

# Artist creates unique portrait style

By Seth Augenstein  
Staff Writer

*HOMEGROWN: This is the second part of a series of features spotlighting the artists and musicians in Glen Ridge. The artists will be featured at a boroughwide festival on Sept. 9.*

Lori Loebelsohn is an artist using her heritage and history to construct art that common folk can appreciate.

“I don’t think there’s anything wrong with making art that’s accessible to every day people,” she said from the third-floor studio of her home.

Loebelsohn, a graduate of Cooper Union and Hunter College, works as a learning specialist at the Montclair Kimberly Academy and has painted traditional portraits for most of her career. However, when a unique opportunity arose to combine American quilt folk art with traditional Jewish forms, she decided to attempt the approach.

The newest style she’s hit upon are the “life cycle” portraits that mix Jewish Ketubah — ancient, illustrated marriage contracts — with some traditional American folk art forms. Her images show a mix of events and interests that tell about a person’s life, or the significance of an event. In her own way, she is simply reporting what she hears in interviews in seemingly simple but vivid illustrations.

“When I did the normal portraits, it was always tedious, painstaking labor. ... These life cycles are more fun, and I’m more comfortable doing them,” she said.

They’re also a reconciliation between her fine-art days, and her illustration days. In her days at Cooper Union, she

worked in abstract forms, but she also went on to illustrate several children’s books during the years for the likes of Hareper Collins and the Cambridge University Press. So the new style of portraits mix the two, and she couldn’t be happier.

Although Loebelsohn is still working on original portraits for all kinds of special events and groups, such as for bar and bat mitzvahs, weddings, and even for the Montclair-based political activism group BlueWave NJ, she said that she is also working on making them into a kind of business. She has learned some Photoshop and other computing skills that might enable her to mass-produce some of her work for future clients.

“It’s something that’s really personal and different, but there are elements that can be repeated,” she said.

In the meantime, she has a children’s book in the works called “Gerty’s Farm,” which is based on the actual American Revolution-era history of the Lefferts Homestead Children’s Museum, where she was commissioned several times as a painter. The book’s story concentrates on a quintessentially American story of children rebuilding their home after it was destroyed in the Revolution.

Loebelsohn said that though she was hoping to finish the book this summer and is still looking for a publisher, her career so far had made it easier to adapt and improve.

“I’m a little tougher than when I started,” she said with a smile.

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