



Wealthy on Love, Life

By Jackye Meinecke

Painter Linda Miller is the wealthiest woman I know. Not in money perhaps--that may be in the future--but in the intangibles--her home that she designed where each window frames a splendid view of the Hondo Valley near San Patricio; the patio that overlooks a golden field and the sunset that is putting on its display of shadows and colors just for her and her menagerie; her mentor; and her many friends. This is wealth!

But her idyllic life comes at a great cost.

"People don't realize how much you give up," Miller, who lives alone and has never married, said. "I paint for myself. It is twice as hard to repeat a painting, to get "the spirit in them."

"This (painting) is not going out to have a good time," Miller continued. "It's almost 'like a boxing match. It wins or you win."

But when the artist wins the work is "more than I do, more than I am capable of," Miller marvels.

Miller finds inspiration outside every window or a foot from the door. She often paints her animals, Scarlet O'Hare, Miss Lily, an Angora goat, roosters and chicks. Or she'll paint the hat full of apples she's just picked in the orchard. Miller also collects worn things and antiques that she'll use in paintings.

Her studio, with its huge northern window and wooden floors is filled with a collection of birds' nests and eggs, an Indian costume, an old gown, cape and top hat hang on a hat rack, and center stage is taken by an old rocking horse. It is redolent with the tang of oil paints and turpentine.

"Let me tell you a story," Miller said as we stride from the studio to the patio. And she relates the finding of a rocking horse that the owner would not sell to her, but who ultimately presented the toy to her as a gift.

Recently, her painting of ballet shoes "After the Dance" was selected as the poster for the Lubbock Arts Festival. She presented a framed copy of the poster to Mikhail Baryshnikov, who had danced in Lubbock.

The shoes showed the wear and tear of every impact of the dancer's feet with the wood floor. With each brushstroke, this painting of a beaten pair of ballet shoes captures the dancers love, pain and toil.

Miller's paintings have a mellow patina, that glow of gentle use and tender care. You can feel her love of the objects or subjects as she captures its spirit and history and pours her own emotions into it.



Miller's Lithographs and cards can be purchased at Tinnie's Silver Dollar in Tinnie [New Mexico]. She also is working on a line of sweatshirts featuring Miss Lily and baby chicks. Or her work can be seen at her studio by appointment.

"I want to be portrayed bigger than life," Miller said as she threw her arms out to embrace her world filled with hundreds of hummingbirds at the feeder and barn swallows tucked under the eaves of her studio.

Her history would certainly make a grand novel. "Let me tell you a story," Miller says as we head down the river to look at a nest of baby hummingbirds.

Miller, dressed in her work attire, boots, jeans and torn straw cowboy hat, leads the way.

At the age of 14, a great-aunt took Miller, who was from Snyder, Texas, to Ruidoso to meet Katherine Hail Travis who taught color theory. Travis only took students 16 or older, but the aunt talked her into taking Miller.

An assistant principal at her high school was struck by the resemblance between Miller's paintings and the work of Henriette Wyeth, though Miller had never heard of Wyeth at the time. The principal was a friend of the director of the museum at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, who happened to know Peter Hurd. The Principal convinced the museum director to introduce Miller to Hurd at a show in Hobbs. "Henriette will not help you," was Hurd's reply about Miller's work.

It turns out that he was wrong, and Wyeth has critiqued and nurtured Miller's talent and drive. Hurd and Wyeth backed her first museum show at Texas Tech University, where she sold out in 45 minutes. Wyeth has predicted Miller's continued success.

"Just me tell you a story," Miller said often, as she would launch into the tales and adventures surrounding Miss Lily and her fan club or Scarlet O'Hare's housewarming party or the objects in them. "Let me show you," Miller said just as often, as we went from studio to house to field and back again.

When she paints, she must focus this seemingly boundless energy force straight to the canvas, to her boxing match.

Of course, not everyone reads so much into Miller's work. As she said of her painting "Migration Ended" of a dead robin, "People who look at it either are moved to tears or they see a dead bird."

"I don't paint for everyone." Miller said.

As to regrets about this consuming and solitary lifestyle, Miller said, "sometimes I do. But with such a drive I would have to have sacrificed one for the other." The art or the family would have suffered, "I was so determined to be a good artist," Miller said.

"I don't intend to grow old." However, if she does, she said, "When I grow old, I hope I can say I've made a difference."

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