

## Swayed by the Waves

written by Lorie Lee Steiner

One doesn't just 'see' a Miguel Freitas painting. One experiences it. Indeed, the viewer is unknowingly swept into the scenery by a surreal expression of rollicking curvy lines; whimsical architecture swaying in the breeze; the sensation of being lulled by waves gently rocking a boat. Everything about Miguel's work says "Just imagine..."

mom's nail varnishes. A great deal of his school time was spent sketching. He drew caricatures of everyone – friends, teachers, staff, depicting different stories, funny scenes and memorable events that occurred in school, some of which landed him in trouble. His caricature sketches became well known. They would show up posted throughout the school, advertising an event or as a funny rendition of the boys' basketball team winning the game. Eventually these sketches became a regular part of the yearbook designs.

Miguel has a clear recollection of one particular day when he was summoned to the principal's office. "Being called to the office was nothing



left, Downtown Toronto, 36" x 24"

above, Porto, 30" x 50"

Miguel moved to Canada from his birth home of Lisbon, Portugal at the age of 13 and still remembers coming to Toronto that crisp winter's night. "It was about a week before Christmas and with all the snow and Christmas lights it was quite beautiful. When we arrived at our new home we got out of the car and right away my brothers and I jumped in the snow and had our very first snowball fight (no gloves), it was awesome."

As a youngster, Miguel was interested in all things creative. From taking apart toys and re-assembling them with others to make new ones, to giving his Hot Wheels a spiffy paint job with his

new, but this time it was different. Our school had a brand new gymnasium and I was asked if I'd like to paint it. This was quite an honour and responsibility. It was going to be the largest painting I had ever done – actually they wanted three of them. Our school team was the Tigers and I was to paint two of the animals on the walls, 10 feet wide, and a huge tiger head on the floor in the center circle. Lots of pressure, the brand new floor wasn't even varnished yet. I completed the work over the weekend and it was going to be unveiled to the whole school during the next big game. I was very nervous, as no one had seen it and the gym



left, Double Latte, 24" x 20"  
right, Best of San Francisco II, 44" x 26"



Spring & Mulberry, 48" x 28"

had been closed for a few days while the varnish set. It was a big success, the tigers came out great, realistic and most importantly, ferocious."

#### Computer Animated

On summer breaks, while his friends were working as servers and retail clerks, Miguel was also busy in restaurants and stores; creating decorative wall scenes, as well as huge murals for pageants and fashion shows. He even painted images on tractor trailers. Then, along came the miracle of technology. "As home computers became popular, my parents bought a Mac 128k," says Miguel. "It had a floppy drive and a 5 inch black and white screen, I loved it! I started to play with fonts, colours and general design, creating storefront signage, brochures and logos for local businesses."

