

WHEN JILL CULVER WAS LAID OFF FROM HER JOB AS A FACILITIES DIRECTOR IN 2002, SHE BREATHED A SIGH OF RELIEF. DESPITE HAVING BUILT A SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN THE CORPORATE WORLD, JILL KNEW IT WAS TIME FOR A CHANGE, BUT NEEDED EXACTLY THIS PUSH TO MAKE IT HAPPEN.

ALTHOUGH JILL HAD DABBLED IN ART GROWING UP, SHE NEVER CONSIDERED PURSUING IT AS A CAREER. IN FACT, IT WASN'T UNTIL SHE WAS LAID OFF THAT SHE BECAME AWARE OF HER OWN TALENT. ONE MORNING, JILL SAT DOWN IN FRONT OF A BLANK CANVAS AND DIDN'T STOP PAINTING UNTIL 14 HOURS LATER. THE RESULT OF THIS FIRST EFFORT WAS AN IMPRESSIVE PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN OUTFITTED IN BLUE FEATHERS AND WITH A FIERY MANE.



Soul Portraits

By Gillian Hersh

Jill wasn't sure where this other-worldly imagery had come from and surprised herself, that with virtually no formal training, she would be able to produce on canvas, and in such detail, what she had only seen in her imagination.

Jill started painting "imaginary" portraits on a regular basis and before long began to feel if people came and sat for her she would get intuitive information about them. After struggling with believing it was possible, she gave it a try. She was thrilled to find that although she had "actual" people as her subject matter, and captured their likeness, she was intuiting information about them that came through in bizarre imagery around them. It turns out that the imagery was personal and meaningful to her subjects. According to Jill, she had discovered her ability to "paint the unseen and to visually connect people with an inner, perhaps undiscovered aspect of themselves." What makes Jill unique is that she does not interview her clients beforehand or try to "figure out" what to paint. The images come from intuition and frequently defy her logic of what to paint.

As an avid animal lover, Jill soon began to apply her unique style to pet portraits. Her very first animal portrait took both her and the pet's guardian by surprise. Jill painted Sausey, a Golden Retriever with soulful eyes, staring wistfully into the distance ... and with rabbit ears tied to her head. When Sausey's guardian first set eyes on the painting she informed Jill that Sausey was mostly deaf and suggested that the rabbit ears were helping her to hear. Sausey was an older dog, and her guardian wondered that if by wearing the ears, a symbol of Easter, Sausey was preparing her for the possibility of her death. Sausey passed away the week before Easter.

Connections like this abound in Jill's work. Take Bonnie, for example. Inexplicably, Jill envisioned this particular dog sporting a pair of sunglasses. Despite the fact that this type of imagery is often unexplainable to Jill, she refuses to censor what comes to her. So she painted Bonnie looking chic in a pair of designer sunglasses. When Jill learned that a vet had recently suggested keeping Bonnie out of the sun to protect her eyes, the interpretation of the sunglasses was evident to both Jill and Bonnie's owner.

People are naturally inquisitive about Jill's process for creating her art. Jill doesn't interview her clients beforehand; she doesn't even require a meeting. She can work from a photo and the subject can be living or deceased. She recently painted a por-



trait of a deceased cat for the guardian who had been mourning her passing for two years. The client found the finished piece reassuring and noted that "the Asian theme of her portrait seems to speak to some very close and unexpected connections to that culture that have shown up in my life recently. That Jill picked up on that was really intriguing. Although gone too soon, I feel like Lily is letting me know she's still with me."

Though it has yet to happen, Jill is prepared for the possibility that her imagery doesn't elicit an emotional response from the client. Regardless, she will continue to paint in this style that is her unique gift. Jill desires to give her clients more than an attractive representation of their pet; she strives to give external representation to the depths of their soul.

Gillian Hersh is the marketing and creative services manager at MHS.

Jill can be contacted at (415) 613-8685 or Jill@JillCulver.com.