

## weekend visual arts

# Portrait of an Antrim artist

ONE of Northern Ireland's most distinguished portrait artists is Cushendun's Peggy Spence.

Modest Peggy, who is a retired art teacher, has painted a number of well-known local figures and actors.

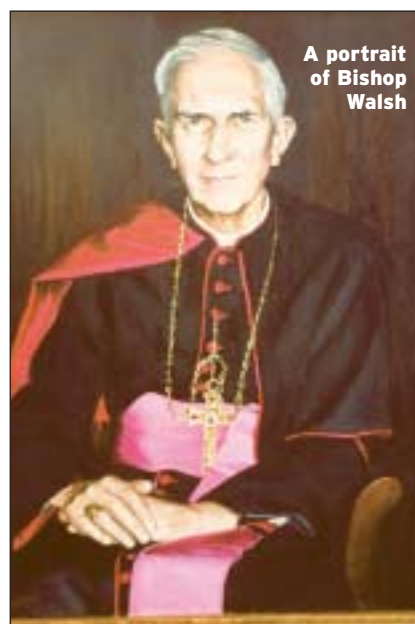
Now retired and living in the picturesque glens of Antrim, Peggy says: "I've been painting all my life."

"I never intended being an art teacher, but just like most of my portraits, I was just approached and ended up loving my work."

Having taught for 16 years, Peggy inspired many of her pupils, including the very talented oil painter Simon McWilliams.

"From he was a little boy, it was very obvious that Simon was going to be something very special, but there were lots of other talented kids I taught over the years" said Peggy.

The talent also runs in the Spence genes, with her daughter Karen also an



A portrait of Bishop Walsh

**Jenny Lee talks to Peggy Spence,** an artist who specialises in portraits

artist in her own right. She specialises in fine detailed drawings and she has already held exhibitions in Longford and western Ireland.

Peggy has recently completed a commissioned painting of Bishop of Down and Connor Patrick Walsh.

"I first met Bishop Walsh when he was president of St Malachy's College when I made a pencil sketch of him and told him that one day I would paint him in colour," she said.

Peggy has also painted a number of local actors including John Hewitt, Joe McPartland, JD Devlin and Louis Rolston.

Some of these works can currently be seen hanging in the Lyric Theatre.

