

PHOTO COURTESY OF SUSAN FARLEY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Daniel Greene painting one of his works for the "Subway Series."

*Renowned  
portrait  
artist's  
subjects  
range from  
Eleanor  
Roosevelt  
to Rush  
Limbaugh*

## A career near picture perfect

BY BRETT FREEMAN  
OF NORTH SALEM NEWS

There are not a whole lot of people on the short list of presidential portrait artists.

But when President Obama chooses an artist to paint his official portrait, which will be displayed in the White House in perpetuity, North Salem resident Daniel Greene will be among the names to be considered for the honor.

"My name will probably come up when work is presented, but I'll just let the chips fall where they may," said Greene, who lives on Titicus Road, a short distance from the Connecticut border.

While he has yet to be chosen yet for such an assignment, the 81-year-old has had friends and students of his whom have been among the artists chosen to paint the 43 official presi-

dential portraits displayed at the White House.

There was one lobbying campaign on his behalf in the 1960s, when his sister's roommate, who was President Lyndon Johnson's private secretary, attempted to win him the assignment. Unfortunately, it never came to fruition.

Nevertheless, Greene, who earns a minimum of \$25,000 per portrait and often up into the six-figure range, has landed a number of notable commissions in his career. One portrait he painted was of former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt that wound up on the cover of McCall's magazine. Greene, who didn't graduate from high school so that he could get a jump start on his career, had never actually been commissioned to paint a portrait of Roosevelt. Rather, he was an admirer of hers and set up his easel while watching her give a lecture at Brandeis University. When she died

in 1962, McCall's was looking for a colored photograph to run. A friend of Greene's had seen his portrait and got in touch with the magazine and set up a meeting.

"At the time, I was quite young and struggling," Greene recalled. "A reproduction of one of my works in McCall's magazine would have been a bonanza. So I left the portrait there. I quickly tried to find out what illustrators charge for things being reproduced."

Overnight, Greene did another portrait from photographs of Roosevelt that he obtained from the public library.

"When I went back up to their office to discuss the possibility of their using it, they were very coy," Greene said. But while he was waiting in their office, he oversaw plans of his portrait for their cover, and the rest was his-

## GREENE

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tory.

When it was published, half loved it and half hated it, which was apparently dependent on how people personally felt about her, according to Greene. But that wasn't the end of it. In 1994, Greene presented his portrait of Roosevelt to First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton during a White House ceremony.

### THE EARLY YEARS

Greene grew up in Cincinnati.

"I knew from a very early age, in fact 5 years old, that I wanted to be an artist," he said.

At the beginning of his senior year of high school, he decided to drop out. He knew he wasn't going to college and was anxious to start studying art. His parents were fine with his decision because they understood his talent.

At first, he moved to Miami Beach with the intention of getting a job, saving money and going to art school. In Miami, he saw artists doing pastel portraits in storefronts, on sidewalks and inside hotels.

"I watched them work and thought to myself that it would be a great way to learn and to earn a living," he said. So he spent a year doing pastel portraits on Collins Avenue before moving to New York City in 1953, when he began his formal studies at the Art Students League of New York, a world-renowned institute. Years later, he taught there and at the National Academy of Design School.

He knew at that point that he wanted to do portraits the rest of his life and found it the most challenging part of painting.

In 1963, he began working for Portraits, Inc., in New York City. They represented several hundred nationally recognized portrait artists and had a gallery on Park Avenue. The process went like this: Someone would come to the gallery or receive samples through the mail. They would then select an artist whose work they liked based on style and price range.

Greene noted that many corporate and government positions require the acquisition of a portrait and he also said that it is a tradition for many families, most notably in the south, to commission official family portraits.

If selected, Greene would be informed by his company and would be given the contact information of the subject. He would arrange a meeting, generally at the subject's office, which would involve scheduling the sittings. Typically, he would schedule about 10 sittings of three hours each and they would go to Greene's studio on West 67th Street.

"Regardless of how busy or important they may be, they would

find time," Greene said.

Sometimes the sittings would be on consecutive days or once a week or even once a month, which is what he did with a former governor of Nevada, whose portrait took about a year to complete.

