

Angling Art

With Warren Stern

Keith Cardnell's *From a Perfect Vantage*



The work reproduced above is an oil painting created by Keith Cardnell in 2018. Cardnell is a 71-year-old retired IT specialist who resides in Kent, England. I doubt that you have seen Cardnell's work. He markets his work through only one gallery in the world—J. Russell Jinishian Gallery in Fairfield, Connecticut—and not many have been brought to market. He has created fewer than twelve sporting-arts paintings in the last decade and sells only one or two in a year to collectors at prices exceeding \$30,000 each.

Do not be misled into thinking that Cardnell's art is merely a retirement pastime. He took up painting at the age of sixteen—an unusual choice for a lad born in a tough working-class neighborhood in East London. His early works were well received and permitted him to earn some money, but not enough to support himself as an artist. So off to work in financial IT he went. But he never lost interest in art and continued to earn money in his spare time from his passion for painting.

Cardnell is primarily a landscape artist, but is also a masterful portrait and figure painter. He eventually combined the disciplines in sporting art, in which a figure is set against landscape, and took on the challenges of perspective, proportion, and tonality presented by the genre. He finds inspiration in his rural, riverine surroundings and his own angling experiences, and he approaches the genre's challenges through scale and painstaking attention to detail. Most of his canvases are over three feet high and five-and-a-half feet long, allowing the work to be appreciated fully at distances up to twenty feet or more. What makes his work exceptional is the amount of research and preparation and the minute detail of shape and color that suffuses his work. This explains the scarcity of his work: each painting can require as much as a year to complete.

These qualities are evident in *From a Perfect Vantage*. Measuring 33 by 66 inches, it is a stunning, richly colored work that cannot be truly appreciated from the small-scale, untextured, low-resolution


image accompanying this article. But I will try to highlight some of the features that I find most impressive.

The most compelling feature is the dramatic and convincing illusion of space and depth. Cardnell achieves this by structuring every element to draw the eye from the rock formation and slightly rippled water in the foreground to the river's bend just to the right of the intersection of the horizontal and vertical axes, a classical method of creating a sense of a third dimension in a two-dimensional canvas. Notice how the fine brush strokes in the water behind the angler and the curve of the rock formation lead slightly to the right, while the most active flow in front of the angler leads the eye gradually to the left, forming a triangle with the opposite flow that points inward to the bend of the river. And notice how this triangle is echoed and amplified by the opposing, thick masses of trees to the right and left of the river. And of course, the cloud formation points to the bend in a gentle curve that first narrows into a dark triangular shape and then broadens into a lighter and less distinct mass over the apparently distant bend. The effect is like looking through the base of a tetrahedron placed on its side.

The sense of depth is emphasized by the placement of the angler at the edge of the rock formation at the intersection of the vertical axis and a horizontal line approximately one-third of the distance between the bottom and top edges, looking directly through the center of the painting to the turn of the river. This is the "perfect vantage" that gives the painting its name and hints at the

narrative underlying the work. We know nothing about this angler: gender, age, and expression are not revealed. The point of the work is not the person, but the scene. All we know is that the angler found the best place to stand, admire, and cast toward the confluence of wavelets, hills, greenery, and clouds. We all know that this is the real objective of angling—to find oneself in a natural setting so beautiful that a landscape artist could not resist putting brush to canvas.

This is a highly formal and serious work. But a second or third look reveals some lighthearted counterpoints. In the right foreground, just behind the angler, is a fish. The angler would need only turn around and drop the fly line to present the fly. But, instead, whether by design or inattention, the angler makes an elaborate cast in the opposite direction, blind casting into a body of water with no fish in sight. Another animal—a deer—stares at the angler from a point on the left side of the canvas, about one-half the distance from the top and bottom. So the deer sees what we cannot—the angler's features and expression as the cast is made.

It is always hard to capture the beauty of a painting in words or photographic images; it is especially difficult in the case of a large work with subtle hues, careful shading, and precise detail. At this time, Cardnell's sporting paintings are few, but his market is gaining traction here in the United States. Cardnell and collectors of his works hope to mount a public exhibition at some point in the future so that we all may enjoy the works in the way that they were meant to be viewed. 

The 2109 Founders Fund Reception: Save the Date

The 2019 TGF Founders Fund Reception will be held on November 6 at the Union League Club in Manhattan. Save the date.

The 2019 TGF Founders Fund Reception Scholar is Maria Grima. Maria will be a first-year graduate student at SUNY Stony Brook in September. She will be studying marine science for a master's degree and eventually plans to get a Ph.D. She has been a volunteer or project aide in the Shinnecock Bay Restoration Program since 2016. Maria is grateful to TGF and its support for students involved in environmental conservation. 