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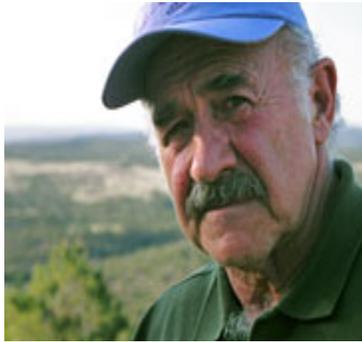
ARTS IN AMERICA

An Art Explorer Finds the Real Creators of Works

By DAVID GEARY

SANTA FE, N.M. — It is the iridescent black eyes that strike you first. From an open, plain face they blaze with intelligence, frankness and an incongruous humor.

The small oil-on-paper portrait of John Marshall — the fourth chief justice of the United States, who in 34 years leading the high court did more than any other judge to shape American jurisprudence — seems a bit incongruous itself, hanging in the Fred R. Kline Gallery here.



Mark Kane for The New York Times

Fred Kline of the Fred R. Kline Gallery of Santa Fe, NM

With more than 75 art galleries and a half-dozen museums in a city of just over 60,000, Santa Fe is a world-class art destination. But in a place where the local pantheon is dominated by Western icons like Georgia O'Keeffe, Fremont Ellis and R. C. Gorman, an 1832 painting by the Southern portraitist William James Hubard is something of an anomaly.

This little gallery, tucked into an adobe warren of shops across the street from the Museum of Fine Arts near the city's historic plaza, is full of such splendid anomalies. Besides the portrait of Marshall (which is appraised at \$100,000 and was on display there last month) are drawings believed to be from Verrocchio's workshop in Florence, circa 1466; early 17th-century Flemish masterpieces; and late-19th-century German drawings.

Fred Kline, 62, who with his wife, Jann, has run the gallery since 1979, calls himself an art explorer.

"I still call myself an art historian, but the term art explorer has a little more verve in describing what it is I do," said Mr. Kline, a former writer for National Geographic who specialized in profiles of American cities. "It's an exciting but precarious occupation. The work is painstaking and tedious; it often takes several years from start to finish on a project. But it's my passion, and I love it."

What Fred and Jann Kline do is scour antiques stores, estate sales and auctions — in person, online and on the phone — looking for unusual, often misidentified works.

In a "dismal, smelly shop" in Texas a couple of years ago, Mr. Kline said, he came across a framed drawing lying on the floor. It had a price tag of \$60.

"It was the first thing I picked up," he recalled. "The owner of the shop said, 'That's a pretty nice print,' and knocked the price down to \$50."

Back in Santa Fe, Mr. Kline began months of research and, when he believed he knew what he had, sent the drawing (for it was a drawing, not a print) to Christian von Holtz, the director of the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, Germany, who authenticated it.

The drawing, "Bernese Oberland Landscape With Women Working," is an intricate landscape by the German master Joseph Anton Koch, done in black ink, and brown wash and pencil, was bought by Eugene V. Thaw, the New York art collector and philanthropist, and is now in the Eugene and Clare Thaw Collection of drawings, which is promised to the Morgan Library in New York. It sold for a substantial sum, but Mr. Kline refused to be specific.

The Marshall portrait is one of the more intriguing of the Klines' discoveries.

Asked to appraise an estate in Los Alamos, N.M., several years ago, Mr. Kline met with Elizabeth Marshall, the widow of the nuclear physicist John Marshall Jr., a direct descendant of the chief justice. The painting had hung in a corner of the family dining room for decades, and Mrs. Marshall did not know much about it, he said.

The face was a masterly rendering, but the body and background seemed weirdly amateurish. Mr. Kline was not able to discern much about the work and was not much interested in it. But as time went on, he could not get the face out of his mind.

He contacted Mrs. Marshall's stepson, John Marshall III of Boulder, Colo., also a physicist, and he agreed several months ago to let Mr. Kline clean and research the painting.

Using the Internet, he found a book devoted to portraits of Marshall. In it there was a portrait that looked almost exactly like the painting he had. The painter was identified as William James Hubard.

"It kind of knocked me over because there it was exactly," he said. "There were seven versions of it, along with portraits by 10 or 12 other artists."

Because the portrait Mr. Kline has is the only one painted on paper, he believes he has found the study for the subsequent portraits.

Mr. Kline called Ellen Miles, the curator of the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, where an almost identical portrait of Marshall painted by Hubard in 1832 has hung since 1974, when it was donated by the Marshall family. Dr. Miles confirmed the painting's origin.

Hubard was a prodigious silhouette maker in his native England and came as a young man to the United States, where he studied painting, reportedly with Gilbert Stuart in Boston and Robert Weir in New York. As a portraitist working primarily in Richmond, Va., he painted James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun and other Southern luminaries of his day.

"Hubard was not one of the big names of 19th-century painting in the way that Sully or Eakins is," Dr. Miles said in a recent telephone interview. "In a funny way, I would use the word 'modest' to describe him," partly because of the size of the paintings and "because of his background."

The ungainliness of Marshall's body as depicted by Hubard in the full-length portrait and the darkness of the background have prompted Mr. Kline to mat the painting so that only the bust shows through an oval opening.

"Certainly as a portraitist he was first rate; that's really where his fame lies," Mr. Kline said. "His figurative talents were considerably less than his talents as a portraitist."

But the ill-proportioned portrait may accurately portray the real Marshall.

In her book "50 American Faces From the National Portrait Gallery," published by the Smithsonian, Margaret C. S. Christian quotes Marshall's Supreme Court colleague, Justice Joseph Story, as observing that Marshall's body was "without proportion," and that it "seemed as ill as his mind was compact." Thomas Jefferson, one of his few enemies, referred to Marshall's "lax, lounging manners."

Still, it is Marshall's face — particularly his eyes — that contemporaries found so remarkable and that Hubard succeeded in capturing.

In his eulogy, Ms. Christian wrote, it was said that the chief justice's eyes were "dark to blackness, strong and penetrating, beaming with intelligence and good nature."