



"WHAT I TRY TO  
DO IS CAPTURE A  
PERSON'S ESSENCE:  
I TRY TO CAPTURE  
THEIR CHARACTER, BY  
EXAGGERATING AND  
PUSHING ELEMENTS  
OF TRUTH, I ENHANCE  
BOTH THE SUBJECT'S  
LIKENESS AND  
ESSENCE"

# JASON SEILER

From drawing caricatures of his grade school history teacher, to drawing caricatures for *The New York Times*, Jason Seiler's career has gone from strength to strength over the last couple of years. We recently caught up with him to discover more about the art of caricature, his fascination with ducks and who his dream caricature subject would be.

## INTERVIEW WITH JASON SEILER

Hi Jason and welcome to the pages of *2DArtist!* Now for a young guy, you have a seriously impressive resume; you've done work for Universal Pictures, *TIME* and *The New York Times*; you swept the board at the last ISCA (International Society of Caricature Artists) convention, winning too many awards for me to list here; you've had books and DVDs published ... but what I'd like to know is: how did it all begin? How did you take your first artistic steps to reach where you are today? And was your first commission really from your grade school principle [Laughs]?

My father is an artist as well, so I grew up surrounded by his drawings and paintings and was very young when I was first influenced by the idea of art. As a wildlife artist, he painted a lot of waterfowl for duck stamp competitions and because I probably thought I wanted to be an artist just like him, by the age of two I was drawing recognizable ducks with crayons and I knew their names as well. To this day I can still name almost any kind of duck I see! In fact, most of my younger days were spent filling my sketchbooks with birds, animals and the occasionally shark. Actually, I became obsessed with sharks at one point and drew over 350 different species in one book, listing their common and scientific names. My mom still has that book!

**"SHE SAID I'D DONE A GREAT JOB AND TOLD ME THAT WHILE IT WASN'T A GOOD IDEA TO DRAW ON MY HOMEWORK I WAS VERY TALENTED."**

When I was seven, I began to get into drawing cartoon characters, like Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck; I drew characters like this for years. Bugs Bunny turned into drawing the Ninja Turtles and from there I filled sketchbooks with Batman,



Superman, and Spider-Man. Around the age of 10, I was introduced to *MAD* magazine. I rarely ever read it; I would mostly draw from it. Anything that looked fun to draw, I drew – mostly the work of Don Martin. As I continued to draw from *MAD*, I started playing around with people, making them look more like “Don Martin” people, with big noses and funny feet.

When I was 11 or 12, I started doing my first caricatures, although at the time I didn't know there was a name for what I was doing. My dad was a youth pastor at the time and so I was drawing all the kids in my youth group. I would spend hours and hours trying to capture their

likenesses from photographs that I'd taken. Soon after this I started drawing famous people; my first celeb caricature was of James Woods - my mom has that as well! My dad soon realized that I was obsessed with drawing caricatures and bought me Lenn Redman's book *How To Draw Caricatures*. It was at that moment that I realized what I had been doing wasn't something I'd just come up with, and that it even had a name!

My first commission for a “caricature” was indeed from my high school principle. I had a bad habit of always drawing on my homework and every once in a while I'd draw cartoons



and caricatures of my teachers on my work, not thinking that they would eventually see what I had drawn.

**"I PAINT WHAT I WANT, HOW I WANT, I CHARGE WHAT I WANT, AND THERE'S NO DEADLINE"**

One day in history class my teacher, Mr Wentz, saw a drawing that I had done of him. He took me to the Principle's office, the Principle excused him and when he left, she began to laugh. She said I'd done a great job and told me that while it wasn't a good idea to draw on my homework, I was very talented. She called me back into her office a day or so later and asked if I'd be interested in drawing nine teachers for a retirement party. I said sure and I was paid \$20 a person. It was then that I started to think that maybe I could draw caricatures for a living. And that's how all of this started.