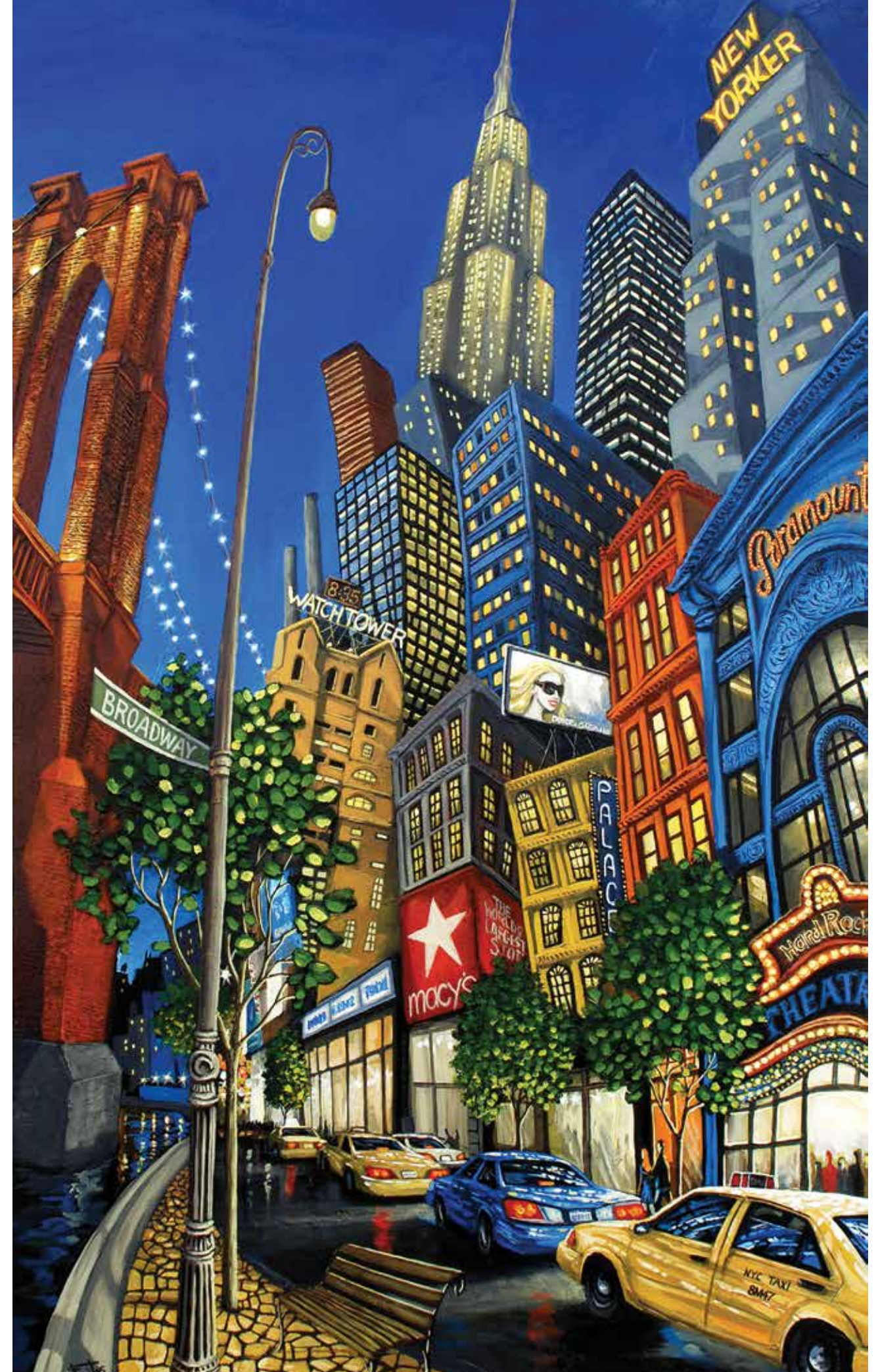
From high school, he went on to study graphic design at George Brown College in Toronto and while there developed a passion for photography, even skipping classes so he could work longer in the dark room. After graduating, he worked the lens for a talent agency, photographing everyone, even people's pets. But his favourite gigs were outside the studio doing fashion and modeling shoots on location, which he did for two years.

The next addition to Miguel's ever-expanding career portfolio was as an Illustrator. As computers became an integral part of the company where he worked, he took on the role of Graphic Designer merging his illustrating, photography and design skills. With all aspects of design now digital, there were endless creative limits to explore. He spent many years working as an art director for a global company creating materials for the tourism industry, everything from postcards to books.

"In 1999 I went to work in Zurich, Switzerland to open and setup an art department," Miguel recalls. "It was a great experience and I loved being back in Europe. I travelled everywhere – it's so easy, just get on a train and in a few hours I'd be



In the Limelight, 44" x 26"



City Lights, 44" x 26"



Gentle Waters, 30" x 60"

in a new place. New scenes, new people, customs, food, architecture. What I paint today has a lot to do with my travels from those days. There's a certain romance I try to capture in my scenes. I distort reality and exaggerate perspective angles to create a visual path and hopefully lead the viewer in. I love being on the water. A perfect day for me would involve a boat and sunny skies, so I often incorporate that into my pieces."

#### Going Public

Back in Canada, after years working his way up the creative ladder, wearing many hats at different agencies, Miguel decided it was time to do his own thing. In 2004, he picked up the brush and started painting full-time. "My spouse (girlfriend at the time) saw paintings all over my apartment – stored in closets, under my bed, etc. – and encouraged me to show them publicly. I created a series and put together a collection that was to be my first public exhibition. There was an outdoor art show which took place in the park just around the corner from where I lived at the time. I knew nothing about exhibiting art and I had no expectations, I just wanted to see the response to my creations. So I entered the show and displayed about 25

paintings. The public response was great and it gave me the encouragement and excitement to continue showing my work."

Miguel did one more exhibition that summer then, in the beginning of 2005, he took on the Big Apple – exhibiting in the New York Art Expo at the Jacob Javits Center in New York City. This was a prime show, all fine art, about 800 artists on display. He did very well, sparking much genuine interest in his work. Before long he was receiving inquiries from galleries wanting to represent him. In 2008, his entire NY Art Expo booth sold out in the first 3 hours of the show.

