

# Portraits of the Artists

## Behind the Canvas With Three People Painters

By CAROLINE DREWES

Examiner Staff Writer

Who, on the local scene, are the portrait painters of the moment?

Ask around, among the bright and beautiful people, the people who have their features immortalized in pigment for posterity . . . and you will hear three names.

Joseph St. Amand . . . an articulate, sophisticated, warmly humorous man, who has had shows at the Legion of Honor, most recently a show at the Baner Gallery in New York. Divorced, now a bachelor again at 41, he has focused on portraits after a period of "landscape sort of things, in which nuns confronted unicorns . . . There is a great satisfaction in portraits, in capturing what I think is a psychological as well as a physical likeness." His work is handsome, decorative, meticulous in detail. He augments his earnings as a painter with a part time job in an architect's office.

Gunnar Anderson . . . three years ago he gave up his position as art director for BBD&O to make his living as a painter. Designed his house "around my studio" on a high hill in Sonoma, where he lives with his wife and three young children. Painting children is his specialty, but he does landscapes too, and he will tell you his charming, sensitive impressionistic studies are NOT portraits in the sense that his subjects sit for him "with folded hands and a string of beads." He captures the characteristic attitude and gesture along with the likeness . . . "split seconds of gesture and deed from the bright pages of youth."

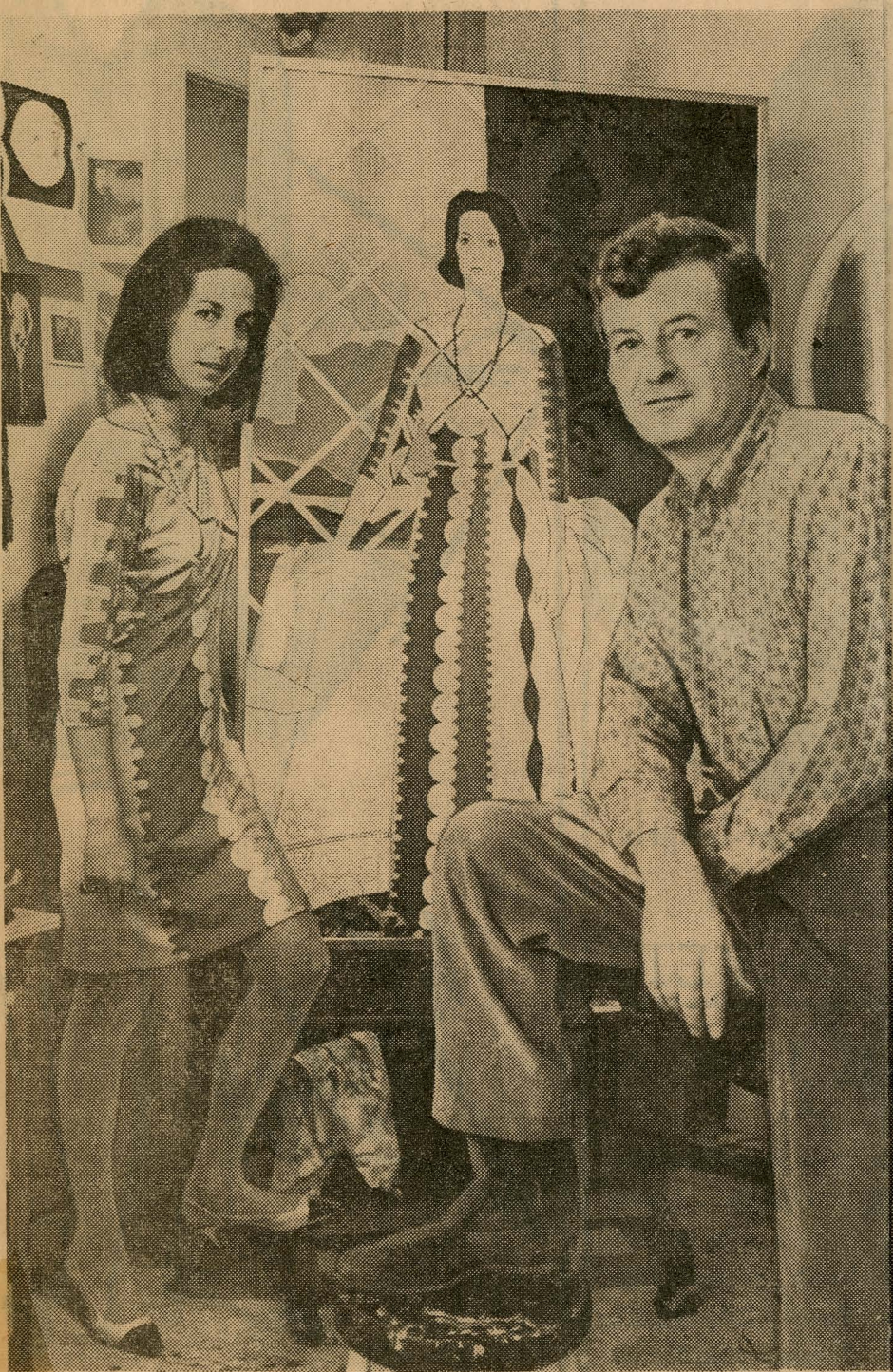
Ira Yeager . . . at 28, youngest of the three. Tall, slight of frame, dark of brow, with gentle brooding deep brown eyes. A small income allows him to devote his time to painting. Lives on Potrero Hill within earshot of the factory whistles, in what was once a factory worker's house, a dwelling he has converted to his needs with characteristic imagination, flair. His paintings have been termed bold, contemporary . . . "I like to paint people looking their best," he says, "the way they should be remembered." Of the three artists, he branches out into jewelry and metal flower design and wonderful brass shapes he calls Moroccan wind bells. To amuse himself, he does small medieval portraits.