It sounds like it was a pretty natural transition for you to move from caricature as a hobby to caricature as a potential career path. What was this transition like in reality? And just how difficult was it to turn that hobby into a sustainable career?

I had already been doing caricature and portraiture all the time, on my own time. As I slowly became known for what I was doing I would take on more and more "side jobs", drawing for commission whenever I could.

Eventually my "day job" was not only depressing for me to be at, but it was no longer needed. Everything changed after I did a small piece for *TIME* magazine. That job "officially" changed my career. Soon after I began working for magazines and haven't stopped since.

The difficulty for me in all of this was doing "gift caricatures" for people. I hated doing them because for me it wasn't "real" art, or at

least it didn't feel like it. I didn't want to draw people and their pets, or their request. People would want to be boxing Mike Tyson or flying an airplane. I realized soon that this sort of work was for a different kind of artist. I still take private commissions, but now I paint what I want, how I want, I charge what I want, and there's no deadline, I finish when I can. It works better because this way I draw and paint naturally and I create an original piece of art that the client is happy with.



The evidence of your talent for caricature is clear from looking at your portfolio and your websites. So I guess the natural next question is: why caricature? What is it about this area of art that captivates you so much? What key features are you looking for in the people you choose as subjects and how do you go about transforming someone into a caricature?

This is a good question. The funny thing is I don't consider myself a "caricaturist". I'm an artist and I have a passion for portraiture. My portraits are stylized; some exaggerated, some funny, and some not so funny, like my oil portrait of Saddam. I can draw and paint a straight portrait, but that's not as interesting to me. What I try to do is capture a person's essence; I try to capture their character. By exaggerating and pushing elements of truth, I enhance both the subject's likeness and essence. I feel that what I do is a lot like impressionism; when I look at a person, really what I'm painting is my impression of them. Sometimes it may look like a straight portrait – there's no need to exaggerate anything – other times it may be created out of exaggerated shapes and form.

When I look at a person, I don't look for any particular thing, or the "obvious" feature on their face. I study that person and find out



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what makes them unique. All the features on the face make a person unique and they're all connected. I look for shapes and I focus a lot of my energy on the subject's eyes and mouth. If it's a person I'm familiar with, I look for references of that person which are similar to what comes to mind when I picture that person in my head. When it's someone I don't know well I surround myself with lots of photos and I do a lot more sketching and prep work.

What do you think is the best caricature you've ever produced? And what kind of tricks and techniques do you use?

Man, that's a hard question! Honestly I don't know; I don't feel as though I have a favorite. I guess one of my favorite paintings is a recent

one I did of George Lucas. I don't know if it's my best caricature - I only like about a handful of the paintings I've done. The George Lucas is a 16"x20" acrylic on linen board. I enjoyed the time I spent while working on that painting and I have it framed and hanging in my studio. I'm not sure if I could ever sell it though because it has personal value to me; it won Studio Painting of the Year at the ISCA's 2008 convention and then was chosen to be in *Communication Arts Illustration Annual 50*. I enjoy the work I do digitally, but when I paint with acrylics or oil I feel somehow connected to the painting. It's then difficult for me to sell an original, no matter how much I may be getting for it.

**"IT'S THE GREATEST COMPLIMENT WHEN SOMEONE HAS TO ASK WHAT MEDIUM A PAINTING WAS DONE IN."**

I don't really feel as though I have any tricks. When I paint with acrylics or oils I usually paint on primed panel or linen board. I like to use a limited palette; usually my palette is Black, Cadmium Red, Yellow Ochre, and White. I'll sometimes add a bit of Ultramarine to my Black.

My palette when painting digitally is very similar. I try to not use too much color, or at least I start off that way and slowly build. I use the paintbrush tool and that's really about it. The important thing I do when painting digitally is to try and paint in a traditional way. I'll do an underpainting of sorts and intentionally let colors pop through from earlier on. Other than this, I don't feel I have any tricks; I'm not interested in abusing the computer or what it can do and I don't want my digital paintings to look digital. It's the greatest compliment when someone has to ask what medium a painting was done in. I was approached by many people at the ISCA convention who thought my George Lucas was a digital painting. I had brought the original with me for people to see and they were amazed that it had been created with "real" paint and "real" brushes.



