

Miller's start in painting found its spark in another source: the superheroes he drew during slow days in his high school classes. He continued his education at Kendall College of Art and Design in Grand Rapids and got into oils after receiving encouragement from his mother, an artist herself.

After meeting his partner, Rock Kauffman, owner of Urbanhouse in downtown Grand Rapids, Miller quit his job as a bartender and began selling paintings at the home furnishings store. In the years since then, business has been brisk. Miller creates three to four pieces a month and often has them sold before the paint dries. He also creates paintings for charity fundraisers and auctions.

Kauffman says Miller's success comes from his flexible approach, which lets him depict the seductive curve of a wine glass and the playful nature of a puppy with equal success. "He's great at capturing personality and his work is always right on. I've never had a client commission a piece and then not love it," Kauffman says.

Miller agrees that individuality is key to his art, and adds that his desire to capture character extends from the subject's personality to his own. "It's about what I get out of an object—the way it flows, the way light and shadow interact with it," he says. "I paint what I see, and [the creation process] is always a pleasure."

So intimate are Miller's works that the combination of commerce and art was something he never thought he'd consider. He recently turned 34, however, and started thinking about his financial future. Now he's working on a Web site and business card to support his enterprise, and has weathered the initial guilt he felt over making a living from something so personal. "I'm over that," Miller says with a laugh, admitting that he now even gives away or sells many paintings Kauffman wishes he'd keep. "I realized that if you've been given a gift, you've got to go with it. I want to make sure other people can enjoy my art."

Oils may offer a steady source of income, but artistry is foremost, and Miller doesn't want to become complacent. He dabbles in acrylics and charcoal, and lately has taken up human portraits as well. His meticulous technique hasn't quite captured the softness of human flesh, but Miller tries to limit his strokes to achieve smoother images. It's a natural extension of his interest in Impressionist painters like Monet and Degas, and his passion for the beauty of the human form. "It's God's greatest work of art," Miller says.

The New York opening is always a dream, too, but Miller would be happy if his artwork stayed in West Michigan. "I want to continue being blessed with creativity," he says. "I don't want to rule the world; I just want to produce art and have people love it."

For more information, contact Miller at (616) 706-7054.