



→ Clockwise from top left

Big River
Canvas edition of 95
Image 18" x 24"
Framed £495

The Journey Home
Canvas edition of 95
Image 18" x 24"
Framed £495

Of Time And A City
Canvas edition of 95
Image 18" x 24"
Framed £495

Evening Song
Canvas edition of 95
Image 18" x 24"
Framed £495

WORKING CLASS HERO

Alexander Millar's triumphant one-man exhibition at the Great North Museum:
Hancock heralds the release of six very special limited edition paintings



THEY HAVE THE world on their shoulders, these work-weary men. Dressed in their trademark dark trousers, thick coats, hobnail boots and flat caps, they walk en masse home after a day's labour.

Their somnolent, synchronised walk seems laboured as the sun sets in this industrial landscape, but a cigarette offers some reward for their toils.

Artist Alexander Millar has captured the spirit and soul of the north east's steel and ship-building past in his latest collection, entitled **'Working Man'**.

Featuring the gadgie, the Geordie word for a man, the nostalgic images are a bleak and honest interpretation of life in the industrial north, yet they are also a celebration of these dogged workhorses. Millar offers more than a nod of gratitude towards these men, who played such central roles in building Britain's reputation as an industrial powerhouse.

The seventy original artworks comprise his biggest exhibition to date and they are all being displayed at the imposing Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle.

The oil paintings evoke strong emotions. Sting, Robert Plant, Cheryl Cole and Sir Ian Botham all own Millar's

paintings, and now Washington Green is releasing a signed limited edition of six of the artworks from the museum collection.

Millar, who is frequently likened to Salford's LS Lowry, is one of the publisher's most popular artists and it is widely expected that these carefully selected pieces will be snapped up. Art lovers will have to be quick, however, for Washington Green is releasing just 95 of each.

Seen as a whole, the paintings offer a melancholic and atmospheric narrative, with the gadgie – more often than not seen from behind – wending his way home.

"There is a story behind them all," explains 50-year-old Millar, who is originally

ARTIST ALEXANDER MILLAR HAS CAPTURED THE SPIRIT AND SOUL OF NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE'S STEEL AND SHIP-BUILDING PAST IN HIS LATEST COLLECTION, ENTITLED WORKING MAN.

from Fife but who settled in the North-east of England in 1976. "And I think the ones that have been chosen from the exhibition complement each other beautifully, although I was told that it had been a very



“PEOPLE CAN SEE THEIR OWN TOWNS AND HISTORIES THERE; THEY CAN SEE THEIR FATHERS OR GRANDFATHERS. I’VE BEEN REALLY SURPRISED BY SOME PEOPLE’S EMOTIONS WHEN THEY SEE THE PAINTINGS. SOME HAVE BEEN MOVED TO TEARS.”

difficult job to choose the final six. I’m very pleased with what has been selected.”

There are linking themes in the six that were finally chosen for this collection: chimneys that belch out smoke, the signal of an industrial heartland; giant cranes that majestically and haughtily tower over the landscape; the games of football being enjoyed by young, carefree lads who have yet to understand what life is going to throw at them.

‘Evening Song’ is a particularly striking piece. It features a knot of slouching men, emulating a colony of penguins, wearily walking uphill after a hard day’s work, the sky glowing as if alight. Despite the fact they are en masse, they seem isolated, lonely in a crowd. In contrast, **‘Big River’** sees a lone,

hunched gadgie cutting a striking figure as he ambles towards the cranes. The sky is still on fire and the cranes are a constant reminder of his heritage.

“To me, that’s the typical Tyneside image, but equally it could be Glasgow, Belfast, Liverpool,” he says. “This is why the paintings appeal to so many people. They can see their own towns and histories there; they can see their fathers or grandfathers. I’ve been really surprised by some people’s emotions when they see the paintings. Some have been moved to tears.”

‘A River Runs Through It’ sees our protagonist dwarfed by the ship that is being built nearby and the gigantic crane that towers above. As the gadgie walks along, the viewer enjoys the enduring image of six



WEARING WELLINGTON BOOTS, GREEN HAT AND SHORT TROUSERS, HE IS UNTROUBLED, CLEARLY ABSORBED BY HIS GAME. "THAT BOY IS ME, I PAINT HIM A LOT. IT IS A VERY SIMPLE IMAGE."