Now I know you're involved in Imaginism Studios's "Schoolism" project. For those readers who might not be aware what Schoolism is all about, could you just give us a quick overview?

And what has been your experience of the service as a whole?

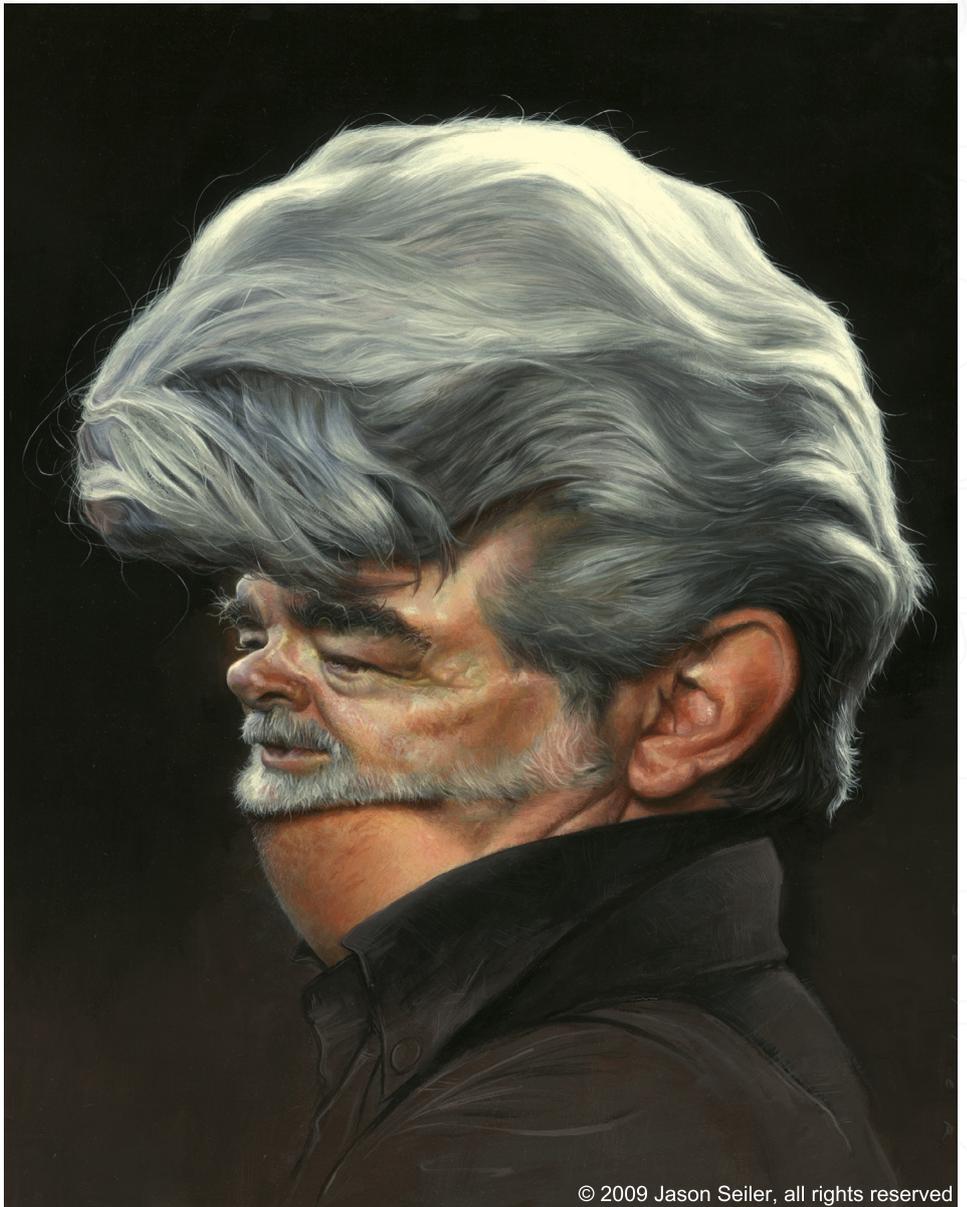
Schoolism was started by Bobby Chiu, an amazing artist and a good friend. It's a place to study if you're serious about becoming a better artist in your particular area of interest. All the instructors are well-known and established in their professions. If you want to learn about storyboarding, for example, you can learn directly from Kris Pearn who's been the head storyboard

