

THE CREATIVE LIFE

Up close with local people in the arts

BY GAILE ROBINSON

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Laurin McCracken

Who: 65-year-old architect and chief marketing officer at Jacobs Carter Burgess in Fort Worth. He took up a watercolor brush several years ago and found, with a bit of schooling and a smidgeon of encouragement, that he had a knack for highly realized still-life depictions in a most unforgiving medium.

Late to the art: "I was 60 years old before I learned I could do this. I didn't know anything about it, and it's a very process-driven painting style," McCracken says. He missed taking a watercolor class on his way to an architecture degree at Rice University, so years later he signed up for a class at the Art Institute of Chicago.

He had a natural gift for painting highly reflective surfaces such as cut crystal and sterling silver. He began to specialize in still lifes that included ornate glass or crystal vases and silver services. Painting such objects with oil paints or acrylics is not for the fainthearted; it's tedious, but mistakes can be painted over and reflections can be added on top of the ground color. Painting them in watercolor, where white areas are the unpainted paper, is extremely difficult and time consuming.

His technique: To get the intricate detail, McCracken paints each reflective surface, every little facet of cut crystal, as "if it was a single abstract painting." He can't move on to the next facet until the first one dries. Each painting takes more than a hundred hours of work.



Immediate gratification: Since he began painting, he's been awarded membership in 10 watercolor societies, including the three most prestigious in the U.S. These groups host their own shows, award prizes and memberships. They are insular, highly competitive and not given to immediate acceptance. McCracken's late-in-life breakthrough is remarkable.

On exhibit: McCracken's work is hanging in several corporate headquarters and at Princeton University. A display of his work is on exhibit through May at the Milan Gallery in Fort Worth, 408 Houston St., 817-338-4278; www.milangallery.com.