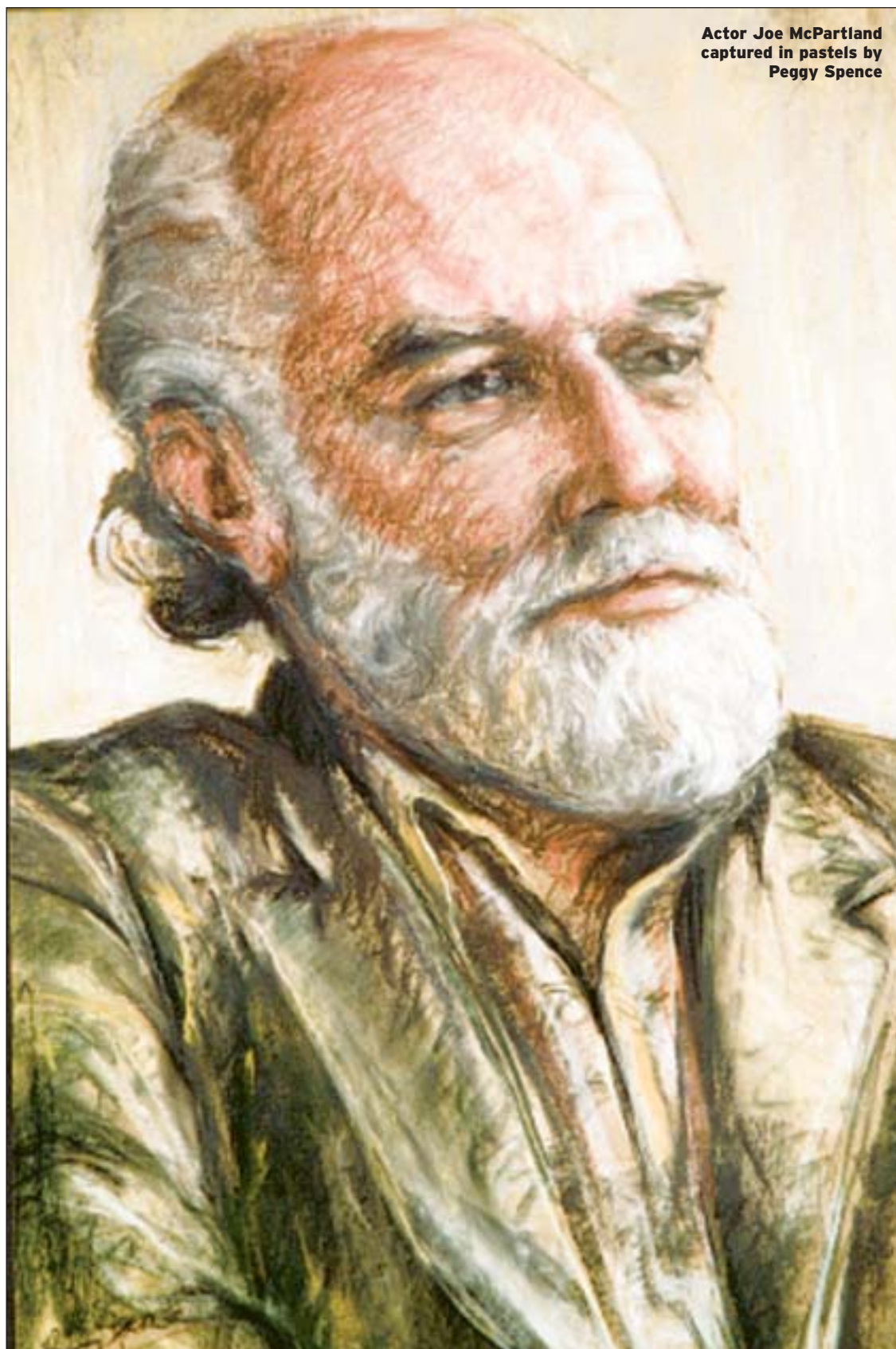
So what is Peggy's secret to portrait success?

"I think portrait painting is something you have to be really interested in," she said.

"I've always wanted to do it since I was a little girl."

"You end up loving people you paint. You have to not only look at them, but think about them too, and really understand them. It can take up to eight sittings," she said.

When asked what celebrity or person she would like to paint, Peggy failed to be drawn to the dazzling Hollywood greats, saying she enjoys everyone she paints.



Actor Joe McPartland captured in pastels by Peggy Spence

Preferring to work in the mediums of oils and pastels, Peggy also enjoys landscape painting, taking inspiration from the countryside around her.

"I have a studio at my home, but I tend not to actually work much in it."

"I do love the outdoors, its such a contrast to portraits. I like the sea, but I also like trees and animals, it just depends on my mood and where the light falls on things."

Peggy also confesses to taking sketch books on holiday with her, though after

being stopped at customs and asked to squeeze out her paints and oils, she now leaves the paints behind.

Peggy has held exhibitions of her work in the past, however says "I would love to hold another exhibition in the near future, but I first need to get more work together as my work keeps being sold."

Having gone to art college, where she specialised in sculpture as well as fine art, Peggy also says she would like to get back to doing some wood carving.

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## Art bridges the generation gap as Turner Award is made

in the news

PAINTER John Turner, now 86 years old, had the satisfaction of seeing the first winner of The John and Rachel Turner Award receive her prize on Tuesday August 6.

The presentation took place in the University of Ulster's Belfast Campus in York Street where John had an exhibition of work earlier this year to celebrate the establishment of the bursary which carries his own and his late wife Rachel's name.

