



A portrait by Claire Lambe.

Claire Lambe's accomplished oil and acrylic portraits at the Uptown Gallery are a reminder that this most traditional of genres still has relevance today. Lambe, a native of southern Ireland who attended the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, lives in Woodstock with her playwright husband, Carey Harrison, and teaches at the Woodstock School of Art. She paints mostly ordinary people, most of whom pose for her in person; her expert drawing skills enable her to successfully render a likeness by delineating the planes of the face and body with precision. However, her painterly instincts ensure that the work is never stale or academic. Lambe often paints directly on the canvas and her fresh approach breathes life into the image.

"I'm not interested in painting like an impressionist or a Dutch master," said Lambe, while acknowledging her interest in both. "I'm very interested that my painting have a sense of the now, that it records who we are at this point in history." While Lambe sometimes uses photos as reference points, she generally avoids painting directly from a photograph. "It's important that for a period of time the person can sit for me and I can have that communication with them," she said, noting that most paintings are done over the course of nine or 12 hours of sitting, followed by her finishing the backgrounds and clothes from a photo or memory.

Despite today's avalanche of technology, nothing is able to capture a likeness as well as a painted portrait, she noted. "When I paint from life, I'm combining hundreds of thousands of moments, which coalesce into one thing. A painting brings more life to a subject than a photo, which captures an instant. Portraiture gives people a gravitas. It gives ordinary people a posterity."

