

STUDIO VISIT

"I incorporate things I had learned and the things I discovered and I've learned more from the animals than from going to the best schools."

Linda Miller
Hondo Valley painter



A marketable menagerie

Roosters, doves, pigs, sheep — they all play a part in the artful life of Linda Miller

BY SANDY SUGGITT
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Hand-painted signs at Linda Miller's driveway warn of free-range pigs and loose guard dogs — political statements and emblems of the artist's penchant for both animals and seclusion.

Miller has a special rapport with animals domestic and wild, has swallows roosting on the eaves of her home, rabbits and chickens in the gallery and sometimes a pig in the living room. Aesthetically, they work well with her paintings and prints since many of them are of animals.

"I've sold over \$75,000 of chickens," Miller said.

The longest-continuing painter in the Hondo Valley, Miller has an almost supernatural rapport with critters and says she can get any animal to sit for portraits. She demonstrated by coaxing a butterfly to pose next to its painted likeness.

"It sat for me," she said. "My philosophy of art is I never know the secret. How on earth would a butterfly know how to sit?"

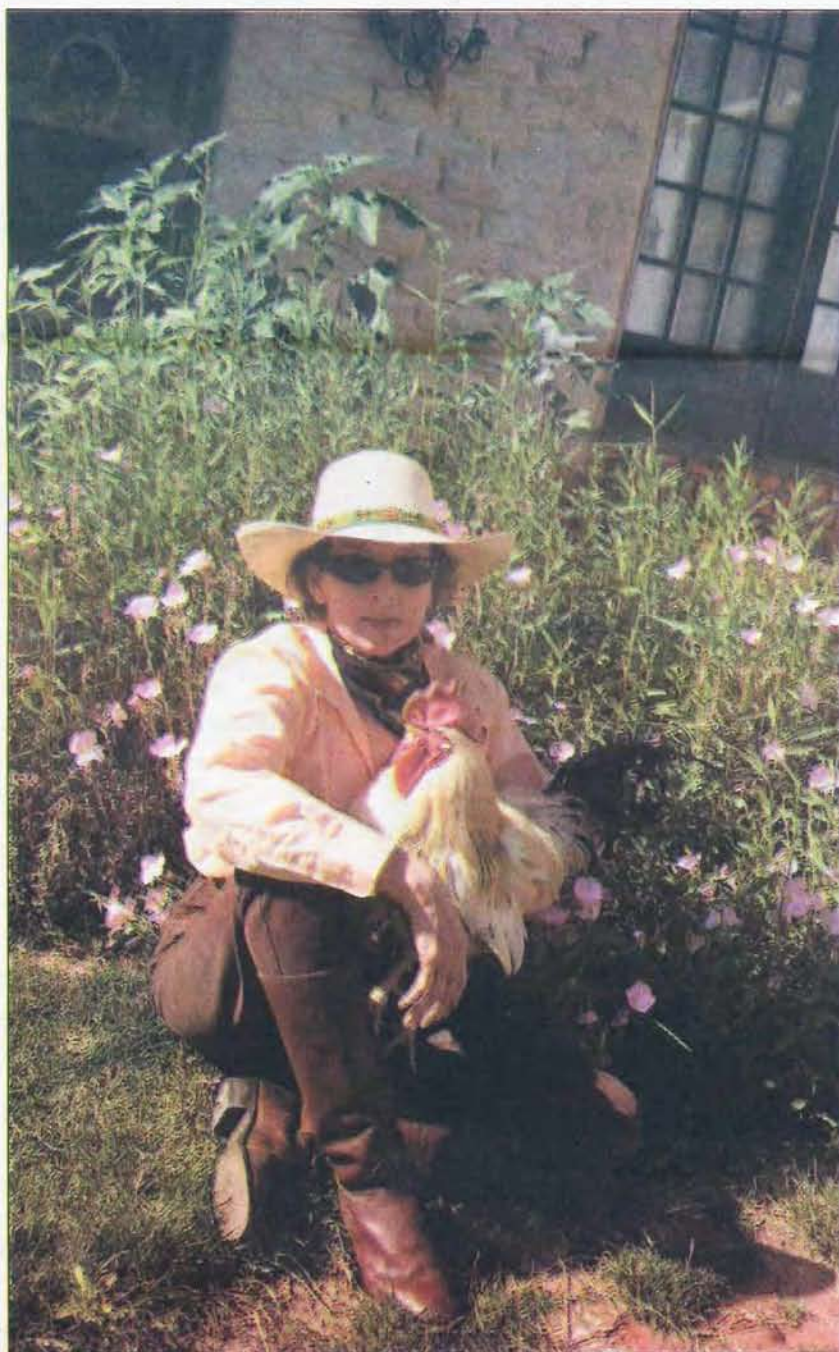
Besides butterflies, Miller has 100 chickens, seven doves, four pregnant pigs, three horses, two rabbits, a sheep, a duck and a skunk. Miller began settling her property in the valley in 1978, planting trees that now tower over the property, building a barn first to hold timbers for her house dating back to 1881, and then her adobe home and gallery. Her studio, like that of her mentor, Henriette Wyeth, has only 12 window panes to better bring out the shadows and color.

"I incorporate things I had learned and the things I discovered and I've learned more from the animals than from going to the best schools," she said.

Miller's Vermeer-like work has been in collections like that of Jackie Spencer for years, and she's been featured in many museum shows, but the praise that means the most to her has been that from Wyeth.

Growing up in Snyder, Texas, she took her first and only art class from Katherine Hill Travis in Ruidoso when she was 14. The next summer, she was asked back to help teach. At age 19, friends of the director of the museum at Texas Tech University

Artist Linda Miller poses in front of her studio with one of her many models and friends, a rooster whose comb she sewed up — 42 stitches — after his comb was torn off by a raccoon. Above, a pastel print of "El Gallo" by Linda Miller. Photos by Sandy Suggitt.



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At left, Linda Miller coaxed her model to pose in front of her painting of it. Below, "Heartbeat," is an oil painting Miller is still working on. Photos by Sandy Suggitt.

Miller: Painstaking precision

saw a show of Miller's work and said, "Henriette Wyeth." At the time, Miller had never seen Wyeth's work. The director managed an introduction and from then on Miller would drive from Snyder to San Patricio with a group of paintings for Wyeth to critique.

Eventually she moved into one of Robert O. Anderson's houses in Picacho and finally to the Hondo Valley.

Miller is not a speed-painter: Some paintings take six months to a year to finish. Instead, she works painstakingly for precision and perfection, striving to recreate the underlying spiritual meaning of her subjects, never dipping her brush in the same color twice. She's now working on paintings of antique santos, but she's been contemplating it for four years.

Painting is not easy for her, but, as she put it, she's married to her art, and everything related to her existence in the valley participates in her art.

"I asked Henriette in 1980, 'Does

"How on earth would a butterfly know how to sit?"

Linda Miller

painting get easier?' and she said 'It only gets harder.'"

A few of her inanimate subjects can be found in a kitchen; others are antique santos she arranges with nests and other found objects. What these have in common is that Miller shuns superficially beautiful subjects, seeking the inner meaning and beauty of whatever captures her imagination.

Some of Miller's work and a line of her cards are available at the Hubbard Museum of the American West in Ruidoso Downs and Tinnie Mercantile in Roswell. To see more, call (505) 653-4762 to visit her gallery and studio in the Hondo Valley.

