



Artist Overcomes a Frightening Injury and Uses Talent to Help Youth

Story and Photos by Gailanne Teresa Dill

Nine months after her right hand was crushed and torn, Linda Miller has painted a remarkable piece displaying the sound and will of an artist to continue to create.

Light streams through a huge window in Linda Miller's studio. Based on her mentor, Henriette Wyeth's studio, the large room is lined up with the North Star and runs exactly east and west. The dramatic brilliance of the window brings to life her most recent accomplishment: "The Nutcracker Suite."

The bright colors and almost tangible objects in the piece take realism to a deeper level. What is even more remarkable is the fact that the artist painted the piece while recovering from a severe injury to her painting hand.

The injury occurred while Miller was comforting one of her beloved pets, a huge dog who had run behind the trailer attached to her vehicle as she was leaving for an art show honoring her work. In its pain, the dog had torn into her hand crushing the bones of the thumb and damaging the other bones and tendons. It took four hours of orthopedic surgery and six months of healing for Miller to regain her abilities. Miller even sold a painting of a hummingbird for a prayer for her hand. Written by a pastor who had admired her work, the prayer is said by Miller every day. It must have worked; the new painting has been described as a major work by artist and author, John Meigs.

Realism infused with emotion and the delicate beauty of something well loved such as old rocking horse or a pair of dance -- worn ballet shoes describes Miller's work. Glowing with warmth, as if lit from within, the brilliant paintings invite the viewer to peak within the frame and feel the rich textures like the silkiness of the ballet ribbons or the crispness of the aging place on an antique wedding gown. Then there are the tender paintings from nature such as robin's nests that she finds or portraits of animals that she has coaxed to sit for her.

Amidst her busy schedule painting, building her impressive renaissance home and caring for her menagerie of animals, the nationally recognized artist has found time to benefit yet another love -- children. Miller will be the featured artist for the Holly-Day Magic Arts and Craft Show to benefit day DARE and the police athletic league. A 19-year tradition in Roswell, Holly-Day Magic will be held November 19 and 20 at the Roswell Civic Center.

Miller's concern for children prompted her to participate when requested this year. She has donated three framed lithographs, "The Christmas Pony," "They Honor Her," and "The Christmas Tree," for a drawing with proceeds going to DARE and PAL.

"If you can't help the kids, you can't help anyone," she says.

Believing that youth need to be reached early, Miller has worked with children. While teaching a group of gifted third-graders, she discovered that part of the lesson was directed toward her.

The children were wonderful they were all colors and sizes. They had to bring the subject they wanted to paint and suppliers to paint the piece I asked them if they need help, but they all said no. However,



one by one they came up. One little girl had painted doll with no hands. “I found out that she was having trouble painting hands, so I heard tracer on hand several times until she could feel what it is like to draw hand she was able to paint hands after that. I realize that I was teaching the way Henri at taught me. Some people think that you have to have a lot of money or education to be a good artist, but all you really need to know is how to see,” she said.

Painting is Miller's way of communicating her love of life -- all life from the delicate portraits of chicks to the robust painting of “Miss Lily” the goat, one of the many animals roaming Miller's mountainous property in San Patricio. With an art career that was nurtured from childhood and strengthened by the critiques of honor yet, Miller has never lost sight of the awe-inspiring creative process.

“My paintings take months to complete, but after they are done it is almost as if someone else has painted them. I approached each one differently and when the painting is done, I have learned something,” she said.

The drive to create began at an early age for Miller.

“I knew when I was five years old but I want to be a painter. I knew exactly what I wanted to be,” she said.

Miller's roots reach back to Snyder, Texas, where she was born and raised by R. C. and Janice Miller. Her ancestors had pioneered to board and county in 1900 and the bricks from the Mercantile where they've homesteaded now form a flower-lined pastor to her home and studio.

Perhaps her love of conveying textures started in her mother's sewing room.

“My mother was a seamstress who designed clothing. I can remember running my hands over the bolts of fabric. She always encouraged me to do art. By the time I was seven years old, I was doing ceramics and by the time I was 14, I was painting,” she said.

Miller's art career gained momentum after she was introduced to Henriette.

John Meigs had seen my work and told me it looked like something done by Henriette Wyeth, the famous daughter of painter, N. C. Wyeth and wife of painter Peter Hurd. “I had never seen any of her work and wanted to meet her when we met she said we were both headed in the same direction. After that, she began critiquing me I was so fortunate to know her I never had formal lessons, but it was through the critiquing of honor yet and John that my art grew,” she said.

When Miller had her first museum show at the age of 21 at Texas Tech, Hurd and Wyeth wrote the foreword stating that Miller was a phenomenon because of her willingness to achieve the perfection of the masters through painstaking effort coupled with a constantly sharpened ability to be self-critical.

The show sold out in 45 minutes. In 1985, Miller had four shows in four different states. Since then, her work is only shown in museums. One exception was a retrospective show of Miller's artwork during the opening of the bank of the Southwest.

Her career continues to gain momentum. Her portfolio is being considered by the head curator of the national Museum of women in the arts. The Southwest collection at Texas Tech has requested one



lithographs of each of Miller's paintings. And 2001, the Southwest collection will give her the seed money and the screenwriter would do the screenplay for a documentary about her life and art.

In the future, Miller plans to work more with young people.

“The nine-year-old son of my nephew will apprentice with me over the Thanksgiving holiday I'm going to start taking kids and giving them opportunities. I want to teach that it is not how to paint, but have to see that is important,” she said. Miller's unique vision of the world continues to unfold a painting of a peach sits next to the Nutcracker Suite and her studio. She said she had to paint the piece to help her do the Nutcracker.

“When I was painting the peach the flaw in the fruit is what interested me. Everyone thinks that your subjects have to be perfect, but it is the flaw that makes it beautiful,” she said.

And her studio is a still -- life composition waiting for her to re-create it on canvas. Among the items is a figure of St. Francis, the shells they came from Henri at his studio, and bark collected by an art patron. Miller has been waiting for the items to collect dust, which will add a feeling of realism in time for painting.

“This is my theory of painting. People buy my paintings to see through my eyes, to see what I see and then a look at the world differently,” she said.

Miller spent a month painting the ballet ribbon in the Nutcracker Suite because the color was so elusive. She works nearly as long on another part of the painting into she can convey the feel of tissue paper.

“One might ask how I can spend so much time on a ribbon, when other people appreciate it, it is all worthwhile,” she said.

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