These days, he often obtains a photograph of a subject and holds a sitting at the end of the project.

Greene has also been commissioned to paint posthumous portraits, including one for William Randolph Hearst for the Hearst Corporation, former Michigan Gov. George Romney (the late father of the last Republican presidential nominee) and first Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, which apparently hangs in a collection at Princeton University.

"These days, with the Internet, commissions come as a result of people seeing your work online in addition to galleries," Greene said.

Greene said that very few people are difficult clients.

"Both parties size one another up," Greene said about the official meeting before the commencement of a portrait.

Do people ask him to white-wash their blemishes or help them lose a few pounds?

"That just doesn't come up," Greene said. "The way you conduct yourself pretty much prevents people from imposing their wishes on you. That all has to do with the way you conduct the portrait sittings."

Greene likened being a portrait artist to being a reporter.

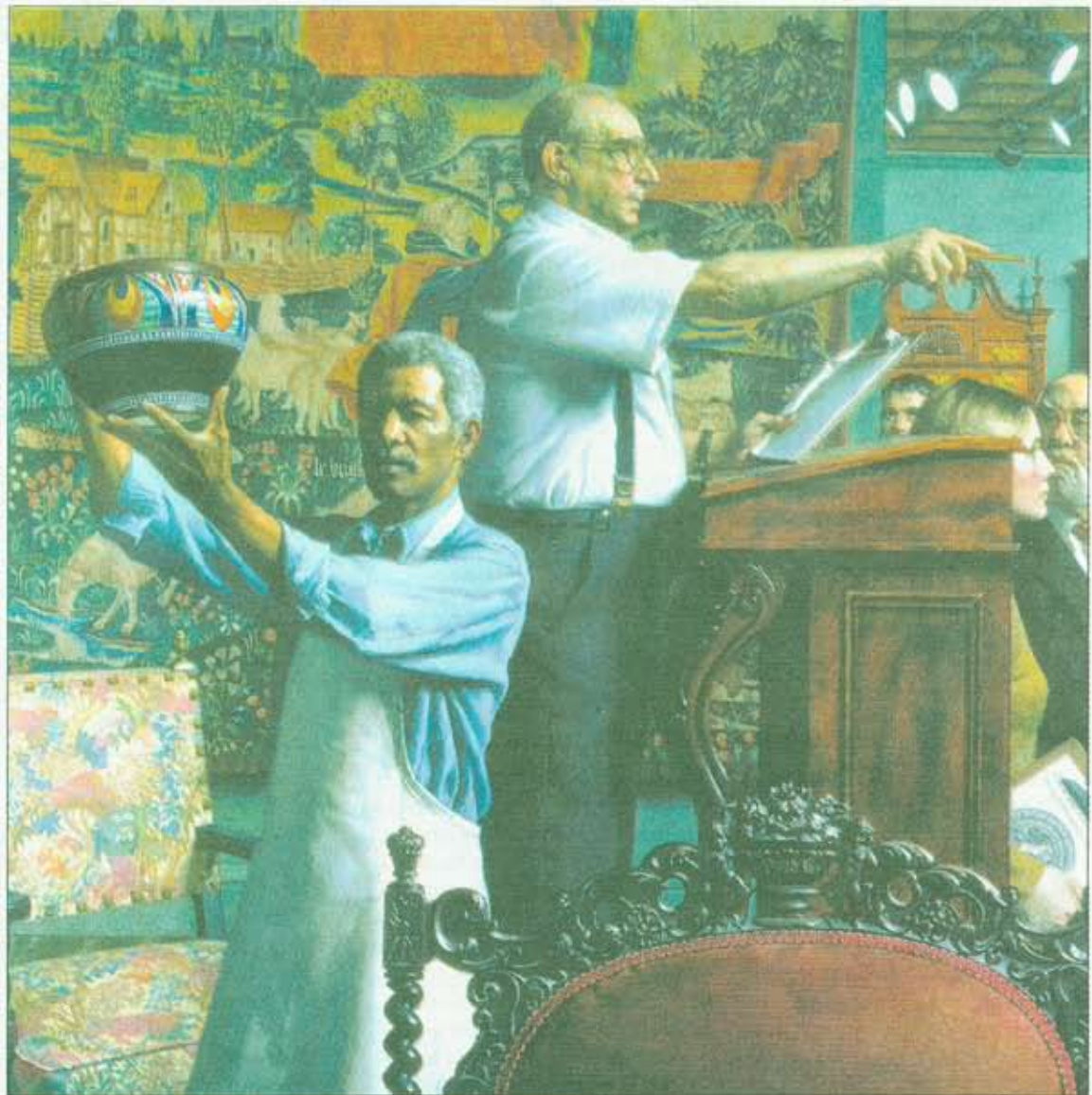
"It is my job to paint my impression of what that person conveys to me," he explained. "In order to do that, you have to be able to get a perfect likeness. So, that's a given. But if one can get a perfect likeness of a time, it then becomes a question of the portrait artist bringing out the significant characteristics that everyone seems to recognize about that particular person."