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artist on films like *Surf's Up* or *Open Season*. Or you can take Stephen Silver's class on character design. Stephen is one of the main character designers for Nickelodeon and many others. It's an amazing concept; you, as the student, get to learn from an artist who is an expert in his field!

**"THE BEST PART ABOUT TEACHING AT SCHOOLISM IS WATCHING A STUDENT REALLY GROW AND IMPROVE AS AN ARTIST."**

I currently teach a course on caricature, where I teach drawing and some painting, and cover exaggeration, likeness, humor, shape and capturing a person's essence. The way it works is like this: each semester I accept only 15 students and then for my class, there are nine lessons, each around two hours long. In those lessons there are demonstrations; I do several drawings and paintings, all the while breaking down my thought process and sharing my techniques. Each assignment then has homework that the student can download and which they have up to 10 days to complete. Once finished they upload it to the Schoolism



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site, I download their work and begin my critiques. For my critiques, I work on a PC tablet and in this way I can draw and paint right onto the screen and record the whole thing. My critiques are usually 25-30 minutes long. The students then download a video file of me drawing and painting, sometimes over their work and sometimes starting from scratch to teach them how I would go about it. It's a one-on-one correspondence course.

Most of the painting I cover in this first course deals with values and the importance of understanding values. I'm currently working on a new course that will most likely start this coming fall. My new course will be "Painting

with Jason Seiler" and it will be an intense nine weeks. I'll mix traditional with digital and teach my approach to painting.

So far the experience has been really great. The best part about teaching at Schoolism is watching a student really grow and improve as an artist. I take on every level of talent. I've had students who were already quite good and others who could barely draw. I take each student on personally and if I have to make adjustments in order for them to learn and grow, I do. I'll sometimes change the course a bit for a particular student; it becomes personal this way. If the student works hard and pushes themselves, they will hopefully come out of





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my course with a publishable piece of art, or if not then they will certainly have a new understanding of what it will take for them to be able to do that.

Wow that sounds intense! Do you have any advice for potential students thinking of taking one of your courses? Is there anything they can do in preparation to make sure they get the very best out of their chosen course?

Sure, my advice would be to do more than what I ask. If I assign two to three sketches of a person, do ten sketches. Always do more, push yourself to the limit as much as you can. Really, if a person does the work and more and

communicates with me and shares their process - if they can be honest with themselves - they will improve and complete the course a much stronger artist. I've had many students who were good, but now after taking the course they're really good and I couldn't be more proud.

It's why I continue to teach. It's always good to humble yourself, become "teachable". I've had some students who were talented, and knew they were, and because of this they thought they had nothing to learn and therefore didn't grow or improve at all. Other students, who may not have been quite so good, passed them towards the end.

In your blog you mention that you're currently working on a sketching DVD. I imagine that's quite a full-on process; just how do you go about making a DVD? Were you commissioned to produce it, or is it a personal pursuit?