Through a donation to the university

John has established an endowment fund, which will provide a bursary of approximately £1,000 each year to the graduating artist who is outstanding in their field.

This year's winner was Jane Swanston. She recently graduated from the University of Ulster's School of Art and Design with a 2:1 Honours Degree in Fine and Applied Art.

An independent adjudicator, art consultant Dickon Hall, selected Jane from the exhibition of final year students work in recognition of her accomplishment across a range of medium and styles.

The John and Rachel Turner Award adds a nice touch to the already immense contribution that John Turner has made to fine art in Northern Ireland.

Many of the north's established artists studied under him in the years he spent as a lecturer at the College of Art and Design.

For future young artists, whose earning capacity is often quite limited as they struggle to perfect their art and establish their name, this award will provide valuable support and encouragement.

Among those attending the

presentation were a number of John Turner's former pupils: Neil Shawcross and David Crone, following in John's footsteps as lecturers in art, Dr Brian Kennedy from the Ulster Museum and Denis McBride.

John was accompanied by his niece Florence Loughlins and his great nephew Stephen.

Jane Swanston, who has already exhibited work in a number of galleries around Ireland, says she will use the award to buy paint to continue with her work. She was delighted that John Turner was present to see her receive the first cheque from his bursary.

## happenings

### Mixed realities go on show

By David Roy

THE Works, an exhibition of original, limited edition prints by David DuBose and Eddie Rafferty, opened at The Ballance House last Friday, and will remain on show throughout August and September.

The exhibition showcases lithographs, etchings and drypoint by two of Northern Ireland's most prominent printmakers, who take different approaches and deal with contrasting subject matters.

Eddie Rafferty's work is based on the tradition of story-telling, inspired by the people and landscape of his home townland. "Since leaving college, my work has been about groups of people, usually men," says the artist.

"The images tell stories of superstitions, bravado, memories of childhood heroes and villains..."

David DuBose, on the other hand, produces images as a reaction to mysteries; the cycle of life, love, gravity, magnetism, the structure of the physical universe.

He says: "I am interested in the relationship between the physical and the spiritual - between the known and the mysterious."

The resulting exhibition is a distinctive collection of limited edition original artwork.

**The Works continues until September 29 and is open to the public Tuesday to Friday, 11am - 5pm / Saturday and Sunday 2pm - 5pm**

### A first for the Trace Gallery

WORLDS APART by Betty Maguire is the first solo exhibition to be hosted by Trace Gallery.

Composed of bronze and glass sculptures, the show casts natural debris such as leaves, seaweed, seashells, feathers and wood in globes, bronze and glass.

Betty Newman-Maguire graduated with a first class honours degree in sculpture from the National College of Art and Design in Dublin in 1988, and was awarded a Masters of Fine Art from the University of Ulster, Belfast in 1998.

She has mounted 12 solo exhibitions in Ireland and America, and has exhibited at major group shows in Ireland, representing her country at exhibitions in France, Denmark and America.

Already, critics have been quick to praise Betty's latest work. Dr Ben Simon comments: "This exhibition explores the world we now live in, the way we perceive it and the way it can change for us. Our presence is reflected in the use of cast hands, faces and music scores..."

Dr Slava Sverkova, member of the AICA, and Honorary Research Fellow of the University of Ulster also rates the exhibition. He is particularly impressed with Betty's ability to express the fragile nature of our relationship with the world around us.

He says: "Betty Newman Maguire creates precious objects, well and lovingly made. She plays on proverbs and sayings, provokes hidden connections and all the time drives forward her belief in good and our ability to do good."

"At the same time, she issues warnings about the fragility of our existence, the insecurity of our 'ownership' of the world. Each of her works weighs heavily on feeling - her art has always been unashamedly emotional..."

**Worlds Apart runs until September at Trace Contemporary Art Gallery, Royal Avenue Belfast. Tel: 028 9032 6544**