So here are three painters . . . each different in style, in technique, in personality . . . each in the limelight, each enjoying recognition among the chic, the worldly, the art-aware, the portrait-minded people.

Come visit with each for a moment.

"My father is a painter. He used the family dining room as a studio . . . Our meals smelled of turpentine and we used to push the paints aside in order to eat." . . . It is Joseph St. Amand talking, in his small rented Victorian a few blocks from Ira Yeager on Potrero Hill, where the tiny front room studio is cluttered with an infinite variety of things and he has hung a mirror on the wall, for depth, to reflect his subjects . . . "I studied architecture in college then turned to art. I had always painted. I

—Turn to Page 4, Col. 1



Mrs. John Bowes' portrait becomes "timeless," when artist Joseph St. Amand "alters" Pucci frock to classic floor-length



# Three S. F. Portraitists

—Continued from Page 1

took up portraits after one restless rainy day when my then wife suggested I paint her. I'd never known I could achieve a likeness."

His passion for portraits leads him, when there isn't . . . a commission at hand to "seize people right off the street."

He painted Mrs. John G. Bowes regally . . . in a striking purple and lilac Pucci print, a short dress which he portrayed reaching the floor "in the interest of timelessness." To him, there is a Byzantine quality to the Portrait.

"I finish the face first and the flesh . . . the rest is up to me. It's my fantasy. I leave the face expressionless, passive, so each viewer may determine what the subject is like by the posture, the texture of clothes and surroundings.

"If the painter tries to catch a candid expression, he is treading on the photographer's toes. Conversely, the camera cannot reflect the psychological implications of the subject.

"Women are easier to paint than men . . . less self-conscious . . . more used to being looked at."

