>17</sup>

As an artist, Kinstler is always experimenting and never hidebound by previous works. About his 1975 sketch of playwright Tennessee Williams, he explains that "using pencil and watercolor was invaluable in creating my first lithograph."<sup>18</sup> He used a pencil and watercolor drawing of Academy Award-winning actor James Cagney to create a lithograph in 1980,

around the time Cagney was appearing in the film *Ragtime*. Kinstler and Cagney became friends, and some of Kinstler's sketches depict Cagney dancing in his earlier *Yankee Doodle Dandy* days.<sup>19</sup>



Tom Wolfe, 1987  
Oil on canvas, 50" x 27"  
Collection of the artist

One of Kinstler's best-known portraits is of writer Tom Wolfe, who broke ground as a "new journalist" in the 1970s and '80s with such works as "The Me Decade" (1976) and *Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987). Wolfe posed for Kinstler the year *Bonfires* was published. His sketches

show a fascinating progression: the writer's image emerges from simple pencil sketch to a final full-length portrait, with Wolfe dressed in his signature white suit and using a cane like an exclamation point. It is a portrayal so evocative that it has come to define Tom Wolfe's public persona.<sup>20</sup> Wolfe has said that sitting for his portrait with Kinstler was itself an experience, because Kinstler is a world-class raconteur: "Kinstler is a joy to listen to from the beginning.... His idea is to release your personality and get things going on a social level."<sup>21</sup>



**Tony Bennett**, 2014  
Oil on canvas, 24" x 20"  
Collection of the artist

Tony Bennett and Kinstler have a long collaboration: they were born two days apart in the same month and year (August 1926), and both attended the New York School of Industrial Art, although they say they didn't

know each other at the time. Acknowledged as America's best-loved singer, Mr. Bennett has always enjoyed painting as well; three of his works are in Smithsonian collections, including a wonderful watercolor portrait of Duke Ellington. When he donated that portrait to the museum, he described how Ellington had given him superb advice early in his singing career: "Do more than one thing." And Bennett followed his advice, saying that, whether vocalizing or painting, he is always in "a creative zone."

He considers Ray Kinstler's advice enormously important to the evolution of his own painting and has said, "I've learned from the Old Masters and been inspired by the Impressionists, but I think I'm really a New York painter, and no one's done more for me in painting than Kinstler."<sup>22</sup>

The two share a philosophy of life that is ever-onward, joyful, and full of purpose. Over the years, Kinstler has done several sketches and portrait studies of Bennett, including a wonderfully vibrant portrayal painted in 2014. Kinstler fondly says of Bennett, "He has a head that could come right off a Roman coin."<sup>23</sup>

Katharine Hepburn was one of Kinstler's most challenging subjects. James Cagney introduced them, and Kinstler managed to charm the sometimes-difficult actor into posing for him at least five times in the 1980s and '90s. It has been noted that "With great attention to detail, the legendary actress observed his process intently,



**Christopher Plummer as Prospero**, 2011  
Oil on canvas, 50" x 40"  
Collection of the artist

often commenting on his approach along the way."<sup>24</sup> The 1982 portrait she called her "favorite" shows her seated with her knees up, wearing a red jacket and a straw hat. She is also smoking a cigarette—a habit she had maintained for decades. But she had recently stopped smoking and wanted to erase all evidence from the historical record. She commanded Kinstler, "Take out that cigarette!" She had met her match, however, because the Master Artist said "NO!" The cigarette stayed. Kinstler donated this wonderful portrait to the National Portrait Gallery, and it was the centerpiece of an exhibition I curated there in 2007 to celebrate Hepburn's centennial birthday.

Another of my favorite Kinstler figures is Christopher Plummer. In November 2012, The Players unveiled the "Kinstler Room" with the

vernissage of Kinstler's full-length portrayal of Plummer as *The Tempest's* Prospero, a role in which he had recently triumphed at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. There is also a Kinstler portrait sketch of the great Oscar-, Tony-, Emmy-winning actor in the National Portrait Gallery's collection, and one of the highlights of my career there was taking Christopher and his wife Elaine on a museum tour. Of course, we focused on the many Kinstler portraits that line the halls of this august institution, but instead of staid reverence, Kinstler's artistry inspired—no surprise—rollicking and witty stories!

The Plummers and the Kinstlers are friends and neighbors in Connecticut, and Christopher understands the swashbuckling passion that fuels Kinstler's imagination. When the Kinstler Room was dedicated at The Players, Plummer gave remarks that captured Everett Raymond Kinstler's contribution to American life and culture: "Unlike many artists today who wrap themselves in life's glumness, Kinstler relishes what inspires a sitter. His work reveals hope, humor, and the joy of living."

Bravo!

—Amy Henderson, Historian Emerita  
National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Churchwell, "How John Singer Sargent Made a Scene," *The Guardian*, January 30, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Morton and John Elderfield in "Was Cezanne a 'People Person'?" by J. S. Marcus, *Cetus News Online*.

<sup>3</sup> ERK quoted in Jim Vadeboncoeur, Jr, et. al., *Everett Raymond Kinstler: The Artist's Journey Through Popular Culture, 1942–1962* (Nevada City: Underwood Books, 2005), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>5</sup> Stephanie Haboush Plunkett, "Everett Raymond Kinstler: Illustrating His World," *Everett Raymond Kinstler: Pulps to Portraits* (Stockbridge: The Norman Rockwell Museum, 2012), 31. Exhibition catalogue.

<sup>6</sup> Everett Raymond Kinstler, ed. *Impressions & Observations: The Sketchbooks of Everett Raymond Kinstler* (Easton: Westtown Publishing, 2017), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Kinstler quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Hollywood: Paintings and Drawings by Everett Raymond Kinstler*. Designed by Peggy Kinstler. (Chagrin Falls: Graphic Repros, 2014), 1. Published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name at the National Arts Club and Mountainsong Galleries

<sup>9</sup> *Impressions & Observations*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Kinstler quoted in *Pulps to Portraits*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> Kinstler quoted in *Hollywood*, epigraph.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>15</sup> *Impressions & Observations*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Anne Quito, "The art of conversation, explained by the only artist to get eight U.S. presidents to sit still," *Quartz*, March 9, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Tony Bennett and Robert Sullivan, *Tony Bennett in the Studio: A Life of Art & Music* (New York: Sterling, 2007), 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Impressions & Observations*, 12.

<sup>24</sup> Kinstler quoted in *Pulps to Portraits*, 66. Also see *Impressions & Observations*, 80.



## Reflections on a Mentor and Friend

An interview with Michael Shane Neal about Everett Raymond Kinstler

Conducted and edited by **Margaret F. M. Walker**

### *How did you first become familiar with the work of Everett Raymond Kinstler?*

When I was a student at Lipscomb University in the late 1980s, I studied with Dawn Whitelaw, who had recently taken a week-long class with Kinstler in Maine. Dawn introduced me to Kinstler's work; she recognized that his was a style I would respond to. What I had not realized was that I was already familiar with it—his portrait of Gerald Ford was in a book I'd had since I was ten on portraits that I loved of the presidents. At her suggestion, I found his book *Painting Portraits* in the university library. I ended up reading the entire book that afternoon, sitting on the floor before the metal shelves. I thought to myself, "this is what I would love to be able to do."

