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UNVEILING SPOTLIGHTS A RECENTLY COMPLETED PORTRAIT COMMISSION OR FIGURATIVE WORK FROM SOME OF THE BEST AND MOST ACTIVE MEMBERS OF THE PORTRAIT SOCIETY OF AMERICA. THIS MONTH AMANDA HOLLIS, GUEST WRITER FOR THE PORTRAIT SOCIETY, INTERVIEWED JOHN SEIBELS WALKER ABOUT HIS RECENTLY UNVEILED PORTRAIT OF JOHN M. MCCARDELL JR.

A Nod to History: Portrait of John M. McCardell Jr.

On June 16, 2020, John Seibels Walker had the honor of returning to his alma mater, The University of the South, to unveil the portrait of its most recent Vice-Chancellor, John M. McCardell Jr. Nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in the heart of Tennessee, the university has a deep history in the region. Originally founded in 1857 to be the training denominational college for the southern Episcopalian delegates, it did not admit students until after the Civil War. The “Second Founding” took place in 1866 and is depicted in the stained-glass scene in Walker’s portrait.



John M. McCardell, Jr., 16th Vice-Chancellor, The University of the South
Oil on linen, 53 x 36 inches www.johnseibelswalker.com

Tradition and community define the university, and as its leader for a decade, McCardell wanted to convey these guiding principles in his portrait. Wearing the red cloak with ermine trim that had been donned by his predecessors, McCardell and Walker discussed the background setting that would best represent McCardell's tenure at the University. As a leading history scholar specializing in the post-Civil War South, the scene of the second founding was a nod to the Vice-Chancellor as a living part of the University's history. Its location in All Saints' Chapel, the epicenter of the institution's tight-knit community, was a visual illustration of his inaugural pledge that the campus would be a respite so that "those fleeing an increasingly soul-less world find a place that has not lost or compromised its own soul."

"My intention with this portrait was to depict the Vice-Chancellor...almost as one of the historical figures seen in the stained-glass window stepping forward and coming to life. In this way, he is depicted as part of what has been a continuum of distinguished Vice-Chancellors from the University's initial founding to the current day," explains Walker. "Within All Saints' Chapel, there are also many commemorations carved into the stone recognizing the generosity and service of numerous families and individuals involved in the University's development. I decided to employ my artistic license to add a similar touch to the stone depicted in the Vice-Chancellor's portrait alongside him to record his service in the same manner."

As McCardell noted in his final address, he leaves his leadership position at a challenging time for both the university and the country. Nonetheless, over the past 10 years, the university became more diverse and closer to his vision of a place of peace for all. So, while the portrait draws on the past, the compassion and humanity Walker captured in McCardell's expression will be a reminder to generations of students and faculty that you can "act in the present and...shape the future."