The DVD is called *Sketching with Jason Seiler*. It's not an instructional DVD on how to draw caricatures – although I do draw a lot of caricatures or portraits – it's more of an inspirational DVD where I share my drawing and sketching techniques. The DVD will cover shape and form, cross hatching, thumbnails and their importance, digital painting and digital paint sketching, ball point pen sketching, watercolor, and much, much more. I share a bit about

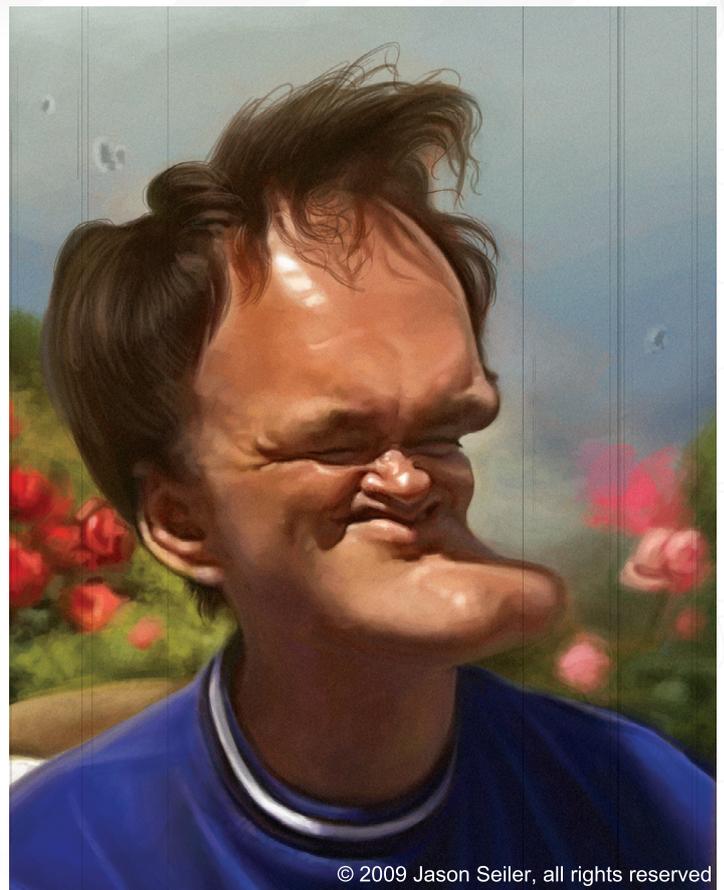


caricature and my thought process; I draw several people while talking the whole time... but like I said, it's not intended to be a caricature instructional DVD. I feel it will relate to many artists in many different areas of drawing, from comics to portraiture.

Creating the DVD was a huge deal. It was a lot of work and I did all of it on my own. I've gotten many requests over the years to do a DVD and I felt that a DVD on sketching would be the best thing to start with because as I think it's important to establish a strong foundation by nailing sketching and drawing before you get too far into painting.

The DVD is high quality and two hours long, with a bonus video of me flipping through some of my sketchbooks, as well as a painting gallery and a sketchbook gallery. My friend Nathan makes music videos for bands and we worked on the DVD for about three months, filming hundreds of hours of drawing and painting. We then spent about two and a half weeks editing it all together. Because I used to be in a number of bands and know a lot of musicians, I was also able to get professional musician friends of mine to write music for the DVD.

The DVD looks and sounds really good and I'm very proud of how it turned out. Most instructional videos that I've seen are cheesy, have bad music and the film quality isn't all that great either. I told Nathan right off the bat what



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kind of DVD I wanted to make and I'm happy to say that we achieved it, with a really top-notch look and great sound. The only thing that I'm not happy with is my own voice ... I can't stand the sound of it!

When can we expect this DVD to be released? And do you see anymore DVDs in your future, or has all the hard work put you off [Laughs]?

The DVD and my new book have both been released and they're both selling quite well! The most exciting thing for me is that I'm selling quite well internationally. It's great sending my work to Iran and Egypt one moment and then to Japan or Belgium the next. I do plan on making more DVDs and books in the future and I think my next DVD will probably be on painting. I'm also working on another project that will be quite different, more of a short film in book form. I'm very excited about it.

