

New England oil painter Mary Minifie applies what she has learned from her strict academic training to her career as a portraitist and still-life painter.

Profiting From Academic Tradition

by Linda S. Price

Even after Mary Minifie graduated from Wellesley College with a major in studio art and later attended the Boston University School of Fine Arts, she still felt she didn't have enough training. "I wanted to know how to paint like the great painters, like Sargent and Velázquez," she recalls. While living overseas for nine years, she sought out teachers while continuing to paint, exhibit, and sell her artwork. Finally, when Minifie and her husband returned to Boston in 1985, she discovered the work of Paul Ingbretson and a light dawned.

She realized Ingbretson's approach was the inspiration she had been searching for.

Ingbretson's painting and teaching methods can be traced back to the 19th century and the French Academy. The artist received instruction at the atelier of R.H. Ives Gammell, who had been trained by William McGregor Paxton, a prominent painter associated with the Boston School of artists. Paxton himself had spent four years in Paris, where he studied with Jean-Léon Gérôme, an artist strongly influenced by Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825).

Minifie studied with Ingbretson for nine years, learning the traditional, rigorous methods of the French Academy, following the slow, prescribed route from cast drawing to still-life drawing to portraits, and finally graduating to figure painting. "It was intense training in how to see," she explains. The emphasis was on how to view form, shape, color, and value in relationship to one another. Accuracy and proportion in Ingbretson's drawing lessons were paramount. Added to this were the values that he had inherited from the Boston School: the importance of seeing the true nature of color and making color reflect the exact value and hue, instead of resorting to formulas.

After this intense training, Minifie considered herself a serious follower of a fine tradition, "but then my husband died very suddenly of a heart attack. I was forced to go from being a serious painter immersed in the classical tradition, able to paint for my own personal goals, to supporting myself and two children as a portrait and still-life painter," she explains. "It was mainly a change of intensity. I now have to be on a timetable, setting things up



LEFT
The Chinese Cloth
1994, oil, 21 x 22.
Collection the artist.

OPPOSITE PAGE
Erin
2000, oil, 21 x 16.
Collection the artist.