

# BIRDS – Read the Story

## *Alpha and Omega – Harris Hawk*



This is a bird I have known for several years. She is a Harris Hawk in the care of Sally, a bird rehabilitator in Austin. Dolly is her name.

Sally takes Dolly to public events to educate people about raptors and Dolly is a good teacher as well as beautiful and awe-inspiring. Alexa took a magnificent photograph of Her at Bamberger Ranch

and she graciously allowed me to do this original piece using her photograph as reference. Dolly has just gone into an offensive posture, as someone at the event got a little too close to her for her comfort zone. Alexa captured her just at that moment at a fantastic angle.

Serendipity; how life is so constructed of lovely intersecting circles. I have been a volunteer at Bamberger Ranch for many years. This spring I invited Alexa to come with me to a fundraising event at the ranch. I ended up using her photo of Dolly from that shared trip. I have photographed Dolly for years but the one Alexa took was THE one. Excellent. None of my photos of Dolly compared to the one Alexa took. Shared experiences, sharing creative energy, sharing time and talent and sharing secrets of the heart, new beginnings and ending things that need to be ended. This picture is about all of that.

Sometimes a work of art is well planned and as an artist you really work to make it happen. And then sometimes the work happens to you, you work it, believe me, but when it finally arrives, you see that the work was taking you all along. And these are the very best experiences to have as an artist. Desiring to do this picture of Dolly not only forced me to ask Alexa if I could use her photograph, which was uncomfortable because she could have said no, but then it catapulted me into this new presentation of my work. Dolly is so powerful and the energy in this piece was so far outside the bounds of a picture frame that she took me to the next level, to present her in a way that was worthy of her - worthy of her great presence, her nobility, her wild nature. She never got to experience freedom as a captive bird and teacher but her wildness is still in her.

No one can take that away from her.

Maple on Mountain Juniper

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## *Eclipse - Great-horned Owl*



We have a pair of Great-horned owls hanging around. I first heard them hooting just overhead in an oak tree early this spring while working in the garden. They were close, real close and I was excited. Pooh, my fat, orange marmalade cat, was hanging out with me in the garden. I figured the owls couldn't help but notice her and in fact that might be why they were so close. Easy pickings. I scooped up Pooh and locked her in the studio then went back down to the garden to hang out with the owls. They were still calling back and forth to one another and I decided to get as close as I could to them. When I walked by the tree they were in, I saw them both fly down to the creek. One landed in a tree on this side of the creek and one landed in a tree on the other side, right across from each other. I stood for a minute to let them settle and get my eyes on them. They were still calling so I figured out who was who. The female was in the nearest tree. (Females have a higher pitch to their call). As I started walking down the hill the female flew off but the male stayed put. I stopped and waited, then walked a bit closer so I had a good view of him and saw that he was watching me. I just stood there for about 15 minutes and watched him. I was struck with his regal bearing. During that time he would look around, sometimes in the direction his mate had flown, sometimes other directions, no doubt looking for a marmalade cat or some such edible. At times he would fix his eyes on me for a moment then go on about his business of looking for things of more interest. I finally retreated with the light and let him be.

Owls. There are few things like an owl for bringing out the anal retentive gene in some of us artist types. Owls have the most complex feathers in pattern and structure, which conceal their powerful anatomy. Sitting owls look like statuesque, fluffy stumps. Perhaps that's one reason we see plenty of owl statues but few paintings. In 2D owls present a challenge; thick bodies, huge heads, short tails, broad wings, strong legs cloaked in complex feathers and large, feathered feet tipped with massive talons; all that with no bright colors but plenty of detail. This impressive package is all camouflaged in a complex mass of feathers that make them look "stumpy" and is in fact meant to make them disappear when hanging out in a tree. Furthermore, the owl rotates its head 180 degrees because its eyes are so big that they can't move in their sockets. This causes owls to have unusual postures, at least from our perspective, and an otherworldly aspect when those huge eyes are laid upon you, always directly.

I love this stuff!

So, now I am working on a picture of a great-horned owl. I hope to share not only the art, but the experience of creating the piece with you. There is no way to talk about all that goes into creating any piece of art other than letting you know that nearly every experience I have ever had in my life, in some way or another ends up in there. All is mystery and even as my own hands and eyes and heart work to make these things I wonder at how it happens. Thank You.

