

A runaway success

Mike Miller has made a name for himself in the art world, yet the only reward he really wants is knowing people enjoy his paintings. Amanda Griffiths reports. Photographs: John Cocks

MIKE Miller was persuaded to enter the 'academy awards' for equine artists in Lexington, Kentucky, and he galloped away with a top prize. The talented Chorley man was stunned when the American Academy of Equine Art gave him the founders' award for best painting.

This followed another award at the Society of All Artists exhibition at The Mall Gallery in London. He's won numerous other prizes over the years and he's shown in prestigious exhibitions including the 'Not the Turner Prize' at The Mall Gallery (when only 400 paintings were chosen from 11,000 entries).

Despite his success Mike is very modest, preferring to stay in the background. He's not an artist you'll find demonstrating his skills at an exhibition or show, he prefers the seclusion of home and the studio.

'I always said I wanted discreet recognition,' says Mike. 'I never wanted banners or trumpets, just people with an eye for the work who want to collect it, hang it on the



Mike's painting called 'A distant call'



Dancing on the headland

walls and enjoy it. Of course, I'm pleased by the awards in terms of the fact the paintings have been judged by my peers and all of the judges are highly talented.

'It's certainly an incentive to create more. It also creates a challenge, too. Sometimes I think, you haven't seen anything yet!'

Born in 1939, Mike started painting as a child and studied at The Harris in Preston and in Manchester. 'An aunt of mine was a very good watercolourist, but didn't follow it as a career. She gave me my first set of watercolours and I went from there,' he says. 'My mother is 92 and still painting.'

Mike is keen to keep the family tradition alive and is responsible for giving his granddaughter, Tara, her first set of paints after she showed a flair for art. Tara, also made an appearance in Mike's favourite painting 'Dancing on the Headland' and it seems his grandson will be popping up in a future painting.

Mike is probably best known now for his paintings of thoroughbred and heavy horses, but he started off with portraits.

'I was given a commission to paint Ted Jones, the director of Leyland Paints, where I worked in the interior design department,' he says. 'That was hung in the boardroom.'

'A friend of my son bred Arab horses. I went to have a look at some and they were tremendous, that's what started my interest in horses about 12 years ago now. It's simply the grace, the power and the movement. I think everybody would agree they are amazing creatures.'

He's also exhibits at what he describes as 'one of the finest wildlife exhibitions in the country.' The National Exhibition of Wildlife Art. It's a tremendous exhibition, really high quality stuff, with artists from all over the world at Gordale Garden Centre on the Wirral. 'Don't be put off by the fact it's at a garden centre,' he says, 'It really is tremendous.'

'You wouldn't believe the talent in this county. I paint for enjoyment and for being part of that world. It's so enjoyable meeting other people with the same interests and I've been fortunate to meet some incredible people with tremendous talent.'



Mike Miller at work