### *In these early days, before you had met, what intrigued you about Kinstler?*

In truth, it wasn't that he was so famous and had painted celebrities, but that he was talented and had actually made a living as an artist. It had nothing to do with my own ability and everything to do with my aspirations: to be that good and to make enough to have painting be my career.

For some time, I had been familiar with the work of John Singer Sargent and illustrators like James Montgomery Flagg and Norman Rockwell. Kinstler was from that vein and had of course begun as an illustrator and personally known Flagg and had met Rockwell. I became enamored with Kinstler and his work—a dedicated fan! In those pre-internet days, I only had access to his portrait paintings through books and pored through them looking for examples.

### *How did you get connected with Kinstler?*

It took some time and is a story that makes me realize how very lucky I am that it happened at all. After college, I rented a small studio and began trying to work as a portrait artist. Like most artists, I'd done master copies of Kinstler, Sargent, and many others. My agent connected with a woman from Montgomery, Alabama, Janie Wall, who had recently organized an unveiling for a portrait by Everett Raymond Kinstler. Janie had even dated him many years prior and the two were sporadically in touch. She saw my work, met me, and promised to mention me to Kinstler the next time they spoke.



Several months later, she called me to say that I should contact Ray on his private number the next time I was in New York.

Now, this was very early in my career. I'd never even been to New York. It was like going to the moon! It just happened, though, that my best friend, Chip Anderson, was transferred there for his job and offered for me to stay in his apartment if I came to visit. So, I got to New York and rang Ray's number several times, always hanging up. I was a nervous wreck. I finally let it ring and it went to a machine. I left a message. The next morning, the phone rings and it's this wonderful voice—Ray Kinstler had called me back. I had been studying him for years, but, for me, he existed only in books. It was surreal. The man on the other end of the phone had painted presidents! We chatted, but he was about to leave town and said "Let me know next time you're in New York. I'd like to meet you and see your work. Could you send me some photographs of it in the meantime? And please include a return envelope; it'll help me ensure I send it back." (I didn't know then what incredible piles of mail he has!)

Before returning to Nashville, I went to the National Arts Club to look around, but was too nervous to go inside, so Chip took a picture of me out front. Back home, I wrote to Kinstler. Two or three months passed, but then, sure enough, my package came back. He had written in detail a critique of every photograph and had marked them in pen. It was incredibly thoughtful and encouraging. He even offered to look at more work. I immediately wrote to thank him and sent more images about a month later.

*So, how did you actually end up meeting him in person?*

Late in 1993, I received a note from Ray that he was dating a woman in Wyoming (his now-wife Peggy). In it, he invited me to attend a week-long class he was teaching in Montana. Again, it was like going to the moon, and I had no money, but I was determined to make it. I lucked out. Some family friends happened to be driving to Canada for a vacation and offered to drive my mother and me to Montana.

You know, my mother is actually the one who introduced me to Ray Kinstler. We saw him walking down the stairs of the Big Timber Hotel with Peggy and, knowing him only from photographs in books, I wasn't sure it was actually him, but I had a hunch because of his great eyebrows. My mother was the one with the confidence to introduce us and ask, "Excuse me, are you Ray Kinstler?" And that was it; he embraced us both like lifelong friends.

Ray continued to take an interest in me and my work. There's really no explanation for it other than that I was young and had great desire and it was a happy time in his life when he was meeting Peggy (to whom he has been married now for 25 years)—everything sort of just came together. I was a kid from Nashville and he was a *very* successful artist. I often think "how in the world did that happen?"

I took two courses with him in Santa Fe, getting to know him and Peggy better, and by then he was recommending me for projects, which was invaluable in starting my own career. I really think of him as a second father; Peggy even calls him my "Art Dad."

*Do you have advice for others stemming from your relationship with Kinstler?*

Don't underestimate the power of having a hero—someone who is at the top of your field. Even if you never meet them, aspiring to do so will count for so much. When I related a story about painting Justice Sandra Day O'Connor to an attorney friend, I realized just how many people in her own field would have liked to have had a similar experience.

*What are some things about the practice of portraiture that you have learned from Kinstler?*

Ray developed artistic skills and then applied them to what interested him: people. He could have used his skills in a number of ways, though. Sargent was famous for saying that you must become an artist first and only then a painter of a specific genre. Ray is cut from this same cloth and always presses his students in this manner. It is one of the reasons I love his portrait of artist Peter Cox; he has made a beautiful still life inside of it. It's a masterpiece. The handling of the figure, the light, the still life, the atmosphere, the use of color, the emotion...all point to the genius of the artist. It is a marvelous example of everything that makes Ray such an exceptional painter.

I also admire his work ethic. Ray, now in his nineties, is redefining old age. He still paints six or seven days a week. He refuses to stop at “good enough.” Even if the sitter is satisfied with a portrait, he will not give up until he feels a painting is his best work.

Ray has taught me a reverence for those who came before, to look to what I can learn from their lifelong pursuit of painting. And yet, he believes it is very important to be an artist of your time. If you admire the work of Vermeer, don’t pose people in costumes, but be of your own time and paint people around you.

*What do you admire in Kinstler, the man?*

He has taught me to have a deep respect for people, integrity in my profession, and a commitment to hard work. He has a genuine enthusiasm for his art that spreads and feeds others’ excitement. When I look at his paintings, I can tell that his sitters are enjoying the process, too. For many painters, a portrait is more about the artist than the person; that’s not the case with Ray. He is a man who knows deeply the difference between right and wrong and knows, too, how to treat others. I love his sincerity. He is refreshingly honest and genuine.

*Kinstler is clearly a man of many fine characteristics. Since you’ve given us the big picture, I’m wondering, do you have any favorite Kinstler stories to share?*

Well, I have two that are related, both about sketches of admired artists. When Ray was a young man, he greatly enjoyed the plays of George Bernard Shaw and thought he would do a drawing of him and see if he would autograph it. So, he sent it off to England. Seeing in the *New York Times* a few weeks later that Shaw refused an interview on his 90th birthday even with that publication, he figured he would never hear back. A few months later, though, the drawing was returned with the inscription, “Good heavens! Is this me? George Bernard Shaw, 1947.”

Several years later, Kinstler included it in an exhibition where it quickly sold. About two years ago, I noticed an auction of Shaw memorabilia, which happened to include this very piece. I purchased it. It is one of my favorites and hangs on the wall of my studio. I recently shared it with Ray during a Nashville visit, now seventy years after Shaw autographed it.

When I was a young man, in that very first portfolio of work I sent to Ray, I included a drawing of him, based on a thumbnail picture in a book, hoping he would autograph it. Maybe he thought of his own drawing of Shaw when he returned this one to me with the caption, “From your delighted victim, Everett Raymond Kinstler.”

*What most excites you about bringing Kinstler’s work to Nashville?*

From the standpoint of the theme, *America Creative*, it’s a perfect fit. Kinstler has spent his life having an intense enjoyment of other creative people—musicians, actors, writers, artists. His most important non-family relationships are with other creative types. He’s also spent a good portion of his life as a member of The Players, a historic actor’s club in New York City, which is how he met many actors, including Katharine Hepburn and Christopher Plummer.

