

Pandemic sparks *masked* portrait project

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SISTERS — If we've learned at least one thing this year, it's that not everyone reacts to a pandemic in the same way. Take writers and artists, for instance. For some, the stresses of the COVID-19 shutdown made it difficult to focus, effectively shutting down their creativity as well. Yet others found that having time to contemplate and work in splendid isolation proved fruitful.

Sisters artist Paul Alan Bennett falls into the latter camp.

"For artists, it's actually, I think, in some ways, kind of an ideal situation," Bennett said. "You're getting this time to reflect and really put your time into your work. For me, that's been a great gift that's kind of surprised me. I'm usually booked up almost every day to do things."

Pre-pandemic, his interests and obligations led him to spend a considerable amount of time driving to and from Bend.

"And all those things just stopped," he said, because of the pandemic, which in a sense became the focal point of his art during quarantine.

Bennett, a printmaker, has spent the last several months photographing people, mostly Sisters residents, in their masks, from which he makes interpretive monotypes.

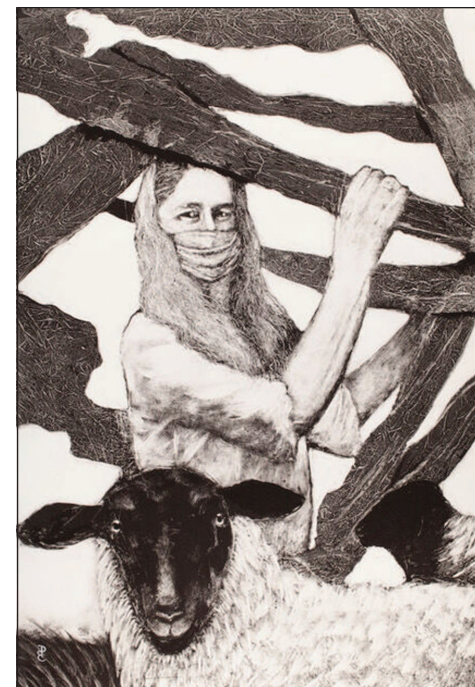
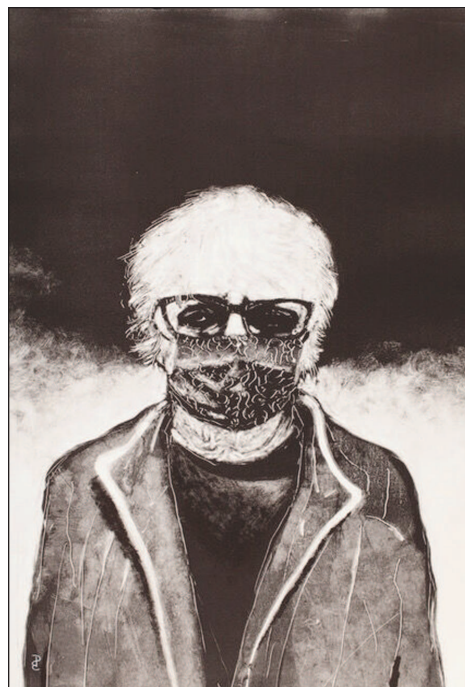
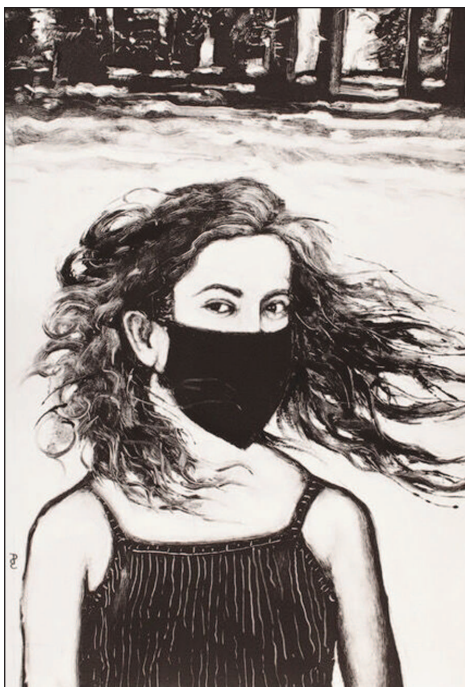
Two things sparked it: first a New York Times article urging people to draw each other without looking at each other for five minutes.

"Carolyn and I did that," Bennett said, referring to his wife, artist Carolyn Platt. "It reminded me how much I like doing portraits. I used to work as a portrait artist, and I got kind of tired of it. Then ... I started doing quick little sketches of people on Zoom conferences, so that got me interested in the portraits again."

Afterward, he made one of the portraits into a monotype and was pleased with the results. Events continued to point him toward an ongoing portraiture project, such as spotting a grocery store clerk wearing a U.S. flag mask. Bennett asked if he could take a photo.

"He was fine with that, and so I worked up a monotype from that and posted it on Facebook," Bennett said. "It got a lot of response, and so I thought I should start doing more."

He began taking photos, from which he made interpretive monotypes, starting with other members of Studio 6000, the Sisters



Submitted images

Sisters artist Paul Alan Bennett began making masked portrait monotypes after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. He plans to compile the portraits into a book as "kind of a historical document that could be relevant for a long time."

printmaking studio where he works, located just a mile from his home. He moved on to fellow patrons of Fika Sisters Coffeehouse, across the parking lot from the studio, to other folks around Sisters.

Bennett welcomed the challenge of capturing something of the essence of his subjects while a very critical part of their faces was covered.

"An awful lot can be said through the eyes. But also, with the mask, it's not like people have any expectations that I'm going to do anything beautiful or attractive," he said.

One of the drawbacks of doing portraits professionally was that it got formulaic, as portrait studios always try to show people in the best light.

"That gets boring after a while," Bennett said. "This way, I introduce elements of mystery, beauty, fun and imagination, and I can ... bring in elements from the past, and I think it makes

for a much more interesting portrait."

He has all the portraits he needs for compiling them into a book, which he'll finance through Kickstarter, as he did with his first book, "Night Skies."

"This time we're in right now is going to end at some point, but it doesn't mean I have to get it done by then," he said. "I feel it's kind of a historical document that could be relevant for a long time."



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