



## New Mexico Artist Has Faith in Her Dry Point Engraving

**H. Jane Nauman – Staff Writer**

When Linda Miller says she is one of the two or three greatest living women artists, she is not speaking from arrogance or egotism. She is speaking with the confidence of a woman who has devoted her life to her art and who believes in the gifts she has been given.

Visitors to the Dakota Art Gallery this month during her exhibit can judge for themselves.

Though Miller can stand on her reputation as an artist in oils and pastels, her uniqueness comes from third media. "No artist in history has ever accomplished what I do in dry point engraving," says Miller. "Rembrandt enhanced his etchings with a similar technique, but I am one of few living artists who works in this form at all, and I have carried the art to new dimensions."

Miller attributes the uniqueness of her dry point engraving to the exceptional strength of her hands as well as to her skill as an artist. Most engravers use a tool called a bruin, a square tool which cuts into the copper plate, leaving hard clean lines of various sizes. By contrast, Miller uses a stylus with a round point which throws up the copper into a burr to make soft, delicate lines that catch the ink.

She hand-wipes the ink onto the copper plate and works it into the design, then wipes off the excess ink. She then applies 100 percent cotton paper to the plate on wet blotting paper and cushions it with blankets. After pressing it with a hand roller, she pulls the paper, producing a dry point engraving of singular beauty.

Miller may be the only artist who works with a one-roller press. The offset printing press she bought for her studio came equipped with only one roller. Although everyone told her it wouldn't work without two rollers, she studied a picture of Rembrandt's press and took a few pointers from that. She fitted a couple of pieces of pipe to the press so she could operate a foot pedal at the same time she applied pressure with her hands. After that it worked just fine.

Miller limits her dry point engravings to 30 or 40 from each copper plate. "Everyone said you could never pull more than nine prints from this type of engraving. But I cut more deeply into the copper with my stylus, so it is possible to draw more prints.

If she pulls more than three prints on one day, however, she is likely to go to bed without skin on her hands, because the burr of the copper is very abrasive to the skin. Each of the prints is an original, and no two ever turn out the same," says Miller. "The print, of course, comes out in reverse of the original engraving." The "1843 Colt" print displayed below its original copper plate at her current show offers an interesting comparison.

Recently a tour of young visitors stopped by her self-built studio at San Patricio, N. Mex. (near Ruidoso). One 12-year-old boy was intrigued with her dry point engraving of an old windmill. The lad hesitantly asked the price. Sensing his sincere interest, Miller quoted him a special price. He rummaged through all of his pockets and proudly carried the engraving away. "That's the lowest price I ever got for my artwork," said Linda, "but it's one of my proudest sales." Other Miller artworks sell to some of the nation's wealthier art patrons.



A visit to the Miller exhibit reveals the artist's fascination with birds' nests. I have a lot of birds in the orchard on my place. I feed them all winter long, and I feel that I give back to them something for what they give to my painting."

The orchards at her ranch come to life in her pastel, "Apple Trees in Bloom," a burst of pastel color like prismatic dandelion fluff's with phantom clouds above blue hills. Miller made her first venture into pastels last autumn.

Miller's show in Rapid City is the farthest she has ever exhibited from home. Most of her paintings sell in Texas and New Mexico where the prestigious Baker Gallery in Lubbock and the Southwest Gallery in Dallas clamor for her work.

"The Baker Gallery has never kept my oils more than two days without selling them," says Miller who believes good art always sells. At her first one-person show at age 19, every painting sold within 45 minutes. She has been selling ever sense.

Getting her paintings to South Dakota was no easy task. She built wooden crates for all of them and hauled them to the bus station. But they all exceeded the 100 pound weight limit. So she hauled them all back home, split them up and built new crates. One final crate still weighed 115 pounds. "I told the bus driver he looked like a weight lifter, and the depot agent assured him that the crate only weighed 100 pounds and we got it on the bus."

But the bus was not big enough to carry her striking 60 x 45-inch oil painting, "Magic, A Day Old Colt." No air carrier going to Rapid City would transport it, either. Finally, by dismantling it and are fully rolling the canvas around a tube, she created a package *two* inches longer than the air carrier's size limit, and managed to sneak it through.

Since she was five, Miller knew she would be an artist. "I have never gone to great art schools, but I have had great teachers," says the slim young artist. She attributes much of her artistic sensitivity to her near neighbors, noted painters Henriette Wyeth and Peter Hurd. Wyeth is also the sister of Andrew Wyeth and daughter of N.C. Wyeth, also famous artist.

"Henriette taught me to remember that trees are connected to the earth, that the roots go deep, that bugs are running around and there is life there," says Miller. "I paint only from my feelings. I do not paint to sell. I paint what moves me. I don't feel I have to compete with any other artists. I never enter competitions. I strive for perfection."

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