



Midnight in Moscow

*This artist vividly brings
his subjects to life on paper.*

IF YOU HAVE TO LOOK TWICE AT THE COLORED PENCIL IMAGE OF a snorting, on-the-muscle Midnight In Moscow to make sure it's not a photograph, that's understandable. Artist Mikel Donahue's work is heavy on realism, and it helps the personalities of his subjects shine through.

"To me, art is an emotion," Mikel says, "whether it's a painting or a sculpture or music or writing... And if you don't know your subject, either personally or through experience, I don't think you can quite get everything that's there. You don't get the emotion that's there."



Pony Horse

His art includes portraits and scenes of western and ranching life, but one of his favorite subjects is short-track sprinters. He frequently visits the Oklahoma City track Remington Park, about two hours from his home. And in the back yard of his Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, home stands the 23-year-old broodmare Missy Mit Go, dam of multiple-Grade 1 winner Mr Chivato To You.

Mikel and his wife, Christie, got the mare in 2004, when the mare's then-owners, John and Sylvia Crain, decided she needed to go to a home with fewer horses and more personal attention. They were referred to the Donahues, "We said 'Yes,' and here we are," Christie says. "(The Crains) have turned out to be absolutely wonderful people. They are just are very close friends, and we see them all the time. (Missy has) not only given us great horses, but she has given us wonderful friends, too. ... It's just amazing what one horse has done for our lives."

The Donahues have several prospects coming up, including a 2-year-old out of Missy Mit Go named Mai Mr Mito, a yearling by Southern Cartel, and two foals out of Missy Mit Go born this year, one by Fishers Dash and the other by Dash To Chivato.

Donahue, a native Oklahoman, has lived in the Tulsa area all his life. He has worked in the advertising and marketing industry for more than 27 years since graduating from the University of Tulsa.

He had been interested in art from childhood, and his grandfather, who also painted, took him to see art at the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City (now called the National Cowboy Hall of Fame Western Heritage Museum).

"I liked horses, and I liked being able to draw things from time to time," he says. "In college, I took some art classes and decided that being an artist didn't pay anything, so I had to figure out what to do that was close to it.

That's when I got into commercial design and advertising."

He works as art director for the corporate offices of Dollar Thrifty Automotive Group.

Christie is an office manager, "So I, too, have the 8-to-5, Monday-to-Friday job and love it. ... When we're home, it's our time to do things with the horses or whatever we want to do. It's nice for both of us."

It was Christie's influence that prompted Mikel to get more serious about his art.

They have been married nearly five years, but while they were still dating, "I came up one day and I saw a piece of his art," Christie remembers. "I really liked it, and I said, 'Who did this?'" She was shocked to learn it was one of his pieces.

"I said, 'Well, I have to take this with me.' ... I took it home with me, and I showed it to a lot of people, and he has been busy with it ever since," she says.

His art now hangs in a number of private collections, including that of AQHA Past President Frank Merrill. And for the past three years, Donahue has been invited to participate in the Working Ranch Cowboys Association Cowboy Art Show and Sale, held as part of the World Championship Ranch Rodeo in Amarillo in November. In 2006, he was named best in show artist at that event.

Donahue, who works in colored pencil, watercolor, acrylic and oils, has donated works to benefit AQHA's scholarship and equine research funds. He also has helped a therapeutic riding center and the Alzheimer's Association of Eastern Oklahoma.

Donahue focuses on portraits to help tell the story of his subjects' personalities. He has gone through phases in his art when he was interested in one thing or another. Now, he says, "the reality of it is, the character, the people, are what's interesting."

He takes that insight, coupled with his art director's instinct for composition, and sets about telling a story with his pencils or paintbrush.

"In getting that composition put together, you hopefully have something that tells a story or makes a statement or creates that little bit of emotion," he says. 🐾

Visit www.mikeldonahue.com to learn more.



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