

A Man of Sorrows

I became intrigued by Abraham Lincoln's image very early in life. My mother, a Czech immigrant interested in America's past, borrowed many history books from the local library, including those about Lincoln and shared their contents with my brother and me. Encouraged by my mother, at age four I made a well-rendered drawing of the president from the five-dollar bill. Photography fascinated Lincoln, and seldom in the nineteenth century did someone have himself photographed as often. Thus, I had numerous portraits of Lincoln to study. My parents eventually bought me a bronze bust of Lincoln, which made his physical appearance all that much more real to me.

From ages eleven to nineteen, I attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, learning to draw in a traditional academic manner, first still lifes then live models, working in charcoal, pencil, and pastel. During and after college, I utilized my academic training to continue to draw portraits of historical figures. I had worked on other portraits, but it was Lincoln with whom I most connected personally, and my reading of biographies like Carl Sandburg's furthered my interest in the man.

By the 1980s, when my attempts at drawing Lincoln proved increasingly successful, I decided to create an iconic portrait of him around the central theme of a humane man presiding over the bloodiest war in American history, a man given to dark bouts of depression as he empathized with the causalities on both sides. To create this image I especially looked at the works of the great Civil War-era photographer Matthew Brady, Lincoln's favorite photographer, and the works of his former student Alexander Gardner. Though Gardner was one of the last to photograph Lincoln weeks before the president's assassination, I felt he did not capture him in a stately enough posture as had Brady. Since *A Man of Sorrows* required an iconic pose, I melded the soulful and saddened face captured in Gardner's series of photographs with the more crafted structure of Brady's finest portraits of Lincoln.

My work is influenced by techniques of oil-paint glazing that allow for the layering of colors, which in turn create luminosity on the canvass. Appropriating this painterly technique, I bought a whole range of drawing pencils, light to dark, and, starting light, I worked layer by layer to achieve a glow on the paper. Influenced by photorealism this technique requires smoothness of application on the paper in order to attain the proper atmosphere of the subject and its deeply melancholic theme.

The prints offered in this numbered and signed series reflect this technique in that they have been printed in a layering process made possible by a digital-lithograph technique. Originally completed in 1986, this iconic Lincoln portrait is being offered during the 200th birthday celebration of America's sixteenth president.