

what inspires you? —>

PHOTO: CYNTHIA LEIP



# Misha Lenn



"I like the impressionists. They are my heroes, my idols. I love them, Degas, Renoir, Lautrec, all of them," says Misha Lenn, whose style of illustration—mixing pen and ink with watercolors—has won him international acclaim and reflects the influences of the impressionists.

Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, Lenn first visited the United States out of curiosity but later decided to make Boston his second home. In 1990, he was granted a visa "for persons with extraordinary ability in science or in art," which allowed him to live in the U.S. permanently.

An accomplished jazz pianist as well as an acclaimed artist, Lenn's work shows the parallels between music and art, his two loves. "I've played jazz all my life," he says. "It reflects myself and reflects my art. The same feelings go through life from music to art.

"Everything connected to music or dance appeals to me," he says of his sources of inspiration. "I don't think about how it works in my mind. It clicks. When something clicks, it is like a

series, one thing goes after another. I have so many ideas and so many things I want to do, but physically, I am not capable of doing them all."

When an idea doesn't click, Lenn may get involved personally. One time when he was asked to design an invitation, he took tango lessons himself to capture the feel for the dance, and then he was able to present two people dancing the tango on the invitations.

"An idea starts from a very little thing—just like how a pearl grows. It is a tiny thing that grows inside the shell, which means I'll have a little idea, but it grows and grows. It is truly interesting that it goes from a small little thing to a big series of somethings."

Lenn's work takes on the characteristics of two genres: fine art and illustration. He works to combine characteristics of impressionism—emotions, movements, and colors—with styles from more decorative artists like Gustav Klimt, which make one look at a painting as though it were through a curtain.

Lenn's work usually does not include faces or features. He hints at an eye or a nose, but uses body presentation for most of the communicating because, he says, "The body speaks for itself. You can say everything by just putting a hand on one side or another."

He'll thumb books and magazines to collect images and emotions for projects. "It's like giving birth," he says. "When I'm doing something for a musical piece, I will listen to music; if it is a particular style, like Toulouse-Lautrec, I'll look at his paintings.

"Movies and fine art are everywhere. Illustration is not as visible. An illustrator is a person who translates something. Fashion designers are great illustrators," adds Lenn, citing Yves St. Laurent and Coco Chanel as two fashion designers who inspire his illustrations. "Everything, all forms of art are connected to one another."

To learn more about Misha Lenn's work, visit [www.mishalenn.com](http://www.mishalenn.com).