My DVD and book can be found by going to my store on my website, or by going directly to: [www.jasonseilerdepot.blogspot.com](http://www.jasonseilerdepot.blogspot.com)

One final question before you go: if you could produce a caricature of anyone in the world, to hang on their wall for all to see, who would it be of, and why?

I don't know ... this is a hard one. I think maybe Conan O'Brian; I think he's hilarious, he'd be fun to paint and it would be cool to know he enjoys a painting that I did of him.



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## **JASON SEILER**

For more work by this artist please visit:

<http://www.jasonseiler.com/>

<http://www.levycreative.com/portfolio.php?pid=192>

<http://www.imaginismstudios.com/our-art/jason-seiler>

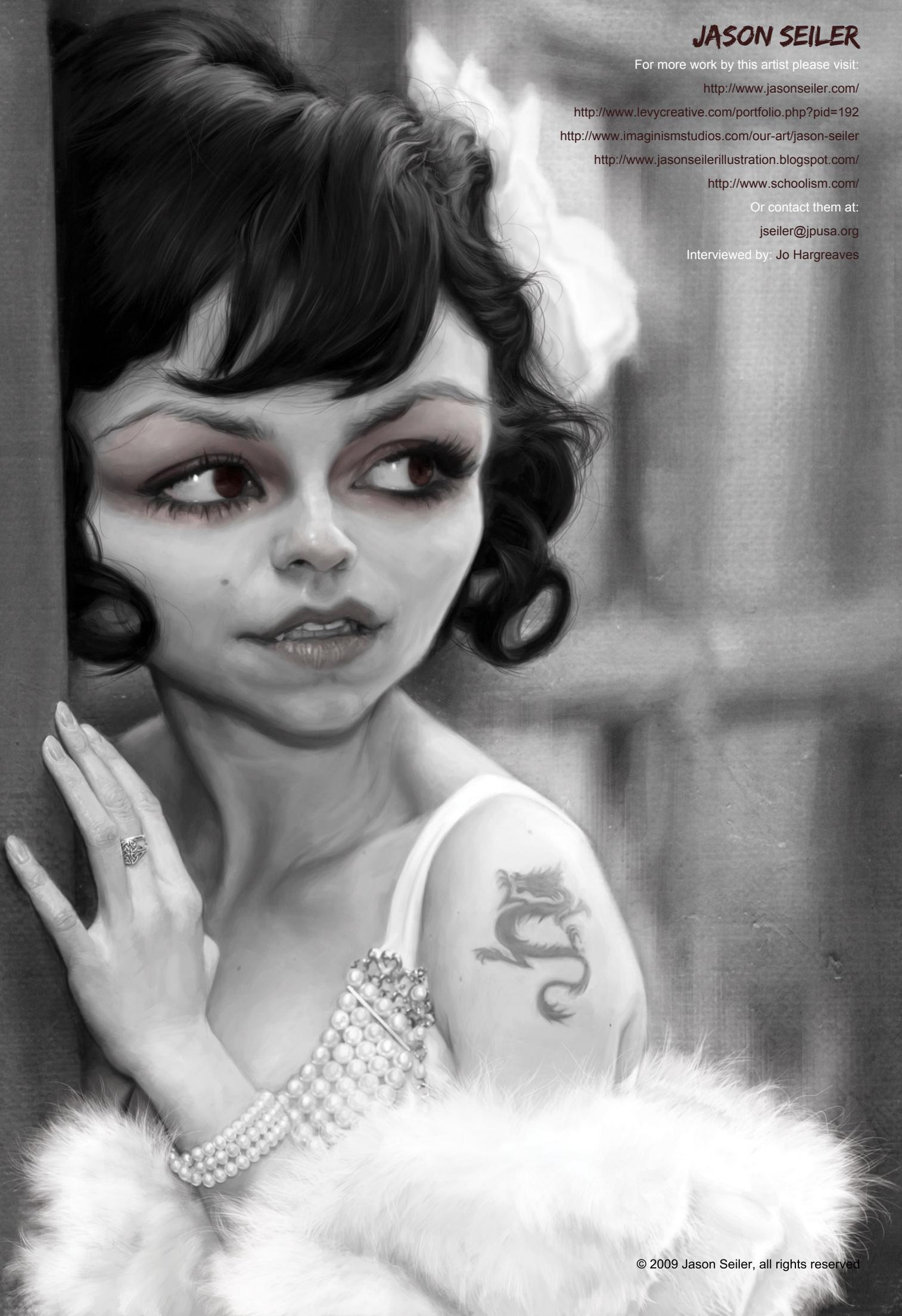
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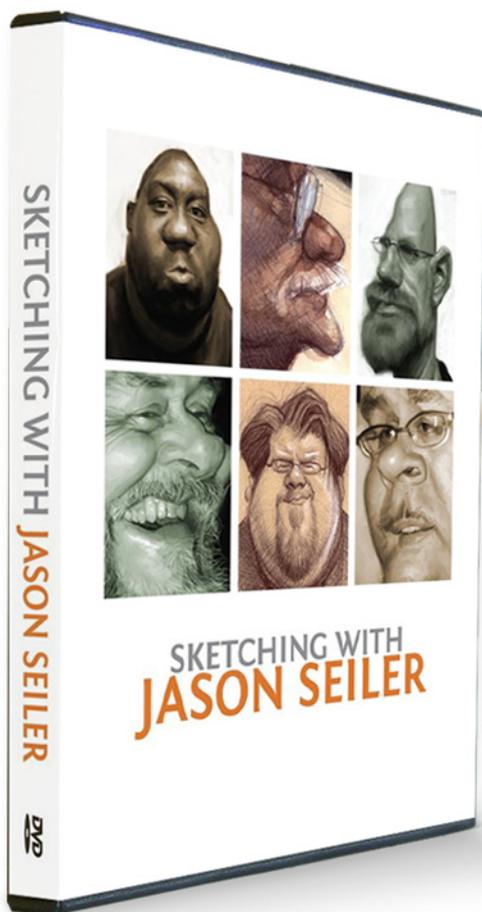
<http://www.schoolism.com/>

