

ORIGINALS – Read the Story

Thinking Like a Mountain (She Wolf)

My initial inspiration for this piece came from the wood. I knew it was to be a wolf looking between the trees. A few years later it finally became clear just who that wolf was. My intent was to render her quite real and pensive, yet powerful. Her eyes look not quite at you but through you or beyond you, and the fierce green fire in these eyes will never go out.

The She-Wolf of Aldo Leopold's Great Regret

"...As she came out of the water we realized it was a wolf, not a deer...a half dozen pups joined in a welcoming melee of wagging tails and play... In a second we were pumping lead into the pack... When our rifles were empty, the old wolf was down and a pup was dragging a leg...

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes, something known only to her and to the mountain.

Since then I have seen state after state extirpate it's wolves... I have seen every edible bush and seedling browsed...every edible tree defoliated... In the end the starved bones of the hoped for deer, dead of its own too much, bleach with the bones of the sage...

I now suspect that just as a deer herd lives in mortal fear of its wolves, so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer. And perhaps with better cause...a buck pulled down by wolves can replace itself in 2 or 3 years, a range pulled down by too many deer may fail of replacement in as many decades."

Excerpt From Thinking Like a Mountain
by Aldo Leopold.

King of the Mountain

King of the Mountain (Bighorn Sheep)

When going up Mt. Evans in Colorado one spring, I saw bighorn sheep running across the broken, granite boulders as they moved to high mountain meadows. The sheep were in the middle of their spring shedding cycle and I was struck by how well they blend into the mountain habitat. Their shaggy coats looked so much like the rock that it was difficult to see them when they were not moving. I knew right then that I wanted to do a picture of that phenomenon.

I learned that the lodge-pole pine when killed by pine beetles, has blue streaks in it so I went on a quest to find some of this wood to bring home with me. This wood came from a log cabin building operation where I was able to obtain split logs.

Royal Family (Cheetahs in the Serengeti)

One of the most memorable experiences from my trip to Africa was observing a family of Cheetahs up close. This particular mother Cheetah, the "Queen of the Serengeti" as I came to call her, was quite extraordinary. She had successfully raised 4 cubs to near adulthood, or teenage as a human correlation, and they were all still healthy and alive.

Cheetahs are the fastest land animals on earth and arguably, the most successful hunters in their habitat. However, they are slight of build compared to the other top predators they live among and they are also solitary, so the mothers raise their young alone. Because of this a large percentage of Cheetah kills are stolen from them by Lions, Hyenas, Wild Dogs, Jackals and Vultures which form packs, prides or flocks that easily overwhelm a solitary Cheetah. The much larger Leopards also steal Cheetah kills as do Eagles. Cheetahs, being the skilled hunters that they are, end up feeding the masses as they themselves go hungry. They have to be supreme hunters in order to survive seeing as they only benefit from a percentage of their own efforts.

As if life was not difficult enough for Cheetahs already, due to these circumstances they must hunt almost continuously. To make matters worse, the cubs are often killed by larger predators or they starve because the mothers' kills are so often stolen. On the average one cub from a litter will survive to this age, sometimes two, often none. For this mother to have successfully raised these 4 cubs to this age was indeed extraordinary and spoke of her capabilities. For us to have been able to see her and her family was a rare treat and a thrill beyond words. She gave us a special gift.

Until this point in our trip we had only seen a Cheetah far off, a speck in the grass. We were becoming discouraged that we may not even see one close enough to get a photo. Then our guide got word that a Cheetah had been spotted not far from where we were. We sped to the spot and got in line behind other jeeps that had arrived before us. We sat for a few moments seeing nothing. Then slowly, a Cheetah rose up out of a ravine facing in our direction. She paused then began to walk towards us. Our pulse quickened and the excitement built as one by one, four more Cheetahs followed her out of the ravine!!!! They continue to walk towards us until mom sits down on an extinct termite mound and the cubs join her. They are perhaps 40 yards from us at this time and I cannot express the joy and excitement that this encounter gave to us.