The idea of his coming to Nashville, which is such a creative center in music and, increasingly, so much more, is very exciting. With regard to painting, he is the artist’s artist and has influenced several generations. While he has been very successful, his ambition is to be the best artist he can be. We do not discount the fact that to welcome one with his notoriety, success, and achievements is a great honor. Ray has won every top award a portrait artist can receive. It’s a feather in Nashville’s cap that he would want to come here and exhibit his work.

I also think that Ray’s commitment to his craft will resonate with the many Nashvillians who are trying so hard every day, doing what they need to do to pay their rent and succeed as artists. There are so many people in this city laboring for their break. He is the perfect person to look to, to teach that if you stay vigilant, hold fast to the dream, and go step by step it can happen. His life has not been a perfect upward trajectory, but has followed the ebb and flow that is a normal part of the creative life. If you’re fortunate, though, he is a great example that you can make it into your 90s doing what you love.

*Michael Shane Neal is a portrait artist based in Nashville, Tennessee.*

Plates



## Artists



**Will Barnett, 1977**  
Oil on canvas  
50" x 40"  
Butler Institute of American Art,  
Youngstown, Ohio



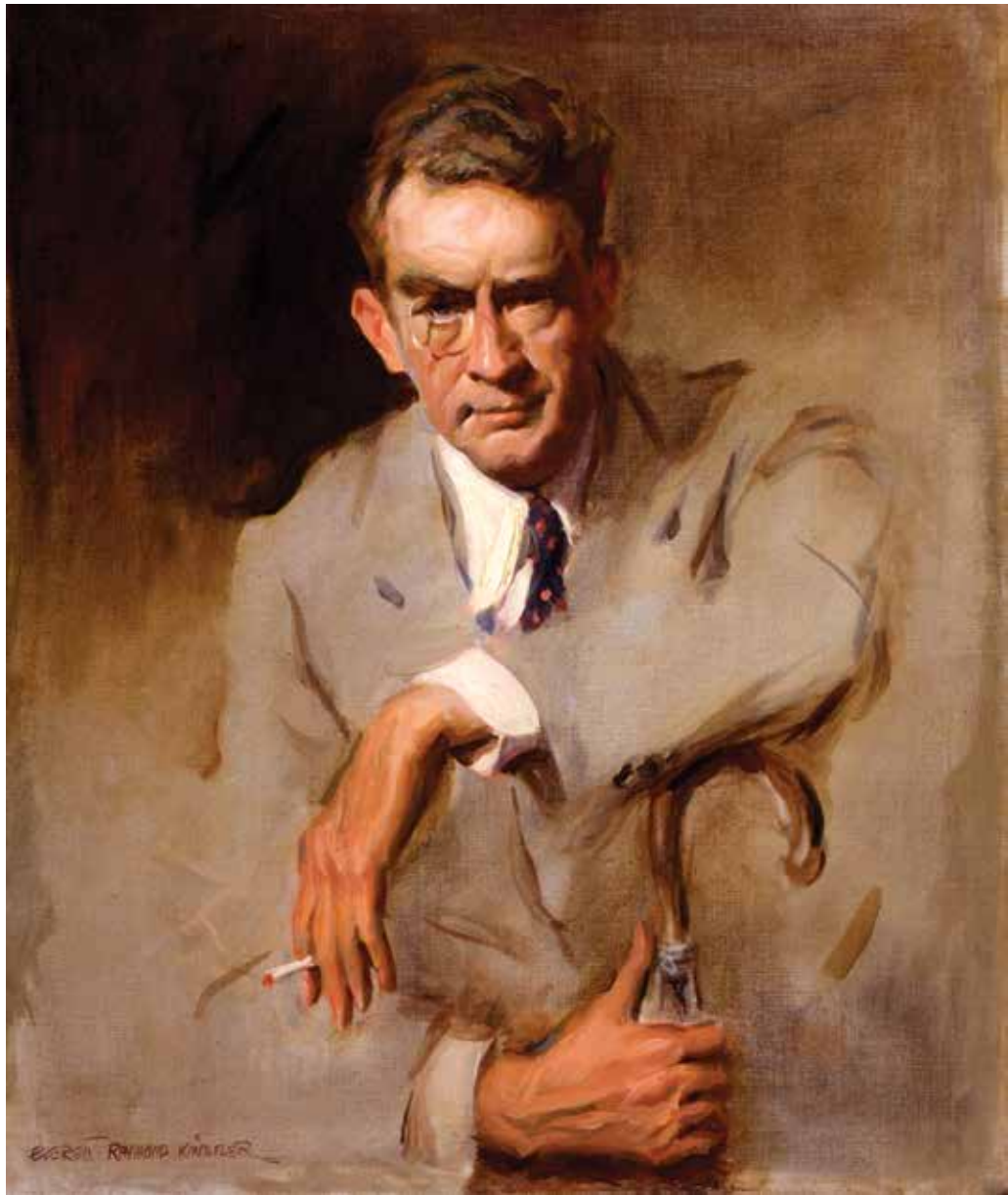
**Paul Resika, 1985**  
Oil on canvas  
26" x 32"  
Collection of the artist



Paul Jenkins, 2006  
Oil on canvas  
60" x 50"  
Collection of the artist



Alexander Calder, 1972  
Oil on canvas  
40" x 34"  
National Portrait Gallery,  
Smithsonian Institution  
Gift of Everett Raymond Kinstler  
© 1972 Everett Raymond Kinstler



**James Montgomery Flagg, 1956**  
Oil on canvas  
31" x 25½"  
National Portrait Gallery,  
Smithsonian Institution  
Gift of Everett Raymond Kinstler  
© Everett Raymond Kinstler



**Norman Rockwell, 1965**  
Charcoal on paper  
12¼" x 9"  
National Portrait Gallery,  
Smithsonian Institution  
Gift of Everett Raymond Kinstler  
© 1965 Everett Raymond Kinstler



**Peter Cox**, 1983  
Oil on canvas  
54" x 60"  
Collection of the artist



**Jacob Lawrence**, 1987  
Oil and charcoal on wood panel  
36" x 24"  
Collection of the artist



**Romare Bearden**, 1980  
Oil on canvas  
30" x 24"  
Collection of the artist



**Triple Self-Portrait**, 1972  
Oil on canvas  
40" x 34"  
National Academy Museum,  
New York





Chen Chi, *Now and Then*, 1993 & 1966  
 Oil on canvas  
 46" x 42"  
 Collection of the artist



