



*Improving knowledge for those affected by Down syndrome*

## **The Art of Achievement with Down Syndrome**

**By Robin Johnson**

Michael Johnson is an independent artist and has been painting full time since the day after he graduated from public school in June of 1993. When Michael graduated and decided to become an artist, the principal and the vocational instructor were flabbergasted. They said it could never work and that Michael could never be successful as an artist. Despite their predictions, he painted every day and worked to learn his craft, in his own way.

Michael has limitations - he sometimes gets hung up with details and getting things just right, but when he takes his time and people are patient he can do a good job. Painting is Michael's passion. His favorite subjects are animals, little children and nature. He paints from a unique perspective and is meticulous about details. Art helps Michael communicate his ideas, express his feelings, connect with his community and work to the best of his ability every day. Portraits and illustration jobs have challenged Michael and have helped him to develop his art skills.

Since 1999 Michael has painted more than 70 commissioned portraits of pets, houses and children. He has also painted adults - including memorial portraits of an animal rights activist, an artist with Muscular Dystrophy and Albert Einstein. He has illustrated 2 children's books and contributed to 14 other illustration projects including a book of dog stories. The National Down Syndrome Society gave Michael a VOICES award for expressing his voice to the general public through his art. It is a big achievement for a young man whose speech is often difficult to understand. Michael had a successful solo exhibition at Vanderbilt University in 2001 and the response was so positive they kept them on display for five additional months and purchased several paintings for their permanent collection! In 2002 Michael won a national art contest, competing with amateur and professional artists from all across the USA. His painting "Pets Make the Difference" was chosen as the poster design for National Pet Week in May 2003.

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