Or contact them at:

[jseiler@jpusa.org](mailto:jseiler@jpusa.org)

Interviewed by: Jo Hargreaves





# SKETCHING WITH JASON SEILER

"Covering a wide field of media including digital paint, watercolor and even ballpoint pen (!), Seiler's two-hour incursion into technique is not only impressive but enlightening. Watching work go from loose affiliations of lines through to finished artwork is a real benefit to those wishing to expand their range and learn not only the basics of caricature but the use of other media.

"Seiler speaks with the viewer constantly but doesn't waste screen time on his own head shots and being yer best friend, instead letting the camera cover the work as it emerges. Long shots of faces emerging from the canvas don't bore the viewer as every line slowly builds the work (though the creation is shown in double speed). For anyone interested in learning the techniques of caricature painting in Photoshop, this is not necessarily a tutorial, but rather just a dynamic example of how Seiler does things in his own method. His tips for capturing likeness are generally the common basics but there are still some good ideas for both the amateur and the professional alike.

"In terms of Special Features, there's a bit of stuff to wade through, though these are mostly galleries of both Seiler's finished works and sketchbooks. There is some occasional repeat viewing here, but also a few surprising (excellent) sketches thrown in of images that aren't caricatures.

"There is a link on the main menu to take you to particular lessons documented throughout the major piece of the DVD, which will save those wishing to use it for reference trawling through the entire disc.

"Overall, for someone learning caricature or wanting to improve their game, this is well worth a visit. The links to lessons throughout the disc make it an easy reference point for particular media or techniques." – [DVD Review by Jules Faber for Inkspot](#)

## Where to Buy!

To purchase the Sketching with Jason Seiler DVD, please visit:  
<http://www.jasonseilerdepot.blogspot.com> | <http://www.schoolism.com>



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