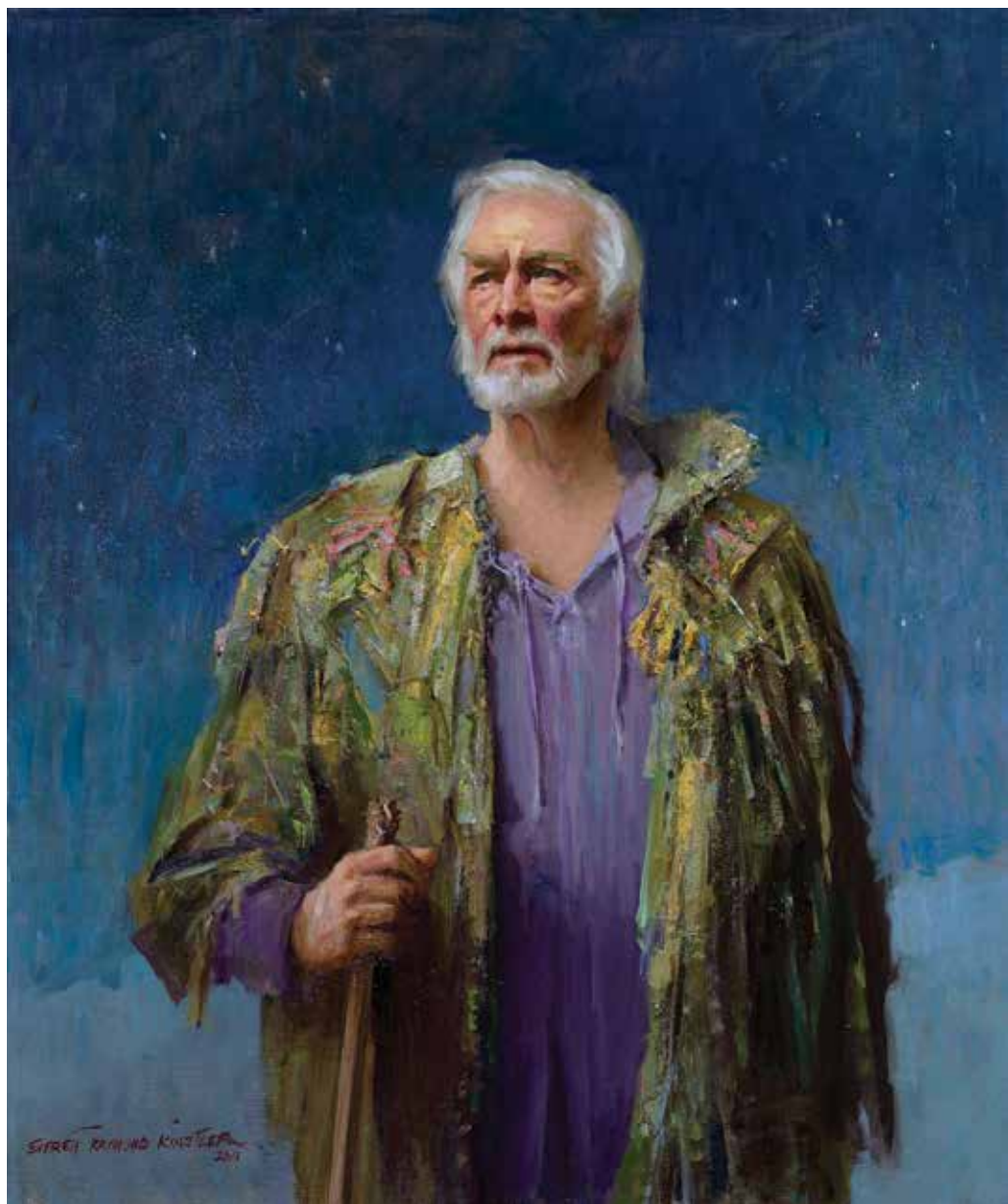
Liv Ullmann, 1984  
 Oil on canvas  
 32" x 38"  
 Collection of the artist



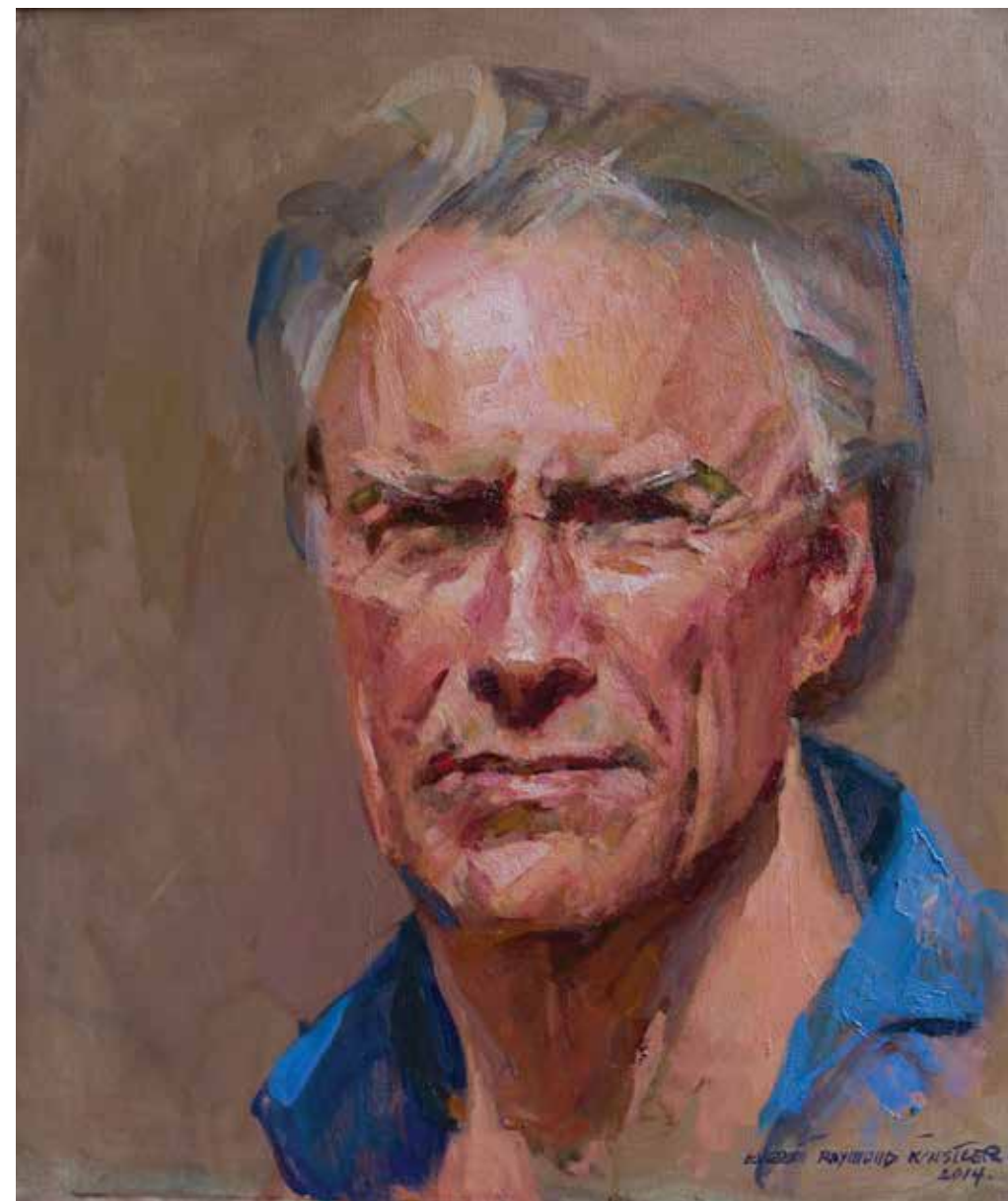
Katharine Hepburn, 1982  
Graphite on paper  
10" x 8"  
Collection of the artist