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### ***Inca Doves***



The inspiration for this image came a few years ago while I was sitting on my deck. I was watching a pair of Inca doves feeding on the ground when one of them flew up into a tree and landed on this large, curved grape vine. I thought at that moment what a good picture it would make to do a pair of doves sitting together on that vine. It took 3 years for me to find the right piece of wood to get the effect I wanted. I did the doves, vine and leaves and the rest of the patterns are the natural grain and spalting. The wood is a very unique spalted maple.

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### ***Pilated Woodpecker***



Having watched these proud, impressive birds with admiration, I knew I would have to do a picture of one. What wood could be more appropriate than this piece of pecky cypress? I have held it for awhile until the time was right. At my friend, Nancy's house, I noticed that when the Pileated woodpecker came to the feeders all the other birds kept their distance, at least out of pecking range of that powerful beak.

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### ***Scissortail Flycatcher***



Another interesting piece of wood that had me stumped for awhile, the patterns in this pecan always looked like clouds to me. I finally saw clearly what to do with it when I thought of the scissor-tail.

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## ***Painted Bunting and Madrone***



I wanted to do a madrone tree and a painted bunting so decided to combine these two beauties in one image, hence the title. I tried to find some madrone wood to do this one on but could not. Lyptus was the best substitute, looking much like madrone. It was only available in narrow boards so that presented a challenge for me compositionally. However, the shape served to add interest to the piece and I'm very pleased. Often what seems like problems end up being creative largess. The bunting is the most colorful native bird in the U.S. and the madrone is, arguably, the loveliest of trees. The two together are magical.

Original on Lyptus wood

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## ***Texas Gold: Golden-cheeked Warblers***



The Golden-cheeked Warbler is one of our most rare songbirds, breeding only in central Texas. The female is nearly as bright and showy as the male. I chose to do them on native live oak as that is where I have usually seen them on my property, gleaning the trees for insects. The grain in this wood made me think of music, the song of the warbler.

## ***A Temporary Truce - Hummingbird***



Other titles I considered for this piece were, "Tiny Titans", "Mighty Mites", "Bejeweled Juggernauts" and in a silly moment "Moored Missiles". You can see a pattern here. I'm always amazed at the huge hearts and aggressive nature of the minuscule hummingbirds. They seem to think they are the biggest bird on the block. At my feeders the males and females fight constantly. They even fight with their own kids once they get to a certain age, and they chase any other bird that gets too close to their feeder or perch. I saw one chase off a Scrub jay and have read an account of a hummer chasing a hawk out of its territory. I wouldn't want to tangle with a Scrub jay, much less a hawk.

The beauty of these little birds is obvious and their mastery of flight is incomparable, but the largess of their personality and spirit is a thing to behold as well. In a temporary truce, they take a break and allow me to admire them for a moment.

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## ***Screech Owl***



This owl piece was done in a unique fashion. I found the mesquite board with a hole in it and immediately thought of an owl picture. The owl itself is done on a piece of basswood and placed behind the mesquite. The entire surface of the basswood around the owl is burned as is all the feather detail. Color was added to the bird with prisma-color pencil.

This owl and his mate came to an owl box we put up and raised a baby. They were quite comfortable with us and we were thrilled to be able to be so closely included in their lives.

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## ***Alice in Wonderland – Tricolor Heron***



I was in the Florida doing art shows and camping in the Everglades between shows. Mrazek pond was a hot spot for photographers and I arrived with my 18 year old manual camera. There was no room to set up my tripod between all the professional photographers with their huge lenses so I just poked around to see what I could get close ups of. At one point this little

Tri-color heron flew down right in front of the line and struck a perfect pose with mirror image. The only shutter that went off was mine because the photographers were all set up for long shots. The heron was too close and it was all mine! Aside from my own shutter, I heard sad moans from the real photographers who could not get the shot of this accommodating bird.

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## ***January Jubilee, Cedar Waxwings***



This is a scene taken from my yard. This tree is no longer with us I'm afraid. I love the lichens that are such a magic garden and so often overlooked. The Cedar Waxwings come to Texas in winter and search for all manner of berries to eat. They are lovely, gregarious birds and always travel in flocks. In this scene I wanted to show a close up of the beauty of the Hill Country in winter. There is beauty all around in every season.

Original on Basswood

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