### NOTABLE SUBJECTS

One of his most notable subjects was Ayn Rand, the American novelist and philosopher who has a large following among contemporary libertarians and conservatives.

"I was part of her inner circle," Greene said. "She had a group of fans. I might even call them followers who were admirers of her, admirers of her philosophy. And I was part of that group who were close to her for a number of years. Her philosophy appealed to me because of her insistence on maintaining one's integrity and not compromising. And I related to that. At the beginning of my career, she gave voice to the integrity that I thought one should have as an artist."

Greene said that he found their discussions fascinating and he did a number of portraits of her.



One of the pieces from Daniel Greene's "At the Auction" series.



The founder of Wendy's, Dave Thomas, was a "charming" person, according to Daniel Greene.

"And she would come to my studio and we would work for a short period of time, and we would debate for several hours. Debate every stroke. Then later that night I would go to her apartment and we would continue our discussions or she would come back to my studio

with an aesthetician friend of hers and we would have additional discussions about painting."

Greene clarified that their discussions were not political in nature.

"My views are very liberal and hers are ultra-conservative," he

said. "The part of her philosophy that I related to had to do with the integrity of the artist. She used it as an opportunity to learn about painting. I used it as an opportunity to have discussions with someone who was extremely articulate and quite bright."



Daniel Greene presenting then-First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton with a portrait of Eleanor Roosevelt during a 1994 White House ceremony.



PHOTOS AND RENDERINGS ARE COURTESY OF DANIEL GREENE

Daniel Greene working on his "Subway Series."

Their friendship lasted for several years and Greene was the artist who painted Rand's portrait on the cover of her book, "For the New Intellectual." Greene was also interviewed for the Oscar-nominated documentary, "Ayn Rand: A Sense of Life."

Greene emphasized that everyone is a valid subject to him. "I don't draw the line," he said. "It isn't a negative to me to paint someone whose political views I may not relate to."

Greene said he was on the very short list to paint a portrait of President Richard Nixon and was looking forward to it even though he was not a fan.

"I was not a Republican at that time," he said. "I was not a fan of Nixon. He just would have been a fascinating person."

Greene also did a portrait for conservative talk radio host Rush

Limbaugh, whose politics he doesn't "care for."

"Rush Limbaugh was a very cooperative model," he said. "He was very good at posing. All my dealings with him were quite pleasant. I did a full-length life-size portrait, which apparently now hangs in Palm Beach at his residence."

Greene charged Limbaugh \$90,000 for the painting. But during the many hours that they sat together, they had very little conversation.

"I kind of squelched the conversation, so we really didn't get into anything," he said. "He asked me a question about art. I gave him some sharp answer. That just curtailed any more conversation. It wasn't deliberate. He had some cliché thing to say and I kind of shot it down."

Another notable subject included the late Wendy's founder, Dave

Thomas.

"Oh, he was delightful," Greene said. "Absolutely charming."

At one point during the sitting, Thomas asked for a stand-in to wear his diamond ring so that he could watch Greene paint it.

At another point he was commissioned by George Lucas to do a portrait of Natalie Portman for a book about "Star Wars."

