

PHOTOGRAPHER GABRIEL BURGOS | WRITER JENNIFER STEVENS | DESIGNER MATT KANNENBERG

MAN OF CARICATURE

The old garage-turned-art-studio in David O'Keefe's house is a hodgepodge of sports memorabilia, sculptures of political figures, photography books and so many framed paintings you can barely see the white walls. Except for what David calls "The Special Wall," a collection of drawings from his four favorite artists—his children. ►



Caitlyn, Audrey, Sally and Connor have handed in pictures of robots, one-eyed aliens and football players in hopes of securing a spot on the special wall. "If it's not great, I tell them to throw it away and try again," says David.

But somehow, a few parody drawings of David have slipped through the cracks and on to the wall—payback for all the caricatures he's sketched of his children

over the years. David in a tutu, elegantly posed in fifth position. David in cutoff jean shorts with the words "Hey, ladies!" dangling above his head in a dialogue bubble.

He looks at the pictures with a goofy grin and says, "I couldn't do anything without my family." And all is forgiven.

David met his wife, Janice, in a high school journalism class while working for Brandon High School's newspaper, *The Emblem*. She was his editor, and he was her cartoon artist. During Christmas season he would paint the windows of local storefronts—snowflakes, mistletoe and Janice sitting on Santa's lap. He painted

.....
 ◀ Al Gore, George Bush and Muhammad Ali are just some of the many caricature-style sculptures O'Keefe has created over the years.



▲ O'Keefe's children proudly display their art on "The Special Wall" in his studio.

her name into every mural. And after 27 years of marriage, he still talks about her with that "I can't believe she married me" excitement in his voice.

After high school, David made his way to the *Tampa Tribune*, where he worked as a dispatcher. He drove a truck around the greater Tampa area, picking up