The cubs were finally all assembled, looking this way and that, while mom with four teenagers to feed was focused on the next hunt. I was focused on her and seeing that she could never stop thinking about the next meal. I see her searching the plain then

suddenly she begins to stalk. She has seen something in the vast expanse of the Serengeti beyond us. She moves, stealthy, and stalks right in front of us, never looking our way, head low, eye on the prize and the cubs follow. They pass right in front of us and cross the road. Suddenly she stops and sits down. It's over. Whatever she saw (which we never did see) was gone. She will have to try again.

Perhaps without an envoy of jeeps filled with human admirers she will be more successful next time. But then there are the lions, hyenas, jackals...

This huntress who feeds the masses is Queen of the Serengeti to be sure.

Sycamore

Form Follows Function? Toucan

I've heard this idiom before but looking at a Toucan blows it right out of the water. Obviously God was having fun when he made these creatures. Why would they need a beak nearly as big as their bodies just to eat fruit? Works for me, I'm an artist.

Amazing Grace

Mountain Goats are incredible athletes that seem to defy gravity. While watching these boxy creatures on Mount Evans I was awestruck at their agility and grace as they navigated impossible crags and spire in their stony kingdom. It seemed that they must have invisible wings and suction cups on their feet. I will never forget the impression they left on me as I tried to follow them around on the mountain.

Walnut

Heading Home

Memories of horse packing trips of old and the anticipation of another trip to Utah inspired this image. The wood is Banak and set the mood for me. The packer, always at home in the wilderness, could be going to camp or heading back to the ranch.

Faithful and True

Truly a spiritual piece for me, this one came after a drought of lack for inspiration. I would go to the woodshop and look at wood and no good ideas would come. Then I'd have a good idea, go try to find the right wood for it and couldn't get anywhere from that angle either. So then I prayed, asking for help.

This time when I went to the shop I walked over to a piece of mesquite and the thought of a white horse came to me. Good, a white horse would do well on mesquite. I started to visualize the horse and then for some reason thought of the story in Revelations about a white horse. I didn't remember the story so I ran up to the house, got the Bible and said "Okay God, show me where it is". I had no idea which chapter it was in so I just opened to Revelations and there it was. (Smile.) 19:11 "And I saw heaven opened and behold, I saw a white horse; and he who sat upon him was called Faithful and True..." Wow!

So I realized that I needed to do 2 horses, Faithful and True. Faithful would be white and True would be black. I began to think of the composition, thought there may be more to it because of the way the ideas were unfolding, and decided to cut the board long. I felt there might need to be a 3rd horse but didn't have an idea about it yet. By the time I cut, planed, joined and sanded the wood I was ready to start the sketch. I decided to use no references at all but rather be guided by the master artist. Faithful and True went on beautifully with practically no erasing. That is unusual for me. I typically labor over the sketches and spend tons of time on them.

This board has some small knots running through it that made me think of an appaloosa horse. I had thought about that from the start but put it aside as just my infatuation with Appaloosas; I was focused on the white and black horses and working on their sketches when the phone rang. While we were talking I told my friend about the picture I was doing, and he said "You should put an Appaloosa horse in there". Okay, I got the message. After I hung up with Chuck it came to me that the Appaloosa is Joy. "Faithful and True meet Joy!" I was very excited and started sketching her but this was different. I was having problems, kept changing the composition, lots of erasing. I think I re-drew just one of the front legs 7 times and still didn't like it. Faithful and True went on perfectly, practically with my eyes closed, why was I running into a wall with Joy?

