

Next time you visit Barnes & Noble to pursue one of your favorite interests, watch out:

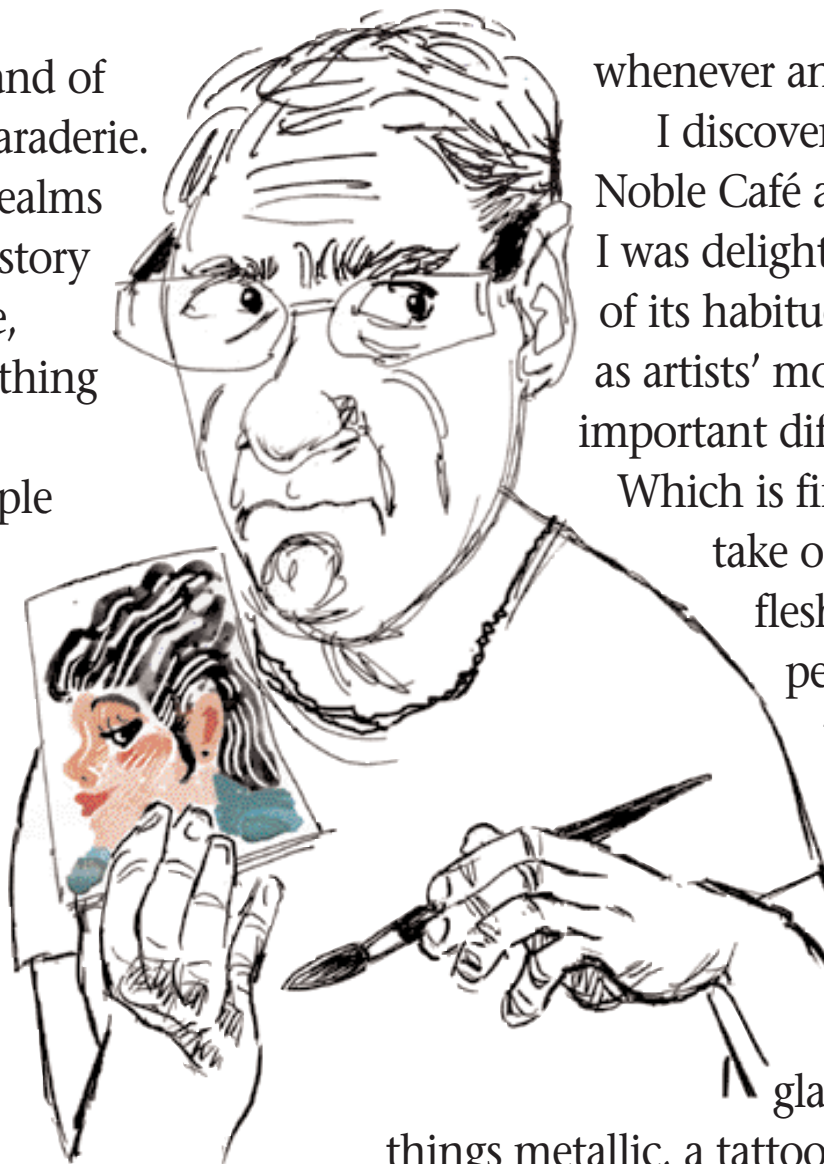
You may become one of mine.

I love the place. It's an island of culture, civility and camaraderie. Here you can enter the realms of fiction and nonfiction, history and mystery, past and future, haiku and how-to—or something entirely unexpected.

I like the B&N Café. People come there to study, to play chess, to meet blind dates, to talk business, to remember, to forget, to connect, to feel safe, to find themselves. Even to eat.

I come for inspiration. My weapons are watercolors with, variously, pencil, oil pastels, charcoal, ink—and spontaneity. If I work well and I'm fast on the draw, I capture what is, to you, just another moment. Then you leave, but I gotcha. Every piece in this window was done here in the café. If you think you see yourself here, I saw you first.

Why do I do this? I love it. So I do it



whenever and wherever I can.

I discovered the Barnes & Noble Café about five years ago. I was delighted to see that most of its habitués sat almost as still as artists' models, with one important difference: no nudity.

Which is fine with me. I can

take only so much raw flesh, and anyway,

people reveal more of themselves through their everyday disguises. Give me

a hat, a peekaboo dress, great hair,

running shoes,

glasses, bald spots,

things metallic, a tattoo, wrinkles, what have you—and I'm in heaven.

And while I'm making lists: The coffee and those chocolate-covered pretzels ain't bad, either.

—Art Spikol