



Since taking up oil painting at age 9 and studying anatomy at age 11, Ron Sanders has branched out in many different directions as an artist. After graduating from Columbus College of Art and Design, he has been a fine artist, working in oils and acrylics. He is also an illustrator with his work in history textbooks, limited edition prints, and on young adult book covers. In addition, Sanders has a long list of commercial clients with which he has worked, and an even longer list of awards he has received.

"I love being an artist," Sanders said. "... It has always held my interest and been fun for me. There are always new things to learn and new directions to grow."

But, the artwork that will probably last the longest, might be anonymously in your pocket.

For the last 10 years, Sanders has been working with a team of artists in the Artistic Infusion Program for the United States Mint to design coins and medals. He submits designs for each project, along with his fellow artists. The designs are reviewed by federal committees, who then present the ideas to the Secretary of the Treasury, and one design is selected.

"To date, I have had 13 of my designs chosen to be minted," he said. "Some of those have yet to be announced

# Multi-Talented Artist is Chosen to Design New LIW Children's Literature Award Medal

By Natasha Dunagan

to the public and are scheduled for production in coming years. My most recently released design is the eagle obverse of the End of WWII 75th Anniversary Gold Coin and Silver Medal."

"Other design credits include the Steve Gleason Congressional Gold Medal Obverse (awarded to Steve in January of 2020) and the 2018 WWI Army Air Service Silver Medal Reverse design featuring the Spad XIII Biplane," Sanders added.

Listed on the U.S. Mint website are some of his other coin and medal designs from the past:

2017 America the Beautiful Quarters® Program – Ozark National Scenic Riverways reverse

2016 Mark Twain Commemorative Coin Program – Gold reverse

2015 America the Beautiful Quarters® Program – Homestead National Monument of America reverse

2015 Native American \$1 Coin Program – reverse

2013 America the Beautiful Quarters® Program – Great Basin National Park reverse

2013 5-Star Generals Commemorative Coin Program – Gold obverse

2012 National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center Silver Dollar Coin – reverse

Code Talkers Recognition Congressional Medals Program – Yankton Sioux Tribe obverse

Sanders has found designing coins and medals both rewarding and challenging.

"I've always enjoyed variety in my work, and coins and medals offer much of it. I've worked on everything from landscapes and architecture, to soldiers, ships, and planes, to science and industry, to portraits of famous people," he said. "And, of course, it's pretty impressive to



see how my drawings look once they've been sculpted by the very talented U.S. Mint sculptors in Philadelphia."

"Lastly, I think all of us in the AIP program are aware that coins last for thousands of years," he added. "So, it is awe-inspiring to be a part of something that will tell the story of our country and culture to many future generations."

The challenges are based in the difference between painting in color and two dimensions and designing in monotone something meant to be sculpted.

"As a fine artist and illustrator, I am accustomed to working with color, value, and edge manipulation to create a painting," Sanders said, "But when designing for a sculpt, there is no color or value, and edges need to be defined."

"Our job is to create a drawing that informs the sculptors of the shapes and the rise and fall of surfaces," he continued. "That, in itself, is a learned process and part of our training at the Mint."

"The other challenge is designing for a small circle instead of a large canvas," added Sanders. "We are often tasked with representing stories that are very broad, historically speaking, and that have many people involved, or many scenes to tell the story."

"Our job is to refine all of that information down to a simple image that represents the broader story," he said. "So, we often work in symbols rather than narratives."

One of his coin designs led to a meeting, which in turn led to his latest accomplishment. Sanders met Vicki A. Johnston - who is the museum supervisor at the Laura Ingalls Wilder Home and Museum and the secretary for the Laura Ingalls Wilder Festival Committee - at the unveiling of the 2017 Ozark National Scenic Riverways (America the Beautiful Quarters® Program).

The following year, 2018, Wilder's name was removed from the now Children's Literature Legacy Award by the American Library Association and the Association for Library Service to Children due to controversial attitudes toward race from the 1800's which were reflected in her books. Fast forward to this year, and the LIW Festival Committee is restoring Wilder's name to their own award - the new Laura Ingalls Wilder Children's Literature Award.

"We wanted to honor her long-time contributions to children's literature," said Johnston, "And we felt she was worthy of this honor."

Johnston remembered Sanders when the committee was considering who could design the medal.

"His work for the United States Mint came to our attention, and we knew he could create a beautiful design," said Johnston.

Sanders worked to recreate a portrait of Wilder, which the committee had chosen to be on the medal, and he added his own ideas.

"I suggested adding the raised arms holding a book to tie it into the literature award theme and her fame as an author," he said.

Although working with the U.S. Mint led to Sanders designing the new literature medal, it is actually being produced through a privately-owned company, MedalCraft Mint, of Green Bay, Wisconsin ([www.medalcraft.com](http://www.medalcraft.com)).

The medal will be awarded to one children's author and one illustrator each year after their work is reviewed, said Johnston.

For its inaugural year, author David L. Harrison, of Springfield, MO, and illustrator Higgins Bond, of Nashville, TN, will receive the award during a ceremony held at the Wilder Home and Museum, in Mansfield, MO, on Nov. 5, 2020.

Johnston said Harrison "is an Ozarks native and his poetry, fiction, and nonfiction for young readers have been anthologized in more than 185 books, translated into 12 languages, and presented on television, radio, podcast, and video stream. He also writes books for teachers."

About Higgins Bond, Johnston said,

"With over 40 years devoted to illustration, we felt she was worthy of the honor for her contribution to children's literature."

*For more information on Ron Sanders, visit his websites at [www.ronsandersart.com](http://www.ronsandersart.com) or [www.ronsandersfineart.com](http://www.ronsandersfineart.com). For information on Sanders' work with the Artistic Infusion Program, visit <https://www.usmint.gov/learn/artists/aip-ron-sanders>.*

*For more on the Laura Ingalls Wilder Home and Museum, visit <https://lauraingallswilderhome.com/>.*

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