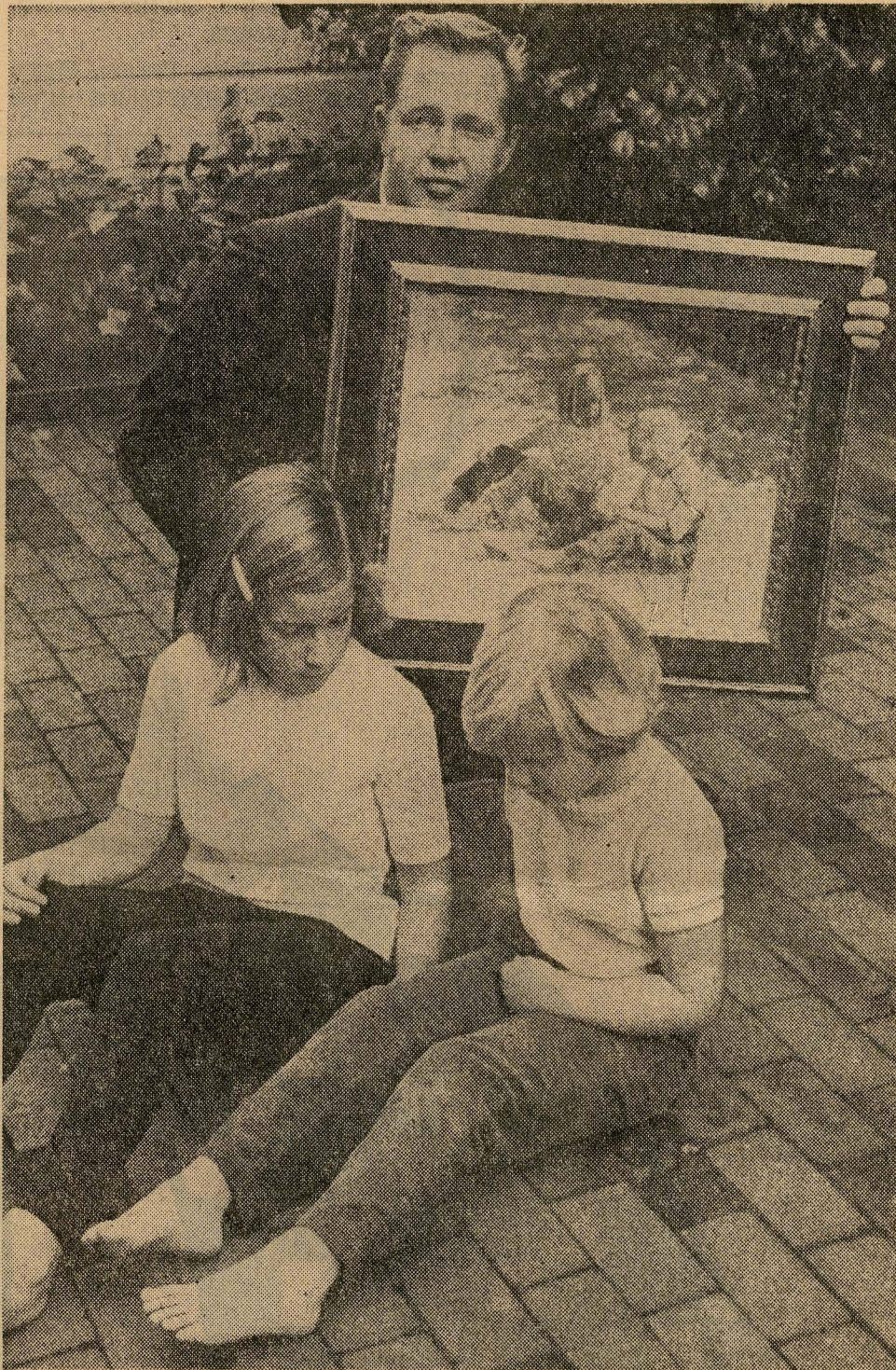
St. Am and lives with comfortable old furniture, house plants, Oriental rugs and a garden. And with two cats and a small brown dog named Leslie . . . "because he looks like the late Leslie Howard, of course. Look at those worried eyebrows."

On his free days he may paint from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. . . . "If I feel like it . . . but if the time rolls around to plant bulbs, I stop painting and plant daffodils."

Now listen, for a second, to Innis Bromfield, whose Pantechnicon on Union Street is the local gallery for Ira Yeager and Gunnar Anderson.