Exhibiting in New York for 6 continuous years acquired many contacts and much renown for the artist across North America, and an impressive following throughout the world. Between galleries and his own exhibitions, it seems an understatement to hear him say he's kept busy throughout the year.

#### Home Sweet Studio

"We recently purchased a house in Toronto, literally up the street from where we lived for the past 9 years," says Miguel. "This new place allowed me to move my studio back into my



Sunday Brunch, 44" x 26"



left, Cruisin', 16" x 12"



above, Cascading Dream, 26" x 42"  
bottom, Summer Impressions, 31" x 72"

home. I love that I can be creative anytime I feel the urge with no commute. My studio is open and bright and faces our backyard filled with massive trees. The 3 local squirrels are always entertaining, chasing each other all over the yard.  
I love looking out and seeing the seasons change. Summer, however, is a tough time to be in the studio, the occasional sounds of golfers teeing

off the 7th hole of the golf course across the street is a little too tempting. Another distraction is the water. Just down the street is the Beaches and we often take an afternoon break, go for a walk on the boardwalk or hang out on a favourite outdoor patio and chill. Needless to say rainy days are very inspiring and productive.  
My space has to be somewhat organized. I







left, Afternoon Conversations, 44" x 26"



above, Schwabisch Hall, 26" x 42"

cannot work in a mess. There's always music playing, it varies with my mood, most of the time it's just background noise because silence doesn't work for my creative process. My nieces and nephews are often in my studio, I set them up with an easel and their own white surface to paint. They always manage to get paint somewhere they shouldn't but it's all part of their creative process and it's inspiring for me to watch them. I have a shelf that showcases some of their creations; drawings, paintings and clay mascots. I love seeing their minds at work."

#### Imagination, Illusion, Inspiration

Miguel is a firm believer that inspiration can happen anywhere, anytime. "Sometimes I see something as simple as a tree, or a table and chairs at an outdoor café, and I compose the entire painting in my head. I'll jot down a quick sketch first chance I get, usually on a napkin somewhere along the way. I close my eyes and imagine that place, that mood, the lighting, the ambiance and my mind adds that little touch of surreal. I strive to create a place that doesn't actually exist. Even when I'm creating a commissioned piece and the client

requests a specific city, I'll take real elements from the area but I'll also add what I feel necessary to compose the piece my way. Sometimes I'm asked to paint something outside my normal comfort zone and those projects push me to create a great piece I normally wouldn't have thought of."

Thanks to all his years in advertising, Miguel has learned the importance of standing out. When developing his style, he combined a distorted perspective with a slight touch of whimsy. That, along with the thickness of multiple layers of sculpted paint, creates a highly textured surface that makes his art unique and recognizable.

Describing his technique, Miguel says, "My paintings are mainly creations of my imagination and the places they depict are intentionally open for viewer interpretation. I like to play with perspective, lighting and shadows as I create an illusion of depth and a visual walkway into my paintings. I start with a simple sketch on a wood panel then, with a sculpting-like technique, consisting of thick, rich acrylics combined with mixed media, I create a multi-layered scene full of vibrant colour and character. Layering adds texture and depth. When I paint, I deliberately







previous page, Curacao, 26" x 44"  
above, Cafe Martin, 32" x 20"



above, La Promenade, 32" x 20"  
right, Louvre, 36" x 24"



alter and distort the scene with a slightly surreal and whimsical twist to create a unique place where things are not always as they appear in reality."

In fact, those vibrant colours, which appear randomly executed, are carefully chosen and placed to evoke an emotional response from the viewer. Shades of scarlet, nautical blues, sun-warmed yellows seduce with the promise of adventure and romance in laid-back, some might say familiar, settings. At once alluring and illusive.

Most of Miguel's inspiration comes from his European upbringing and travels; an influence clearly reflected in his subject matter. "I was always surrounded by lots of history and beauty," he explains. "I try to capture that certain mystery and romance of a place. Seeing new places, exploring a new city and its architecture is so inspiring."

That being said, Miguel does know how to

enjoy the good life away from work. "Meeting up with some friends and trying out a new restaurant, a nice cabernet and great food. I love the city at night, a simple evening stroll after dinner, some window shopping and ending up at a café, that sounds pretty good to me."

Sounds great to us too. Cheers, Miguel!

Enjoy the imaginative works of Miguel Freitas at: [www.freitas.ca](http://www.freitas.ca), [art@freitas.ca](mailto:art@freitas.ca), 416.699.4449  
Gallery Representation:

Crescent Hill Gallery  
Mississauga, Ontario  
[www.crescenthill.com](http://www.crescenthill.com)  
1.866.288.6088

Howe Street Gallery  
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