

Lifestyles

Artist Creates Unique and Illuminating Work

By Martin Wilbur

Dorothy Tyor Muson has painted all her life. As an artist, she has been hired to paint commissioned portraits in a variety of projects.

But a trip to Italy about 12 years ago provided her with an idea and a unique business opportunity that quickly took off and has taken her artistry in a new direction.

During that trip, Muson became intrigued with illuminated manuscripts and brought home an idea that blossomed.

"I thought I'd like to try that but I didn't want to make fake medieval manuscripts and so I came home and I started doing some letters, what I would call illuminated letters, using people's initials," said Muson, who raised four children with her husband in Mount Kisco and Bedford for about 30 years before moving to Ossining four years ago.

Muson, combines her portrait painter's talents with the techniques of medieval manuscript painting. She first draws the likeness of the person from a photograph and combines the illustration with various interests in hobbies in the drawing. Then she uses the person's first initial and includes the letter made of a 23-karat gold leaf in the work. The gold leaf is critical because it doesn't tarnish.

"It's taking all of these things and putting it into a design," she said.

Finally, Muson frames the 8-inch by 10-inch work. Each finished product costs \$125.

At first, she made the illuminated letters, as Muson calls them, to provide gifts to friends and family. Recipients were so impressed by her work they asked whether she could make gifts for other relatives and



MARTIN WILBUR PHOTO

Accomplished artist Dorothy Tyor Muson stands with some of her portraits in the basement studio in her Ossining home. Today, she spends most of her time creating the illuminated letters, inspired by a trip to Italy more than a decade ago.

friends.

"People became interested in them and asking if I could do them for a friend of a friend," said Muson who works out of her studio in her basement. "So I turned it into a business and it uses both my portrait skills and my landscape skills because in the illuminated letter there's little portraits of the people, their interests."

Customers email digital photos of the subject they want to have the depicted in the art.

Aside from its beauty, Muson, who worked for about 25 years for IBM before retiring, believes its popularity has caught

on because they're small and precise. She heads to art shows throughout the region and currently has about 40 of her pieces on display at the Flywheel Gallery in Piermont in Rockland County. In October, Muson will be part of the art fair in Pound Ridge. She recently completed another show at Club Fit in Briarcliff.

The most fascinating reaction has been the repeated comments that it looks religious.

"It's funny. When people look at these the first time, the first thing they say is, 'They're religious,' even though there's nothing religious about it," Muson said. "They see



gold leaf and think it's religious."

She understands where the questions about religious use arise. Muson has seen other artists gold leaf do work that is connected with religious ceremonies and milestones but hasn't seen anyone else produce what she has done.

"I have never seen someone who does a personalized (work) with a picture of you," she said. "That's really a personal thing."

If a client doesn't care for the finished product they can ask for their money back but Muson has never had a dissatisfied customer.

Although Muson still does large portraits, right now more of her time is devoted to the illuminated letters.

"This is really fun to do because I've had these shows coming up," she said.

For more information about Muson and her business, log on to www.richhoursart.com or email her at info@richhoursart.com