I finally decided to go look at a picture of an Appaloosa and maybe I'd get unstuck, so I went in the house and just as I sat down at my desk it hit me. This isn't Joy, it's supposed to be Hope. I'm trying to do an end run around Hope to get to Joy but I don't know what Joy looks like yet. I do know what Hope looks like. So I ran back out to the studio and erased all the spots and that darn front leg, again, and the ideas began to flow. I already had Hope touching noses with True and the rest of the body composition was good (except for that one leg). I got the leg right and then came the spots, what marked Hope. It started with the broken heart then the spots coming out of it like water from a fountain, then the circular patterns, circle of life, and a small, unbroken heart in one of the circles. Her face came next with the star and a small tear, the look of constellations representing the universe, and the Milky Way. Finally, the tail of the star, shaped like the tail of a g, this in remembrance of a powerful line from a wonderful story by Nancy Tester, "Revision".

You may surmise by now that I have been through some tough stuff lately. Yes. God told me awhile back to give people hope. I have not felt very hopeful lately so don't think I've been

doing a very good job of that and have felt like a great failure, with good reason. I have been a failure lately, in that particular arena. But my falling down and failing doesn't worry God nearly as much as it does me, He has all the time in the universe. I on the other hand am very nearsighted. With the gift of this picture and the inspiration, I think I'm learning how to walk again and hopefully see farther, no matter how bad my eyes are. I hope. Indeed.

"Lunch Break" Black at Prior Creek, Gila Wilderness

This is an image from my wilderness trip into the Gila. The magnificent Middle Fork section of the Gila Wilderness is one of my favorite places. We stopped for lunch one day while riding the canyon at this old homestead. It was a beautiful spot with a spring and wildflowers all around. The horses were very happy with the spot too. I saw Black munching flowers next to this old corral and thought "What a sight".

Golden Eye

Horses eyes are incredible, so expressive. This guy has gorgeous color to his eyes and in certain light they look golden. I have often noticed my own image reflected in the eyes of horses so I put me here as a memory of some of my favorite things; horses, wilderness, camping, taking pictures and camaraderie with friends. This would be my first self-portrait.

Cutthroat Trout and Fishing Fly (diptych)

What a beautiful creature! I am amazed at the range of colors that they possess. Unless you see these lovely animals alive you cannot appreciate the brilliance of their color, the colors fade with the life. This is a trout I caught in the San Juan Mts. of Colorado.

Widow Skimmer on Eastern Gamma Grass

This beautiful piece of mesquite was perfect for the first of my native grass series of images. The gamma grass is dynamic with very interesting blooms and the model for this one grows right outside my studio. The skimmer led me on a chase until he finally settled down just long enough for me to take a picture.

Elegance and the Elf

She is grace and dignity, beautiful in the way of the giraffe.

He is an elf of a creature, charming in the way of all babies.

Elegance and angularity, harmony and discord together.

Storm on the Prairie

Storm on the Prairie was inspired by a group of Steers I saw at the YO Ranch. I was there while they were preparing for a longhorn judging and the steers were in temporary corrals two in each pen. These guys were not use to being contained and tempers started to flair. I saw the fight between these two and they had to be separated. Another steer kept trying to jump out of his pen and the handlers finally had to park a stock trailer next to it to keep him from going over the five foot high rail. These animals require respect. They are strong and large and with such deadly headgear they could badly hurt you just by turning their head to swat a fly.

Passion (Lion and Lioness)

Things are not always as they seem at first glance. What appears to be a serious disagreement between a pair of lions is actually a moment of intense intimacy. How to portray this passionate embrace artistically while avoiding a possibly offensive representation was my first challenge. In keeping with the intensity of the subjects I chose to render them in supreme detail. There is nothing suggestive here, however, a moment clearly put down can easily be misread. Life is like that sometimes. Look in the eyes to get the true story.

African Dreams (Elephant and Baobab Tree)

The first of the images of my African adventure to flow from my heart to hand, this huge bull elephant was special in many ways. I was amazed at his size and thrilled to see that an elephant with tusks this huge still survived and has escaped the poachers. I also saw him on the very last day as we were leaving Ngorogoro. The Baobab trees are magnificent and an ecosystem unto themselves, sustaining so many other species. I felt these trees to be the lifeblood of Africa and a symbol of her grandeur and enduring legacy.

Mesquite

