

Artist followed her father onto canvas

By Susan Bloodworth

Special to The Ledger

WINTER HAVEN — After growing up in the shadow of a father who worked as a freelance commercial artist, Chrissy B. Tavrdes took it for granted that her career would be in the world of art.

"My father was very encouraging," Tavrdes said. "I always liked drawing. I never questioned it. I just always thought I would go into it (art)."

The den in Tavrdes' living room is filled with drawings done by her and her father, including a portrait he did of his Tavrdes when she was 14.

A selection of Tavrdes' figurative artwork drawn in mixed media and oil will be part of a two-person show beginning Monday at the Fine Arts Gallery at Polk Community College.

Tavrdes said she draws to satisfy the need she feels within herself to create.

"If I haven't done it for awhile I feel nervous. My work gives me a peace and satisfaction," she said. "I don't verbalize all the feelings that go into it, but when I see certain people, things or florals, I want to put it down."

Tavrdes, 62, has lived in Lakeland with her husband and four children since 1969, but was born and raised in Chicago. As a child she would help her father file newspaper clippings about art, and would stand behind him and watch while he did his work.

Tavrdes was the eldest of four children, and she and a sister, Dorothea Bilder, both went into art. Bilder is an art professor at Northern Illinois University.

During grade school, Tavrdes won scholarships to the local art institute, where she also took daylong classes in figure drawing and design for three summers during high school. Tavrdes received her bachelor's of fine arts degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1952.

After graduation she worked in the art department of the Chicago Tribune until her marriage later that year to James, a civil engineer. Tavrdes then drew illustrations for Children's Press for a year, until the first of her four children was born. While raising her children, Tavrdes worked out of a studio in her home and continued to draw illustrations for children's books and textbooks.

"There were loads of publishing houses in Chicago," she said. "I could watch the children and work at the same time."

The Tavrdes family moved to Lakeland in 1969, and a studio was again built in her home. One of Tavrdes' jobs was to draw some 200 illustrations for a film strip company that produced records, tapes and matching films on such educational topics as "The Coming of Arthur."

These days, Tavrdes draws 10 to 12 portraits a year.

"I love figures. You get more of a feel from a body and living things like floral arrangements," she said. "I like people to want the portraits and I enjoy doing it."

Although there are no portraits in the 13 pieces in this show, Tavrdes said she tries to make the portraits she draws "more than just a head and shoulders sitting there looking at you. I try to depict a mood."

Some of Tavrdes' work in the show is figurative, depicting people, and is done in mixed media.

"They are portraits in a sense, but they were done for competition in the shows," she said.

Tavrdes draws in mixed media and pastels because it has a lighter feel to it.

"It lends itself to this locale and the sun. I also do some in oil," she said.

Tavrdes' works are part of many permanent collections, including the Polk Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, Tampa Electric Co. and Winter Haven Hospital.

She is preparing for a one-woman show featuring 15 pieces of her work in TECO Plaza in downtown Tampa in September. And she plans to teach art classes in pastel this fall at the Polk Museum of Art.

Tavrdes' work is for sale at B&B Sunshine Gallery in Winter Haven; the Frame Place and Gallery in Tampa; Berghoff Gallery in Tampa and the M.P. Muller Fine Art Gallery in Sarasota.

Along with Tavrdes' artwork, the works of James Couper, an art professor at Florida International University in Miami, will also be shown in the PCC Gallery through June 20. Couper specializes in wilderness landscapes done in oil.



Susan Bloodworth/Special to The Ledger

Chrissy Tavrdes produces mixed-media portraits in her home studio.

Park Pater

By Emily Krvavli



Mae Taken and Mary Ann and Bud Vavra.

The Polk Museum of Art in Lakeland, Fla. has become a favorite stopping place for La Grange Park artist A.K. Bilder and his wife Leica when they visit their artist daughter Chrissy Tavrdes each year.

Tavrdes is connected with the museum by virtue of conducting art classes for adults.

The Bilders have watched the museum grow as the town grows. The museum is now a large two-story building that exhibits paintings of internationally-known artists.

In 1978, Bilder and Tavrdes exhibited 50 paintings. Bilder has donated three of his oils to the museum's collection.

Bilder, born in Turkey of Greek descent, has been an illustrator since 1916 when he started his career in Dayton, Ohio at the age of 18.

His artwork may be seen at the La Grange Park library, to which he has contributed six paintings with a political theme.