Renowned Artist Simmie Knox Shows Portrait Masterpieces at DSU

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Simmie Knox has come a long way in his art career since his DSU days in the early 1960s.

The renowned portrait painter came back to DSU on Nov. 18 to give a presentation in the Education & Humanities Theatre on the progression of his art career. In giving a chronological presentation of his art works and how it has developed into a lucrative portrait commission career, Mr. Knox noted that his move into the art field began at Delaware State College in 1961-62.

Enrolling at DSC initially to pursue a science teaching career, Mr. Knox said that a science faculty member noted his sketching skills and recommended that he consider changing his major to art.

Simmie Knox talks about of the First Lady portrait (in the background) he did of Hillary Clinton.

Mr. Knox changed his academic focus to art and the rest is history. Mr. Knox later transferred to the University of Delaware and ultimately graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Art and a Master of Fine Art from the Tyler School of Art at Temple University.

In his presentation, Mr. Knox showed the abstract artwork he created as the focus of his efforts early in his career. He shifted his specialty to portraits in the early 1980s and it has been in painting the likeness of many prominent subjects that he has made a nationally known name for himself.

As Mr. Knox showed a generous sampling of his portraits, he also shared anecdotes about the prominent subjects he has painted. One of his early prominent commissions was to paint a series of portraits for the family of comedian Bill Cosby. “I did the portrait of his mother Anna Cosby and I learned where he got his humor from,” Mr. Knox said. “She left me in stitches numerous times.”

After he landed an opportunity to do a portrait of the legendary Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, which led to numerous of commissions to do portraits of other prominent federal and state jurists throughout the country.

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was impressed enough with the portrait done of her that she recommended Mr. Knox to then-President Bill Clinton, who commissioned Mr. Knox to do his official White House portrait, as well as one of his wife Hillary Clinton.

Through a power point presentation, Mr. Knox shared many other portraits – Muhammad Ali, former NYC Mayor David

Dinkins, Oprah Winfrey, the late historian Dr. John Hope Franklin, Delaware Supreme Court Justice Randy Holland, the late singer Lou Rawls, Hall of Fame baseball player Hank Aaron, numerous jurists and many others.

Simmie Knox's portrait of the late Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.

Mr. Knox was brought to the University for the Nov. 18 event by Dr. Donald Blakey, director of the DSU Theatre and Dance Program. Dr. Blakey was a physical education instructor of Mr. Knox during his Delaware State College years.

After answering questions from the audience, Mr. Knox went to the University's Art Department where he looked as some of the DSU students' works and held a more intimate discussion about art technique with them. He then completed his day at the University with a lunch reception with DSU Acting President Claibourne Smith, Provost Harry Williams, other faculty and guests.

Simmie Knox was invited to do the presentation by Dr. Donald A. Blakey, director of the DSU Theatre and Dance Program, who brought the artist in connection with his Harlem Renaissance events taking place during the week. Dr. Blakey was a physical education instructor of Mr. Knox during his Delaware State College years.

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