

A Passion for Painting



Artist traces successful career to his TROY experience

By Andy Ellis

Since his childhood days in Selma, AL, there has been one constant in Kirk Miller's life – art.

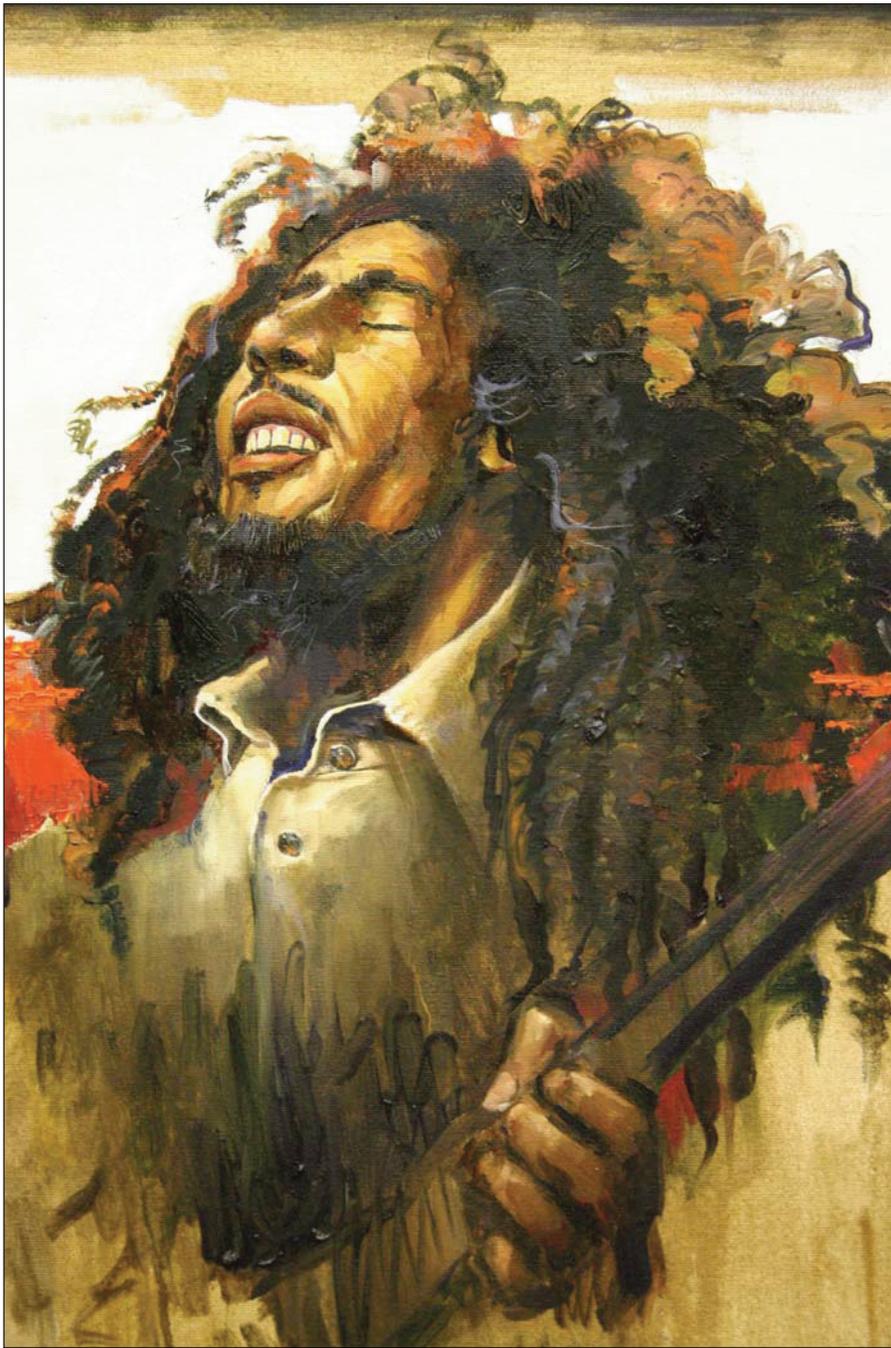
The 1975 Troy University graduate is an accomplished artist whose work dots the walls of galleries, as well as the pages of magazines, books and videos, and is featured prominently in many private collections.

"I think all kids have that interest in them to create art, some just innately pick things up quicker than others and choose to practice and develop that interest more keenly than others," Miller said from his Tustin, CA, studio, only a few miles from his home in the Southern California city. "I just had a particular interest and kept practicing. It is just something I always did."

While his interest in art dates back to his childhood, Miller traces much of his development as an artist back to his days at TROY studying under renowned illustrator and portrait painter and former professor Woodi Ishmael.

"Two things I encountered at TROY were very helpful to me," Miller recalls. "The student body was very talented, and we challenged and





Above, this portrait of Bob Marley is a part of Miller's series of paintings of famous musicians. Bottom left, North Laguna Beach is depicted in this landscape by Miller.

pushed each other. Woodi provided me with my first opportunity to see a true artist at work. I became his assistant and had the opportunity to teach some of his drawing classes. Woodi would allow me to come in and watch him paint. You could see the intricacies of what he was doing. That is so valuable to an artist," he said. "You still have to figure it out on your own, but it is invaluable to be

able to view an artist at work. You can talk about it all you want, but if you can't see it done, it loses so much in the translation."

The opportunity to study under Ishmael was one that almost didn't come to fruition for Miller. At age 12, he moved to Australia and soon developed another passion in his life – golf.

"I began playing golf and used to

caddy for my father," he said. "I got a job as apprentice golf pro and decided that is what I wanted to do in life."

After returning to the United States at age 18, Miller brushed aside the notion of pursuing golf as a career and decided to study art. Bound for art school in either California or New York, Miller learned of the art program at TROY and of the reputation of Ishmael. He enrolled and proved to be an avid student, earning degrees in both art and art education in three years.

"I still have those diplomas prominently displayed," he noted.

After graduating, Miller had an offer to go to work for Disney as an animator, but he saw his future being painted with broader strokes. "I decided I would do something else where I would be able to make some money at it," he said. "I was trained at TROY to be a portrait painter, so that made me in great demand to do demonstrations and lectures."

Miller also found avenues to share his passion for painting with others through how-to books.

"You pretty much do what you have to do to make a living in commercial art," he said. "You find your niche and you just keep plugging away. I've never met a starving artist."

Today, Miller splits time between painting and running an art school for both children and adults out of his studio. More than 150 students take classes to develop and hone their skills and another 60 or so are on a waiting list.

"The Lord has been good to me," Miller said. "I have been married to my wife Terri for 23 years and she has always been such an encouragement to me. You really have to have people in your life to encourage you. There have been so many times that I have just wanted to quit, but Terri wouldn't let me."

Nearly 30 years after graduating from TROY, Miller still expresses his appreciation for the education he received. "Dr. Robert Paxson was the head of the art department when I was there. Both Dr. Paxson and the administration had the foresight to bring in really talented faculty that offered expertise in both the practical and historical areas. You got exposed to everything, and as a result, I received a broad education."