Katharine Hepburn, 1982  
Oil on canvas  
30" x 24"  
Museum of the City of New York  
Gift of Everett Raymond Kinstler,  
2006



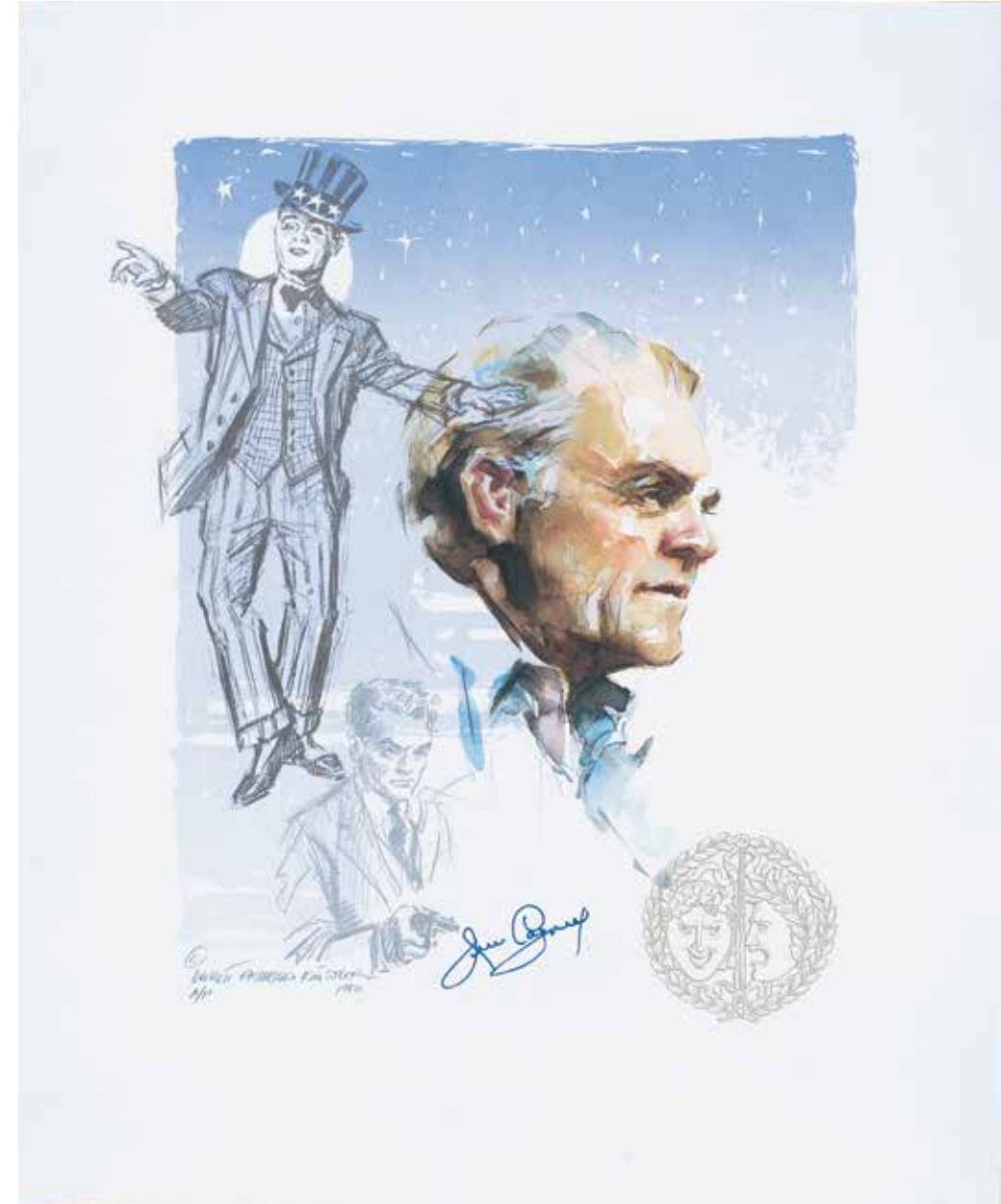
Christopher Plummer  
as Prospero, 2011  
Oil on canvas  
50" x 40"  
Collection of the artist



Clint Eastwood, 2014  
Oil on canvas  
28" x 22"  
Collection of the artist



Life Study for Portrait of  
John Wayne, 1978  
Oil on canvas  
24" x 32"  
Collection of Wayne Rumley



James Cagney, 1980  
Lithograph  
26" x 20"  
Collection of the artist



President Ronald Reagan, 1990

Oil on canvas

36" x 24"

Collection of the artist



Carol Burnett, 1996

Charcoal on paper

20" x 16"

