

Harley Bartlett: Pursuit of Fish, Game, and Light



Brookie Pursuit, oil on linen (20 x 24 inches).
From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.

ON A CRISP AUGUST MORNING, Harley Bartlett finds himself waist deep in a Montana creek in the heart of Paradise Valley. Bartlett has been invited to join one of his collectors for a weeklong fishing trip near the collector's ranch. Bartlett's primary focus is not the pursuit of fish but rather mood-evoking imagery for a series of western paintings commissioned by this avid collector. While the collector seeks rising fish and looks for shadows in the gin-clear water, Bartlett just as eagerly seeks an interesting composition of the angler in action, with an awe-inspiring, mountainous landscape framing him as he casts to big, beautiful western brown trout. Each man pursues perfection in his own way, with the end result for the angler a moment he won't soon forget and the end result for the artist a timeless image captured in oil for the collector to enjoy the rest of his life.

Sporting pastimes are in Harley Bartlett's blood every bit as much as they are in his oil paintings. A classically trained artist with a strong illustration background, Bartlett is both a consummate outdoorsman and one of today's best sporting artists. As a hunter of fish and game, he has spent a lifetime in the woods and on the water. He draws inspiration for his sporting images from his firsthand experiences; he paints what he knows. Bartlett approaches a canvas much in the same way he pursues any hunt: a well-laid-out strategy, proper planning, and careful execution on every aspect of approach. His level of

conviction translates directly to the canvas in a way that is rare in today's market. The result is a sporting image that is visually compelling, convincing, and pleasing to the viewer.

Born in 1959 near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Bartlett has lived most of his life in Rhode Island and splits his time between there and his camp in the Adirondacks. He was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and followed up with studies at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. His experiences in the art world are broad and varied.

Bartlett owned a mural and decorative painting company that supplied cruise ships, hotels, restaurants, and resorts with grand-scale paintings and murals. His mural work is found in the statehouses of Iowa, Utah, and Rhode Island and in the House of Representatives wing of the U.S. Capitol. He has painted religious murals for Rhode Island Catholic churches and portraits of dignitaries throughout the United States.

His paintings are found in prestigious corporate and private collections throughout the Northeast, including the American Museum of Fly Fishing, Amica Insurance Company, the Harvard Club, Rhode Island College, Bryant University, Women & Infants Hospital, Newport Hospital, Lady of Fatima Hospital, Aquidnick Land Trust, Kent County Hospital, Norman Bird Sanctuary, Rhode Island Philharmonic Music School, and the New England Institute of Technology. His portrait work has included many prestigious dignitaries in the political arena; for

example, he was commissioned to paint the official portraits of past Rhode Island Governor Donald Carcieri in 2010 and past Providence Mayor Angel Taveras in 2017. He continues to be commissioned to create paintings for corporate institutions and private collectors alike. His commercial work has been a foundation of training and further developing skills necessary in the fine art world.

Bartlett has been featured in magazines such as *American Artist*, *Florida Architecture*, *Traditional Home*, *Home Gallery*, and *Soundings*. He has won numerous awards throughout his career. In 2018 alone, he received the Alden Bryan Memorial Award from the Guild of Boston Artists, a third-place award at the Bryan Memorial Gallery's *Land & Light & Water & Air* show (Jeffersonville, Vermont), and the Best in Show Maxwell Mays Award at the Providence Art Club's annual member show. He has served in many important governing positions in the art world, including president of the Providence Art Club, and is a member of the Copley Society, the National Society of Mural Painters, and New England Plein Air Painters. In 2015 he became an elected member of the Guild of Boston Artists and is a current member of the Salmagundi Club in New York City.

Bartlett's sporting paintings are known for their finely crafted compositions and subtle coloring, and for capturing some of the most beautiful locations in the United States. His brushwork and paint application are evocative of American and European paintings of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Like many of the artists of the past who continue to

influence him (Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins, and Eastman Johnson), he is most drawn to sporting, marine, and landscape art. His sporting subjects (such as seen in the American Museum of Fly Fishing's *Brookie Pursuit*) are nostalgic and timeless, focusing on firsthand experiences as foundations of his creative vision. His sporting subjects are broad and varied, from fishing Bahamian flats for bonefish and permit (such as seen in *Heart Stopper* and *Distant Thunder*, below); to the vast waters of the mountainous West for cutthroats, browns, and rainbows; to eastern rivers for native brook trout. Hunting subjects range from northeastern upland game scenes to western big-game themes and everything in between.

Bartlett approaches a canvas first by blocking in the painting: establishing the large shapes that are visually interesting and defining perspective, color combinations, and overall composition. (He may block in several paintings at once if he has multiple ideas.) These are the painting's architectural underpinnings. From this point, he begins to refine the work, adding additional colors and shapes, tightening details, and adding the angler or hunter—as a relatively minor element in the overall production—to the surrounding landscape. His skilled and experienced eye, combined with a masterfully trained hand, yield breathtaking paintings of these beautiful locations and the sportsperson in pursuit.

FRED POLHEMUS
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Ruth Clegg



Harley Bartlett painting at the Blithewold Mansion in Bristol, Rhode Island.



Above right: *Heart Stopper*, oil (30 x 40 inches).
Image provided by Fred Polhemus.

Right: *Distant Thunder*, oil (36 x 48 inches).
Image provided by Fred Polhemus.