

## FEATURE

## Portrait painter has had many a brush with fame

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer



IRONDEQUOIT — He can show you thank-you letters from Sophia Loren, former President George Bush and hundreds of other famous people who have praised his portraits.

But there's one person renowned portrait painter J. Stanley Gordon refuses to paint: himself.

"Some people aren't paintable," he said. "I'm not paintable. I have the mug of a thug."

He may have the mug of a thug, but that may have saved him from hangings in the most distinguished art museums of the world and in the homes of the high and mighty.

A parishioner at St. Thomas the Apostle Church, the 77-year-old Gordon has painted thousands of portraits, including six of Pope John Paul II, one of which will soon hang in the Rockefeller Center in New York City; and a portrait of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen that is now owned by the Diocese of Rochester.

"It's a historical document," he said of a portrait. "It's a tribute to a man and his accomplishments."

Inspired by an uncle who was also a painter, Gordon became interested in art and photography while growing up in the neighborhood around St. Stanislaus Church in Rochester. He has been a professional portrait painter since the 1940s when he graduated from the Rochester Institute of Technology, where he also

taught art from 1956 to 1976.

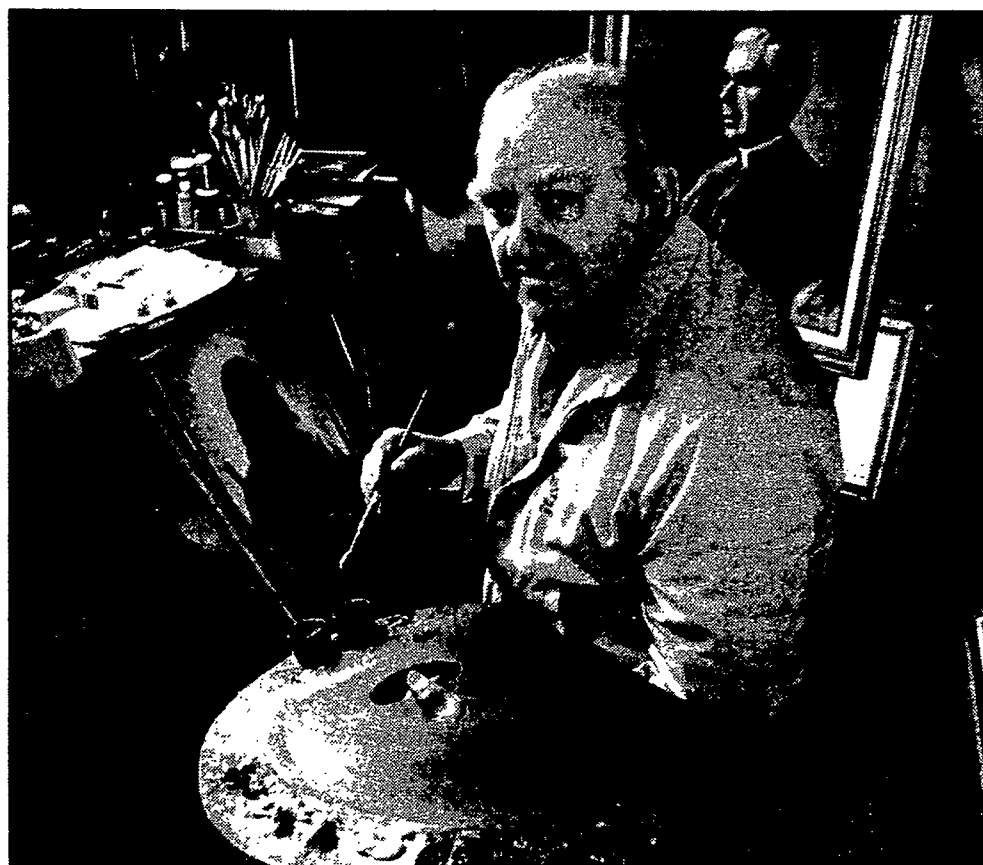
He spent several months during and after World War II as a United Service Organization member, traveling to military bases and veterans' hospitals in the United States, Canada, Iceland and Greenland. He sketched thousands of servicemen for their families, he said. He added that he was treated like a king by commanding officers who, he later found out, actually thought he had been sent there by army higher-ups to spy on them and assess their leadership capabilities.

"Every base I went to, they treated me like an officer," he said. "But I was really there to do sketches. I had an officer's uniform on that I got at Sak's Fifth Avenue."

Along with his own achievements, which have earned the portrait-painter numerous awards over the years, Gordon talks with a gleam in his eye of his accomplished children.

His son, Kevin, lives in New Rochelle, and is a former NBC radio news reporter and anchor who covered Pope John Paul II's 1978 investiture in Rome. Like his father, Kevin Gordon is also a portrait painter who has garnered several awards for his work, his father said.

Meanwhile, fans of the "Regis and Kathy Lee" show on NBC may recall seeing Gordon's daughter Aileen on the program last April when she was featured for winning a recipe contest the show sponsored.



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

Stanley Gordon paints in his Irondequoit home and studio, surrounded by several of his religious paintings.

Aileen, an aspiring country music singer, won for her "Gordon Succulent Soy Sauce Chicken," he noted.

Unfortunately, his other daughter, Celeste, passed away July 12 at the age of 36 from acute pancreatitis. He said that she also was an artist.

Gordon, a widower, has helped many other people cope with the deaths of their own loved ones by painting portraits of the deceased, using photographs supplied by their families, he said. He recalled one moving moment when a de-

ceased woman's mother broke down crying when she first saw the painting he did of her daughter.

"I got this beautiful letter from her," he said. "She's got (the portrait) hanging on her wall like I brought her daughter back or something."

Gordon said he'd like to continue to move people in such a way as long as possible.

"An artist never retires," he says, pointing his finger forcefully. "I can paint until I'm 150."

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