Collection of the artist

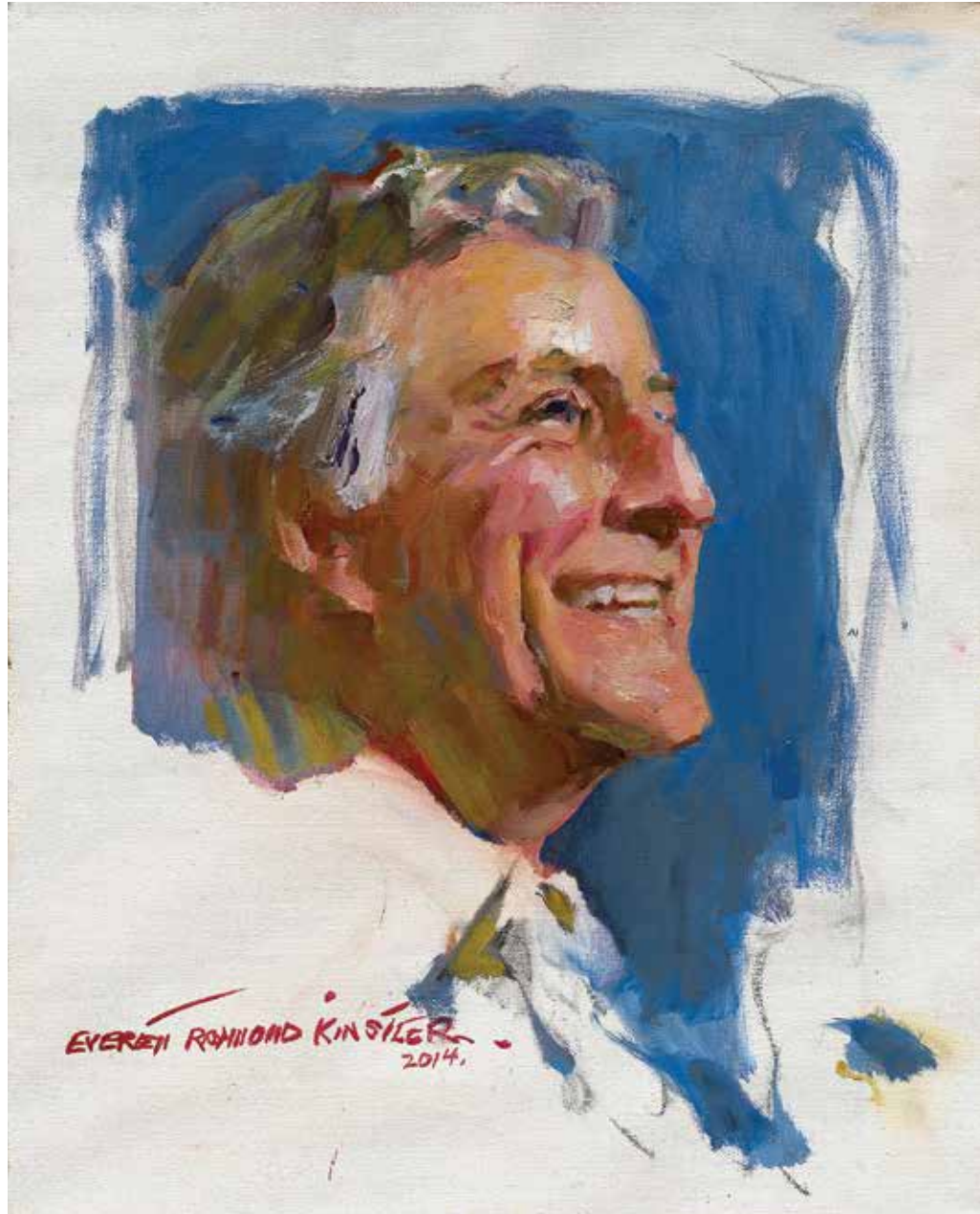


**Bert Lahr**, 1975  
Watercolor, gouache, and graphite  
on Bristol board  
27½" x 17½"  
The Players, New York City



**Movies #5—Actors Who Posed**, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
56" x 60"  
Collection of the artist

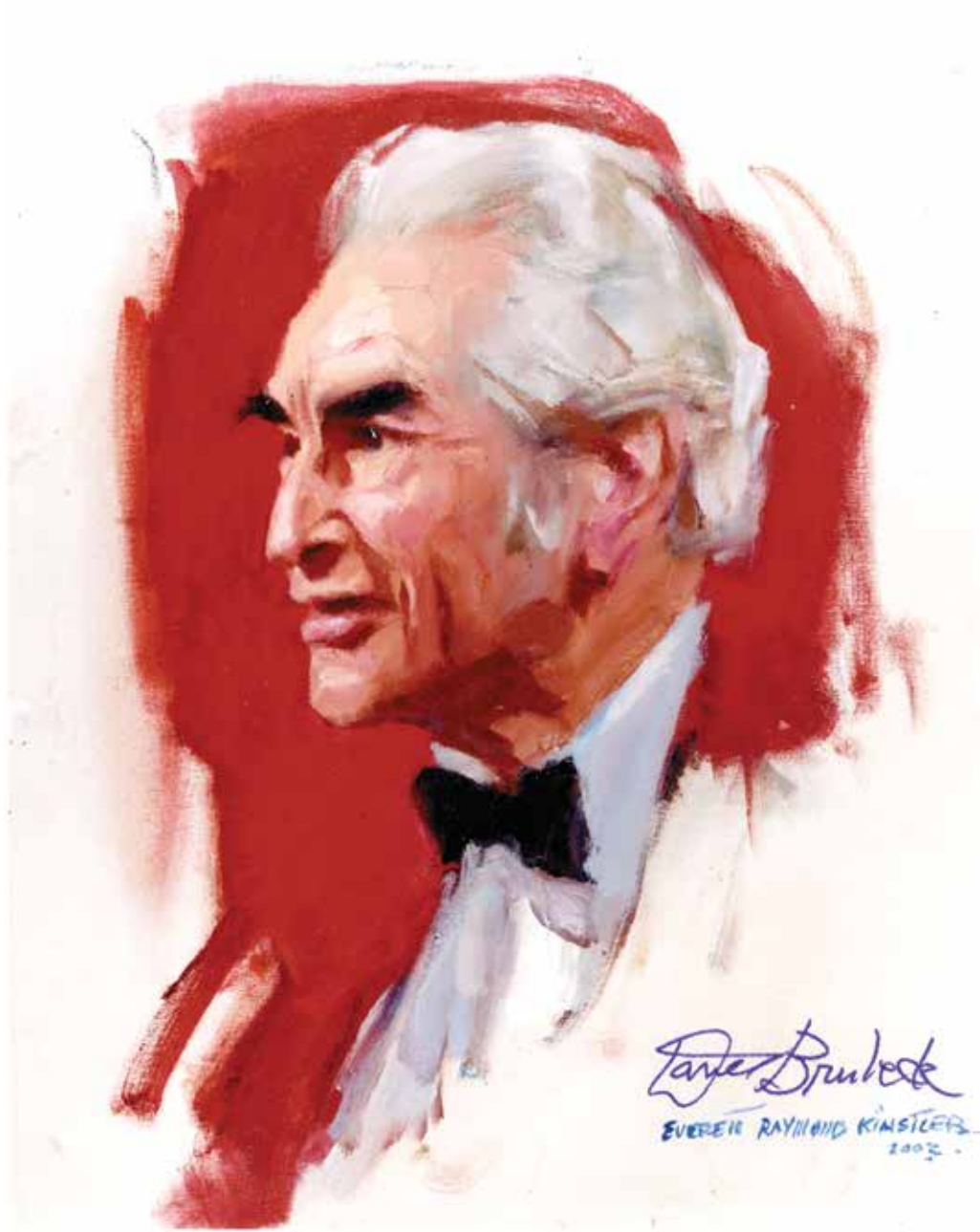
## Performers



Tony Bennett, 2014  
Oil on canvas  
24" x 20"  
Collection of the artist



Marian Anderson, 1990  
Oil on canvas  
20" x 16"  
Harvard Club of New York City