←← **A River Runs Through It**

Canvas edition of 95
Image 19¼" x 24"
Framed £495

← **Geordie Best**

Canvas edition of 95
Image 24" x 18"
Framed £495

→ **The Angel**

Hand painted sculpture
edition of 150
Height 18"
£495

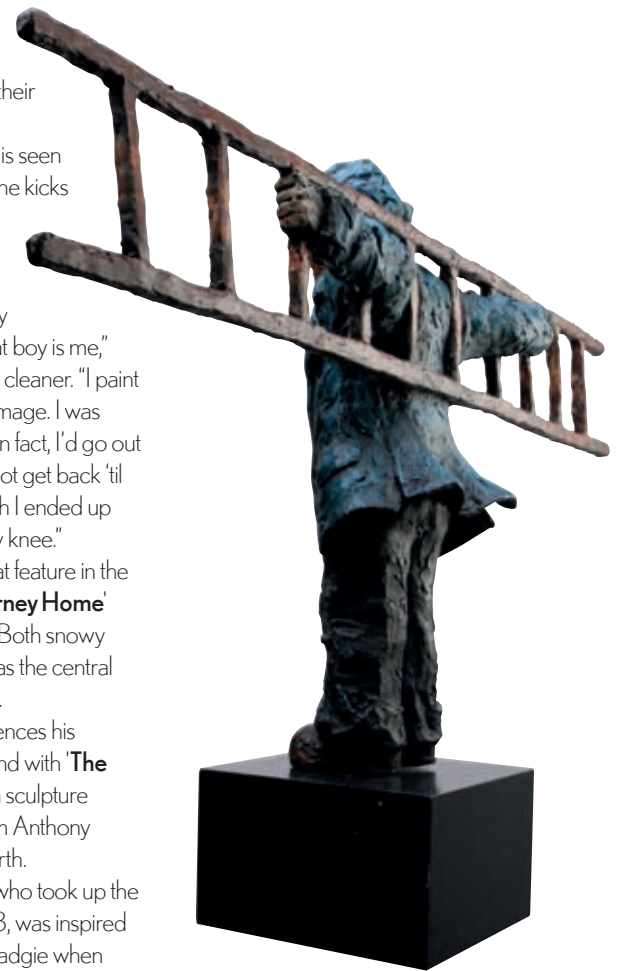
boys playing football, using their jumpers for goalposts.

One of those young lads is seen again in '**Geordie Best**', as he kicks a ball down an alleyway. Wearing wellington boots, green hat and short trousers, he is untroubled, clearly absorbed by his game. "That boy is me," explains the former window cleaner. "I paint him a lot. It is a very simple image. I was always out playing football. In fact, I'd go out at nine in the morning and not get back 'til ten at night. I played so much I ended up with a deformed bone in my knee."

The final two artworks that feature in the limited edition are '**The Journey Home**' and '**Of Time And A City**'. Both snowy scenes position the gadgie as the central character in the whole story.

Alexander cheekily references his window cleaning background with '**The Angel**' a hand painted resin sculpture which draws inspiration from Anthony Gormley's Angel of the North.

Millar, a self-taught artist who took up the brush professionally in 1988, was inspired to create art based on the gadgie when his father developed Parkinson's Disease in the 1990s. Brought up in a close-knit, traditional community in Kilmarnock, Millar spent his youth observing in a wry, contemplative way the old men with flat caps and formidable, strong women who ruled the roost. He knew their idiosyncrasies and their body language and it was this keen eye that helped him develop his talent as an artist. When his father became ill, he began to sketch gadgies - a word that is common usage also in Scotland - as a way of reconnecting him with his past.



Millar found he had to draw them from behind because as he tried to photograph the ordinary working men in the streets of Newcastle as part of his observations and research, they would run away from him. "In a way it helped me to create this 'everyman' character, which in turn has led to more people being able to associate with him," he says. "The anonymity also gives it mass appeal. It could be anybody in any place. I'm very fond of him indeed." So, it seems, are the people of the North East.

Millar's gadgie and other characters from this evocative Working Man collection are adorning the outside of a Metro train, enabling up to 40 million passengers to see them in the next few months.

There is also talk of a sculpture that could be installed on a Newcastle street, which would cement the gadgie as the hero of Tyneside.



VIEW ONLINE

See the collection online at
www.washingtongreen.co.uk