One stand-out client included Dorris Helen Hudgins, the widow of the man who invented xerography, Chester Carlson. Hudgins commissioned Greene to do a portrait of her and a posthumous portrait of Carlson with his machine, among others. She and her husband supported a great deal of research around the world in parapsychology.

"And she knew ostensibly who she was in a previous lifetime," Greene said. "She said she knew

who I was. She had visitations in my studio. All of which was, to coin a phrase, dead serious."

And none of which, to this day, does Greene believe.

In addition to client portraits, Greene has other interests, including portraits of scenes in the New York City subway system and portraits of scenes from auctions.

In 1953, when Greene moved to New York, he rode the subways and noticed the mosaics on the walls.

"About 30 years ago, my wife and I went to Europe," he said. "And I noticed the mosaics in Pompeii and in the Vatican. And I recalled that I had seen mosaics in New York. Many of the mosaics that I saw in Europe were very beautiful. And I thought I'd like to revisit my idea of doing a painting in the subway, which is where I remember mosaics were."

So, Greene went to the New York City subway with the intent of painting a picture of two people on the bench. But as he was going through the subway, he was inspired by an enormous amount of material.

To date, he has done 117 subway paintings, which have gotten worldwide publicity, with galleries calling it his "Subway Series."

His "At the Auction" series was inspired by his move to North Salem 35 years ago when he and his wife needed furniture. To furnish their house, they went to stores, antique shows and auctions.

"I found that the auctions were particularly dramatic," he said.

Few of his own paintings have been resold at auction yet.

"I'm now 81. When I'm gone, very likely some more of my work will come up at auction," he said. "And by virtue of not being around anymore, they become more valuable."

### HOME IN NORTH SALEM

Greene moved to North Salem so that he could teach his growing classes.

His original teaching studio in Gloucester, Mass., was no longer available in the summer and his studio in New York City was too small for classes that needed to accommodate several dozen students at one time.

"I, in effect, drew a circle around New York City of 50 miles distance and decided to look for accommodations within that 50-mile range," said Greene, who had never heard of North Salem. Before buying his property, he looked at over 40 locations.

"The studio was the prime concern," he said. "Having living accommodations along with it was secondary."

His property had been used as a dairy farm.

"When I saw the barn...I knew immediately that it would make a terrific studio," he said. "And I

prayed that it faced north because I rely on a north light for my work."

Greene explained that the sun never crosses the northern sky. So the direction of the light is constant every day; only the intensity and brightness changes.

"Artists have been working in north light studios for 600 or 700 years," he said, adding that this changed when electric light came into being.

When he checked out his property, he took out a compass.

"I found that it faced northeast slightly," he said. This means that in summer mornings, shafts of light come in. But during all other times, it works just fine. "I can't really begin until about 10:30 in the morning until the shafts of light dissipate."

In his summer classes, which hold several dozen people on the second floor of his barn, there is no specified age range. He seldom has anyone younger than 17 or 18, and has had students all the way into their 90s.

His students come from all over the world.

During this summer's classes, which just ended, he had students from Alaska, the United Arab Emirates and China.

He also produces instructional videos that are purchased all over the world. At his summer classes, students enroll for a minimum of a week, with classes seven hours Monday through Friday and a three-hour portrait demonstration on Tuesday nights and Sunday nights.

"There is a great mix of talent in my class," he said.

When classes are not in session, Greene gets in the studio between 9:30 and 10 a.m.

"I work all day; I don't have lunch; and I stop when the light fades," he said. "I put in full days every day. I paint all the time, on holidays, and I don't take vacations. I'm fascinated with painting. It's a passion. And so I don't want to waste any time at all. I'd rather be painting than anything else. So I have no hobbies. The only vacations my wife and I take are to go to museums."

While this is probably his last summer of teaching classes, he has no plans to retire.

"You just don't retire from this kind of thing," he said.

Greene's wife, Wende Caporale, is also a portrait artist, specializing in children's portraits. She met her husband while attending one of his classes.

Together, they have two daughters, Avignon Greene, who is attending graduate school for architecture at the University of Texas, and Erika Saraf, who has acted on Broadway and in films.