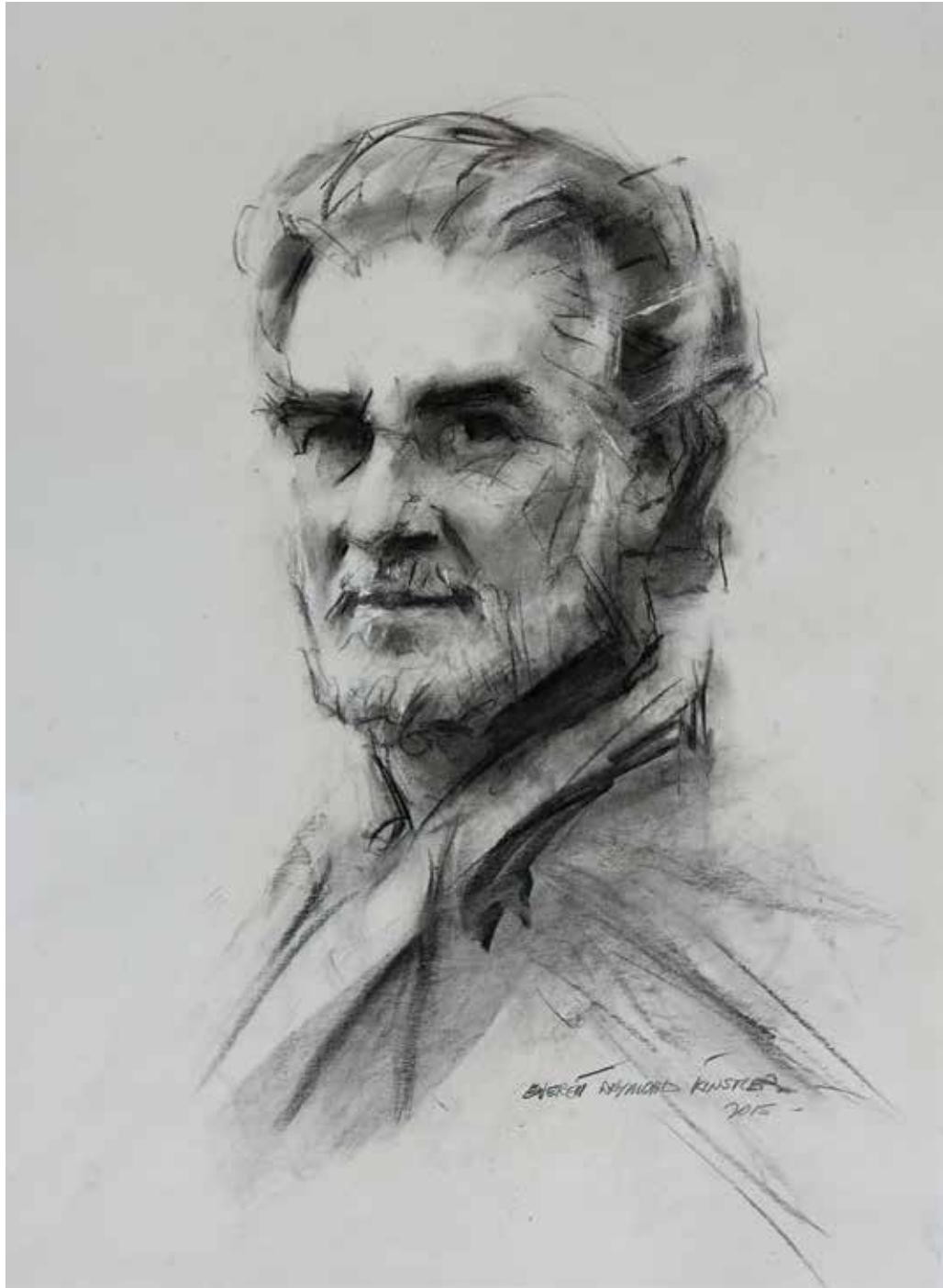


Dave Brubeck, 2003  
Oil on canvas  
20" x 16"  
The National Arts Club  
Permanent Collection



Benny Goodman, 1980  
Oil on canvas  
24" x 12"  
The National Arts Club  
Permanent Collection





**Placido Domingo**, 2015  
Charcoal on paper  
20" x 16"  
Collection of the artist

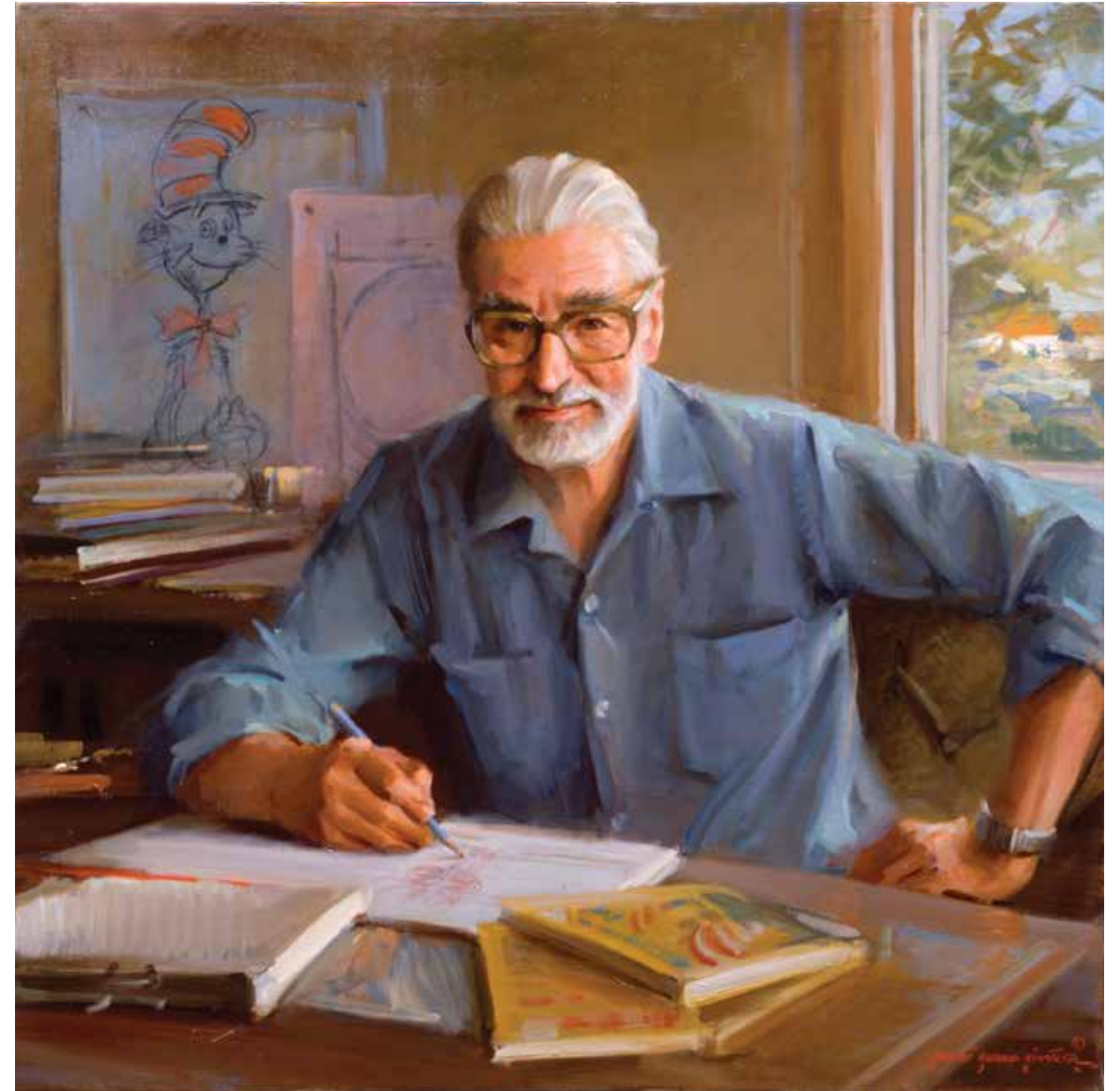


**Placido Domingo**, 1993–2002  
Oil on canvas  
36" x 28 $\frac{1}{8}$ "  
National Portrait Gallery,  
Smithsonian Institution  
Gift of Everett Raymond Kinstler

