NAPIER ARTIST'S AVIATION-THEMED PAINTINGS TAKE OFF AROUND THE WORLD

News / Events / Festivals

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An artist who taught himself to paint just four years ago is earning commissions from around the world for his aviation-themed works.

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Napier man Don Wilkie said the bulk of his works find their way overseas, with buyers in the United States, Europe and Australia snapping up most of his paintings and prints.

The 64-year-old said while he enjoyed art at high school he only returned to the easel in January 2012 thanks to the encouragement of his twin sister, Kathy Boyle.

"She's always been on at me to paint again," he said.

"I'd been painting this big, old two-storeyed villa, a wall a year, and one Christmas I'd had a gutsful and thought I'd go out and buy some canvas and some oils."

Painting is a soothing outlet, says Don Wilkie, who picked up the brushes to prepare himself for retirement

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Mary McCarty

Painting is a soothing outlet, says Don Wilkie, who picked up the brushes to prepare himself for retirement.

"I think I sold the second painting I did," he said.

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"To me it's a total switch-off and it's relaxing. It's an outlet I find incredibly soothing. I get satisfaction about having a blank canvas and finishing up with something I've created."

When he initially picked up the brushes, Wilkie intended to prepare himself for retirement.

"If I was a reasonable artist it would give me an income when I retired and it would keep me busy," he said.

In the brief time he's been painting, he has created a name for himself with his aviation paintings which stem from a childhood fascination.

"My ambition was always to join the air force, but being at intermediate and discovering I couldn't see beyond the end of my nose blocked that," he said.

"The first thing I did was paint a Hurricane. I make up own compositions but usually it relates to a story, a person or a New Zealand squadron."

Earlier this year, Auckland's Museum of Transport And Technology (Motat) took eight of Wilkie's paintings and also commissioned a further two works – a portrait of Squadron Leader Les Munro and another of the celebrated pilot's Lancaster bomber during the Dambusters raid in May 1943.

"I've got him just going over the Dutch coast. That's in a permanent display along with his medals. They were going to do a big launch but he passed away about a week before," he said.

Interspersed among paintings of various war birds displayed in his backyard studio are portraits of Bob Dylan, Joe Cocker and Leonard Cohen along with another of Wilkie's passions – Highland cattle.

"I like fine detail, I am very much a realist and with the Highland cattle you can go mad on that type of thing," he said.

A painting of Highland cattle commissioned by a Havelock North woman resulted in a reaction which wasn't entirely what Wilkie expected.

"When her and her husband came to pick it up suddenly she burst into tears," he said.

The woman's husband assured Wilkie that she obviously loved the painting.

He is now adding landscape painting to his repertoire.

"I try to do things I haven't done before, that way it keeps the interest. Normally I have about three paintings on the go at any one time. It comes from being a Gemini, I have a very short attention span," he said.

Currently working in marketing four days a week, Wilkie devotes evenings and weekends to completing his paintings, each work taking between four to eight weeks.

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