"Gunnar prefers being commissioned to do a painting rather than a portrait per se. He doesn't want to be typed as a portrait painter in the sense that you would find his name in the yellow pages under that heading."

"I know you don't do portraits . . . but I want you to do a painting of my children," is the way Mrs. William R. Phillips Jr. approached Gunnar Anderson



—Examiner photo by Matt Southard

Recapturing mood of portrait by Gunnar Anderson . . . Alix, left, and Katherine, young daughters of the William R. Phillipses

. . . His way of approaching his canvas . . . After he has met the children, he arms himself with dozens of unposed candid snapshots of them. "Children cannot pose" . . . Then, since "Inevitably, I see children one way, the parents another," he completes a series of paintings for their choice. (Alex Phillips, enchanted, bought four separate oils of her daughters.) The portraits the parents do not select, Gunnar sells to others, who buy them as paintings. "What I

fleeting, intangible elements."

"Today I can make a living painting; this would not have been true 10 or 15 years ago. The new interest in culture, in art has made it possible."

He lives a "totally satisfying" life . . . his three children, built-in models . . . the green and gold Sonoma countryside affording "all the background I

need." He built his own sailplane, discovered the site for his home while soaring over the Sonoma hills. Away from the easel . . . "You can't paint ALL the time" . . . he relaxes on long hikes or by constructing frames for his paintings.

And Ira Yeager . . . This is the setting in which Ira works: up a narrow twisting entrance staircase . . .

Whitewashed plaster and wood beams inside . . . A great wooden cage housing three twittering finches, fastened to one wall . . . A zebra skin on the living room floor. Paintings of zebras by Ira . . . An old high-backed settee upholstered in blue and white mattress ticking . . . A huge brass bucket of hydrangeas on an old wooden chest, once a Spanish family altar . . . On the kitchen table, a basket holding pineapple, oranges, grapefruit . . . and eggs. Ferns, ivy plants everywhere. On the coffee table, a string of amber Moroccan prayer beads looped over a water buffalo's foot.

Ira specializes in portraits "Because basically I'm interested in people" . . . but "I feel it's necessary for an artist to do a lot of different things in his field, in order to grow and learn."

"When I sat for him, he was constantly asking questions," Mrs. John Fell Stevenson interjects, "We talked about everything but the weather."