## Authors

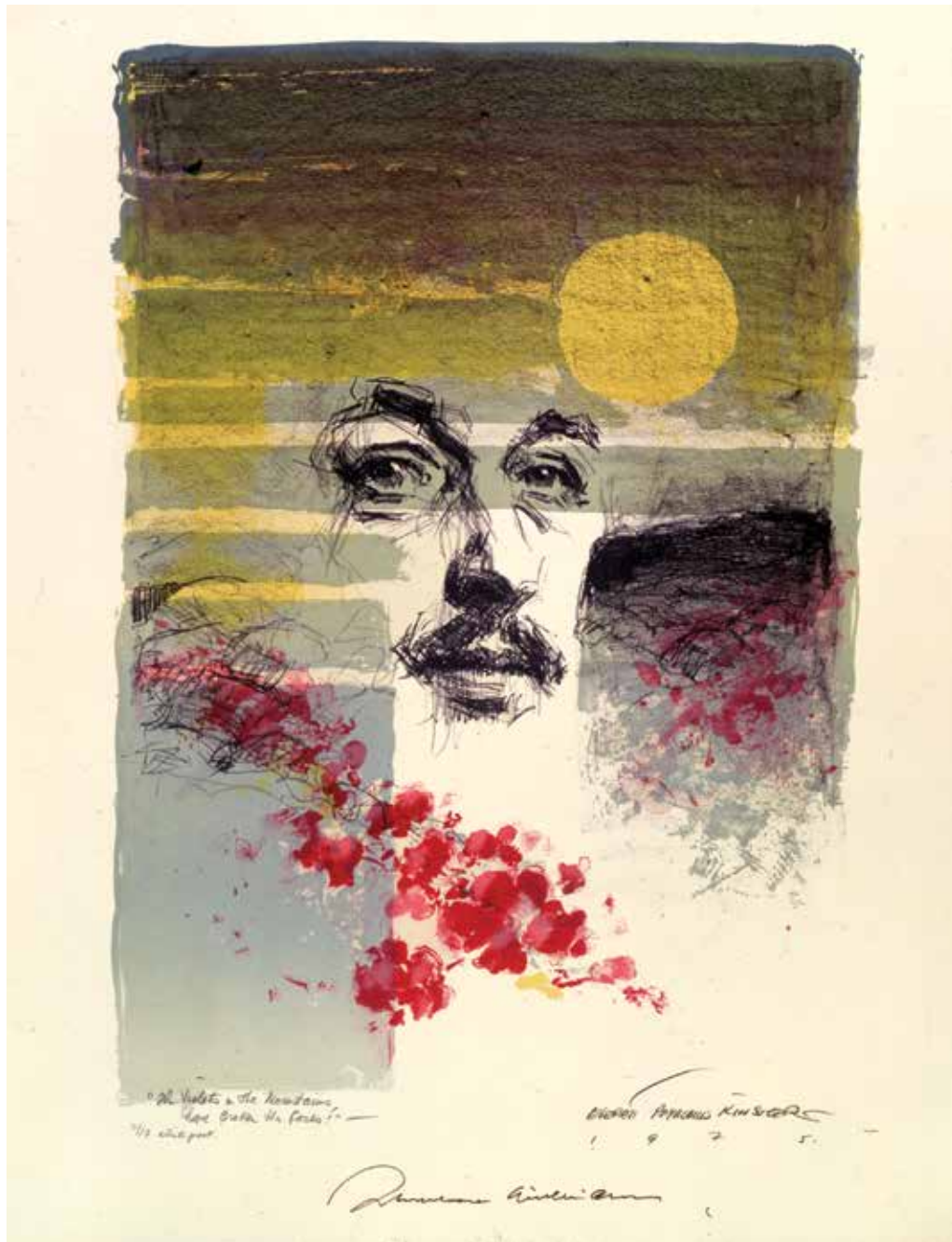


Tom Wolfe, 1987  
Oil on canvas  
50" x 27"  
Collection of the artist



Theodor Geisel, Dr. Seuss, 1982  
Oil on canvas  
41½" x 41½"  
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth  
College, Hanover, New Hampshire  
Commissioned by the Trustees of  
Dartmouth College

## Exhibition Checklist



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Lithograph  
26" x 18"  
Collection of the artist

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Oil on canvas  
31" x 25½"  
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Smithsonian Institution  
Gift of Everett Raymond Kinstler  
© Everett Raymond Kinstler

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Charcoal on paper  
12 1/16" x 9"  
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Oil on canvas  
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50" x 40"  
Butler Institute of American Art,  
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**Life Study for Portrait of John  
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Oil on canvas  
24" x 32"  
Collection of Wayne Rumley

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Oil on canvas  
24" x 12"  
The National Arts Club  
Permanent Collection

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Collection of the artist

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Oil on canvas  
30" x 24"  
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Oil and charcoal on wood panel

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50" x 27"

Collection of the artist

**Marian Anderson**, 1990

Oil on canvas

20" x 16"

Harvard Club of New York City

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The National Arts Club

Permanent Collection

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Oil on canvas

60" x 50"

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**Prospero**, 2011

Oil on canvas

50" x 40"

Collection of the artist

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**Posed**, 2013

Oil on canvas

56" x 60"

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Oil on canvas

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**Placido Domingo**, 2015

Charcoal on paper

20" x 16"

Collection of the artist

*America Creative: Portraits by Everett Raymond Kinstler* is

the third in a three-part series on portraiture organized by

the Vanderbilt University Fine Arts Gallery. The exhibition

is curated by Joseph S. Mella, director, and Margaret F. M.

Walker, assistant curator, with special thanks to the artist,

Peggy Kinstler, and Michael Shane Neal.

**The exhibition is made possible by** Mr. and Mrs. Charles

L. Brock, Robbie and Hank Davis, Mr. and Mrs. J. Michael

Duncan, John and Margarita Hennessy, Mr. and Mrs. B.

Frederick Horne, Mr. Michael J. Horvitz, Virginia Cretella

Mars, Holly Metzger, Michael Shane Neal, Haden and

Jimmy Pickel, Ms. Trish Savides, Mr. and Mrs. S. Douglas

Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Steiner, Neika Stephens, the

Terra Foundation for American Art on behalf of board

member Greg Williamson, Westtown Publishing, and Mr.

and Mrs. Ernest Williams III.

**Additional support has been provided by** two anonymous

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Mr. and Mrs. Arthur E. Byrnes, The Honorable Todd J.

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George C. Paine and Mrs. Ophelia T. Paine, Joelle and

Brant Phillips, Mr. and Mrs. Gustavus A. Puryear IV, The

Honorable Emily J. Reynolds, Kathleen and Mickey

Sparkman, and Dana Kinstler Standefer.

## From the Artist

I am deeply grateful to my dear artist friends, especially Michael Shane Neal for his contributions towards the realization of my exhibition.

Special thanks to Joseph Mella, director, and Margaret Walker, assistant curator, Vanderbilt University Fine Arts Gallery, for their scholarship, direction, and most valued friendship.

Once again, to Peggy...my loving partner in the "journey."

—Everett Raymond Kinstler

### Details

#### Endpapers, front

**Christopher Plummer as Prospero** (detail), 2011

Oil on canvas

50" x 40"

Collection of the artist

#### Endpapers, back

**Tennessee Williams** (detail), 1975

Lithograph

26" x 18"

Collection of the artist

#### Interior, page 12

**Marian Anderson** (detail), 1990

Oil on canvas

20" x 16"

Harvard Club of New York City

#### Interior, page 19

**Placido Domingo** (detail), 2015

Charcoal on paper

20" x 16"

Collection of the artist

