



Portrait of Dan
1999, oil, 20 x 15. Private collection.

so that I make a certain amount of money in a year. It made me crystallize my thinking and methods. I question how I can refine my process to get what I want a lot faster. I have to focus on what is absolutely key. I have to be more accurate and less hesitant, telling myself, 'No fooling around, just do this.' The pressure has been good for me."

Initially, Minifie decided to take her career one year at a time to see if she could support her family by painting. "Things worked well enough that I wanted to keep trying," she says, adding, "There are times when having to be two parents to two kids while having a painting career makes me wonder what in the world I'm doing." Nonetheless, she maintains a studio

in the old converted Manchester, New Hampshire, mill where Ingbretson has his studio, 45 minutes from her home. She loves this roomy space, with its north windows, and she likes being around other painters. "It's also nice to leave home and go someplace where I'm a painter. I'm usually in my studio seven hours a day, six days a week."

Although she continues to paint still lifes, Minifie's main staple is portrait commissions. She prefers to paint her subjects in her studio, where the light is best, but frequently travels to their homes, returning as often as needed. Ideally, Minifie aims for 10 sittings of three hours each. "It's a challenge," she says, "to make people understand the value of working from

life." Sometimes she has to compromise on three or four sittings, initially doing as much as she can from life, then working from photographs later. But, she stresses, "When you're with a person you pick up a lot more than just visual likeness. You get the feel of them. A different kind of presence comes through in a painting done from life."

When she is forced to rely on photographs, she insists on shooting her own with her Nikon and a telephoto lens. She has 11"-x-14" prints developed at a commercial lab. Even if she is painting the portrait entirely from life, she shoots some photographs. They are good reference tools—not only do they make her aware of things she didn't see, but they allow her to view the entire composition and, occasionally, give her new ideas for the portrait.

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The first determination Minifie makes with her subjects is how formal or informal they want the portrait to be. She asks them to bring a choice of clothing to the first sitting, and advises them to pick a color that complements their skin tone. Next, she finds a background color that agrees with their skin tone and clothing. Minifie drapes various colored gauzes over other fabric to create subtle color transitions. "It's like having colored lenses. It helps you get just the right variations of color and value behind the face." Concerning lighting, the artist prefers light behind the dark side of the head and dark behind the light side, allowing both sides of the form to be read. She then sketches the portrait in charcoal on brown wrapping paper. The paper won't last, she explains, so there is no temptation to get too precise with the drawing. She draws quickly,