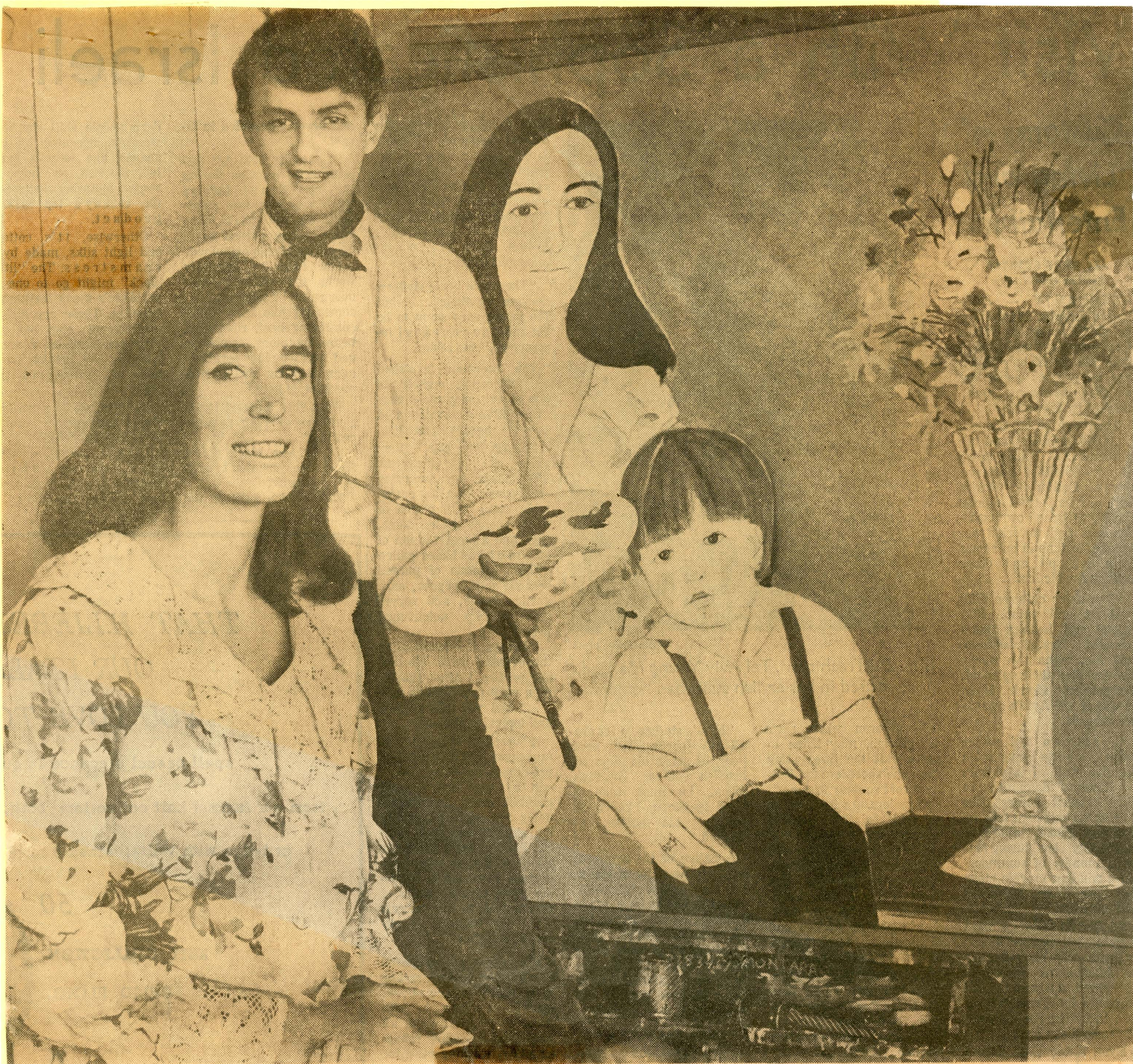
Ira begins a first sitting with tea and conversation, conducts his portrait sessions thereafter with conversation . . . and harpsichord music on the record player. (Mrs. James Ludwig is his next subject.)

When he had finished the portrait of Natalie Stevenson, against a pink background, with her small son John Fell Jr. at her knee and a vase of tender spring flowers by her side, Ira added a section of canvas to the bottom, making it a full length portrait (he is apt to do this portrait-in-sections sort of thing . . . "The sculptor in me, I guess").

But hanging in the Stevenson dining room the complete painting made her look "too matriarchal" Natalie declares. And she removed the added piece of canvas.

To Ira, Natalie Stevenson was an ideal subject and he sought to put on canvas "the very feminine, ethereal quality of Natalie . . . She makes me think of the Russian court" . . . His definition of a good subject: "One who doesn't put up barriers."





—Examiner photos by Bill Nichols

Mrs. John Stevenson, photographed at final sitting for portrait with son John Fell Jr. by Ira Yeager



AN EXHIBIT titled "Favorite Artists," most of whom usually have one-man shows of their own, will be previewed on Monday, April 28, in the new offices of Grubb and Ellis Company on Union street . . . Sunday painter Milton T. MacDonald Jr., who is managing the new office, has gathered paintings from The Pantechnicon and Pomeroy Galleries for the three-day exhibition.

AMONG LOCAL artists represented will be Gunnar Anderson, Jack Johannsen, Ira Yeager, Edward Luper, Dong Kingman and Geoffrey Lewis . . . a no-host dinner at Los Gallos after the preview is being organized by Mrs. Warren Debenham Jr.

SF CHRON. 4/1/6



IRA YEAGER  
A favorite artist