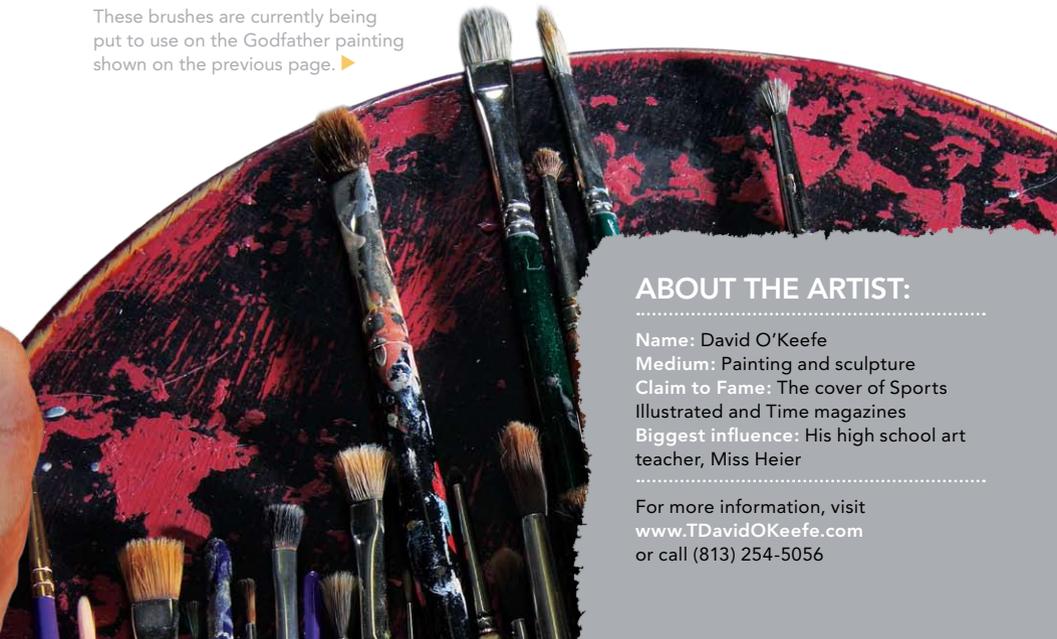
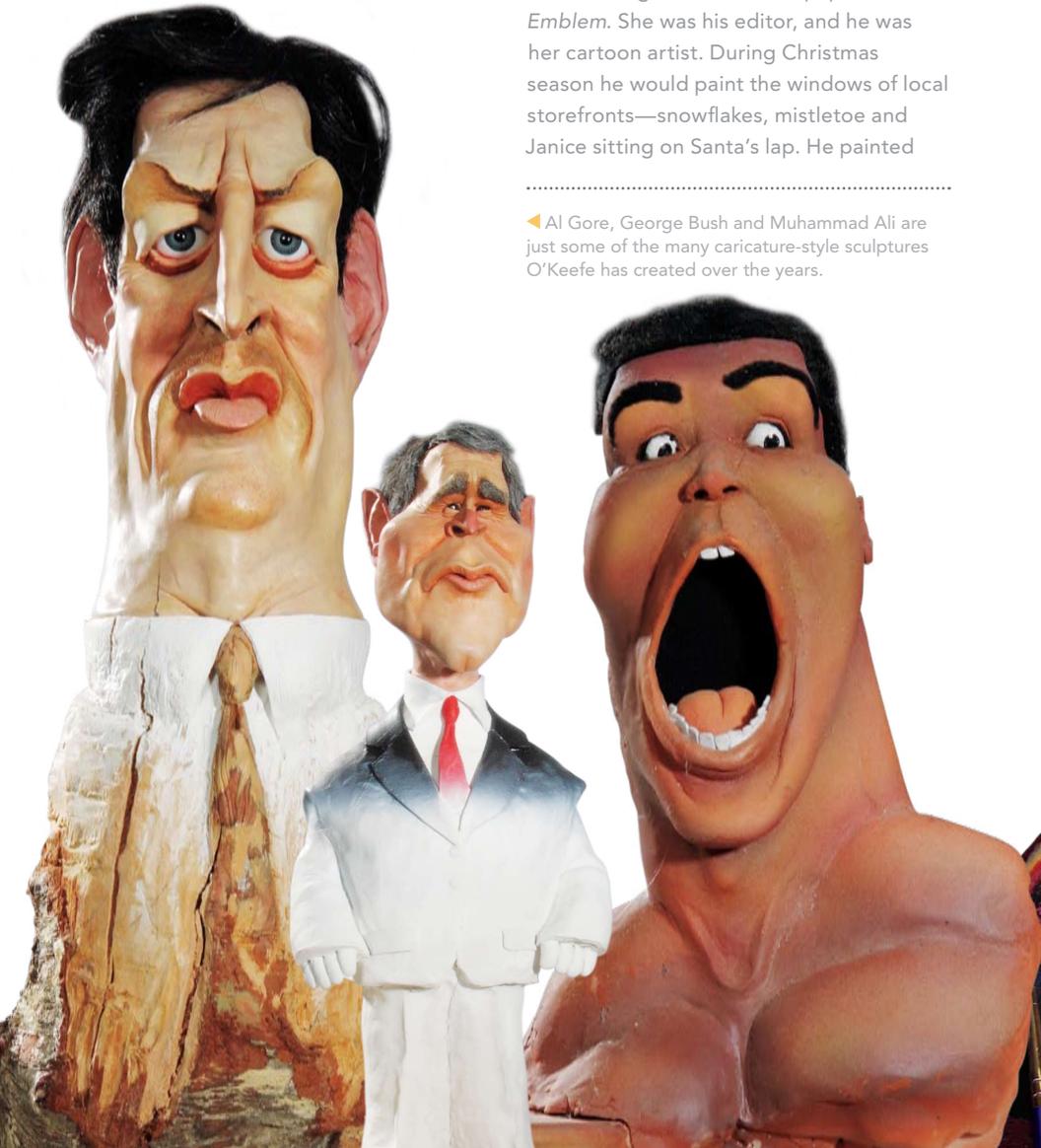
.....
 These brushes are currently being put to use on the Godfather painting shown on the previous page. ▶

advertisements in Lakeland, Ruskin and Brandon during the day, and sketching and painting at night, building his portfolio—someday hoping to secure the coveted special projects illustrator position. It took him 10 years, but he did it. And he did it for about 17 years before the newspaper industry took a turn and he found himself without a job.

But a year later, he's doing just fine. He's still painting and sculpting those sarcastic caricatures and witty illustrations he did at the *Tribune*, but he's working from home, surrounded by his beautiful art and family. "If I won the lottery tomorrow, this is still what I'd be doing," says David.

Sports fans and political enthusiasts will be delighted to know they can find his creations on the Internet and at his gallery in South Tampa. They'll see sculptures of Brett Favre in his New York Jets jersey, Al Gore made of a tree stump and President Bush with a zipper for a mouth.

"Art is the only thing I can do," says David. "If I wasn't doing this, I'd be out there driving a big rig." ■



ABOUT THE ARTIST:

.....
 Name: David O'Keefe
 Medium: Painting and sculpture
 Claim to Fame: The cover of Sports Illustrated and Time magazines
 Biggest influence: His high school art teacher, Miss Heier

For more information, visit www.TDavidOKeefe.com or call (813) 254-5056