



Nina Mikhailenko

*From
Russia,
with
love*

*Story and photos
by Andrea Rust*

Looking more like an art gallery – where one could spend hours roaming – than a house, the walls in Nina Mikhailenko’s Seattle home are literally covered from ceiling to floor with paintings and other artwork – bright, vivid colors of every subject possibly imaginable.

“I cannot stand empty walls,” Mikhailenko says as she moves a painting from one wall to the other in her bare feet. Her bouncy curls follow her every move.

While Mikhailenko is known most recently to the racing world for her painting “Another Race,” which she entered in the equine art show at Emerald Downs last year, she paints every subject under the sun; from architecture and landscapes, to people and animals.

“New things inspire me,” Mikhailenko said. “I get tired of doing the same subject.”

From the extensive amount of art in her home, it is obvious Mikhailenko enjoys an array of subjects. Following her from the dining room – scented by a fresh bouquet of lilies – to her upstairs studio, each room along the way is covered with oils, watercolors and pastels. One can see and feel the famous locations from around the world which Mikhailenko has recreated.

Among the 32 other awards Mikhailenko has won over the years for her art, her oil painting, “Another Race,” was featured on the cover of the August 2006 issue of *Washington Thoroughbred* and won first place in the open illustration category at the American Horse Publications annual awards competition held in June.

“I have never won anything for a cover,” Mikhailenko said. “It makes me feel wonderful!”

The comments from an AHP judge for “Another Race” noted its “bold color and dynamic composition, with slashing brushstrokes that intensify the movement.” The painting currently hangs in her home, but is available for sale.

“I always strive to do my best, but it’s tough,” Mikhailenko said.

Mikhailenko was born in Russia and studied art at a St. Petersburg high school when she was 15 years old. She graduated from the Mukhina Art Institute and traveled to the United States in 1974 after living in Israel for a year.



“I always liked to draw and doodle, ever since I can remember,” Mikhailenko said.

Growing up in Russia, Mikhailenko said people didn’t think about doing art for money, so if she painted for the money, she probably never would have made it in her homeland.

After being in the United States only a short time, working as a graphic designer like she had in Russia, Mikhailenko sold her first portrait of a model to a fellow artist in the early ’80s. In 1993, she began painting as a professional artist full time.

A self-titled Russian impressionist artist, her work has roots in the late 19th century Russian art movement known as “Peredvishniki.”

“Whether painting horses, scenes of architectural splendor or of persons at work or at play, Nina captures the appropriate mood, charm and spontaneity,” said Robert Wells, a Seattle attorney with Mikkelsen, Broz, Wells and Fryer, PLLC, and a collector of Mikhailenko’s work since 1974. “Above all, Nina is a person of warmth and graciousness.”

Although Mikhailenko studied art in Russia, she also did private study in Seattle at the Ronald W. Lucas Art School for three years. Additionally, she did workshops with Sergei Bongart for four years and workshops with David Leffel.

“The anatomy [of her horse portraits], it seems to me, is always anatomically correct, whether at ease or in action,” Wells said. “The action paintings are especially appealing because of the grouping of horses and the surrounding scenes.”

Choosing to share her insights with others, Mikhailenko has also taught art in the Bellevue and Seattle areas off and on since 1984. A member of the Oil Painters of America, she also works in watercolors, which is among the first mediums she learned in Russia, along with pastels, charcoal and ink. Mikhailenko said she prefers to work on location, because it helps to see the character live, but often paints from photographs.

“Some artists’ (work) are so depressing, and that’s fine, but I wouldn’t want it hanging on my wall,” Mikhailenko said. “Life is tough enough, I want people to be happy and improve their lives. I hope my paintings make them feel better and be happy about life.”

Mikhailenko achieves this take on her artwork through her use of bright colors and movement.

“I enjoy doing every painting and I put all of myself into it,” Mikhailenko said. “For me, every painting is the same thing, but the horse’s movement is always different. The horse is beautiful because of the movement and elegance, but horse art is also hard to sell.”

Mikhailenko said the best parts about her job is getting to work for herself and going wherever she feels like; so her future plans are always up in the air.

“There are so many artists, and I think I am one of the few truly good ones,” Mikhailenko said with a smile.

Mikhailenko works from her home and on location, but loves to paint for people and will paint almost anything anyone wants.

“My favorite art is usually the last one that I painted,” Mikhailenko said.

One of her most recent favorites is a painting she did this past June for a couple for their 25th wedding anniversary. The two can be seen walking down the aisle at their wedding. The piece can be viewed on her website. Mikhailenko’s work can also be seen in various galleries across the United States and Europe, in art shows and in her home studio.

To learn more about Mikhailenko’s impressive and extensive background, portfolio and all available work, visit her website at www.artistnina.com or write her an e-mail at nina@artistnina.com. ■