

ADVENTURE IN ART

THE POPULARITY OF SPORTING AND WILDLIFE ART IS SURGING FULL-SPEED AHEAD.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

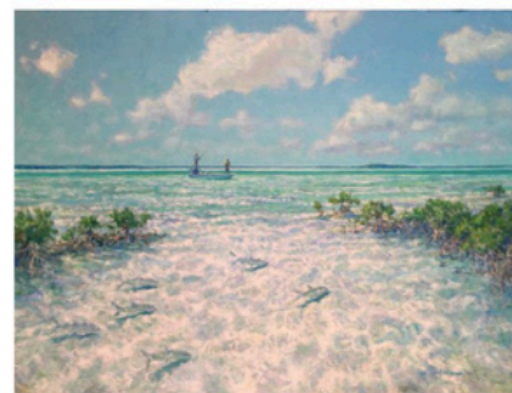


When hunting and fishing were staples of American survival, sporting art, a genre of art depicting images of birding, big game hunting, fly-fishing and other outdoor pursuits, was a portrayal of everyday life. As those activities evolved from necessities to pastimes for many, sporting art morphed into something new.

The captivating scenes of wildlife and the great outdoors have infiltrated the fine art scene and gathered their own devoted following of collectors and fans. Enhancing their work with vibrant colors and realistic human figures, modern sporting artists are creating stunning paintings and sculptures in an ever-evolving genre.

European Roots, American Style

Centuries ago, European royalty enjoyed hunting as a leisure activity, commissioning paintings of the dogs, birds, foxes and deer that filled the forest scenes where they spent their time. These images were displayed in hunting lodges and sporting halls,



Left, from top: "Woodcock Country" and "A Strike" by Harley Bartlett; right, from top: "Waiting for Stragglers" and "Threading the Needle" by Mike Stidham

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Top left: "Season's Entree" by Roger Blum; clockwise from top right: "To the Net," "A Day in the Field," and "The Edge of the Pasture" by Arthur Shilstone



providing inspiration before the hunt.

Eventually, the English countryside was replaced with larger towns and cities that captured artists' interests. Sporting art was still produced, but it was no longer a focus in the world of art.

Prominent sporting artist Luke Frazier says that sporting and wildlife art wasn't recognized as a type of fine art until somewhat recently, when German artists Carl Rungius and Wilhelm Kuhnert paved the way for those who loved the outdoors, alongside artists like Charlie Russell, Philip Goodwin, Winslow Homer and A.B. Frost.

Following this recognition, sporting and wildlife art began carving out space of its own in the artistic community. According to Frazier, this started a whole new component—the use of sporting art and wildlife imagery for magazines such as *National Geographic*, *True* and *Field & Stream*. Sporting art became especially sought after during the last 100 years, according to Frazier, with some of Rungius' paintings selling for hundreds of thousands of dollars.

One reason for the increased interest may be the human element that many recent works feature. Frazier says adding people to

the scenes help make the artwork more relatable, reminding hunters and fishers of times spent enjoying the outdoors with loved ones. The more unrecognizable the figure is, the easier it is for the viewer to relate the image to his or her own experiences with friends and family.

"Sporting art is one of those things that puts you back out in the field. ... It's warm. It takes you back," says Jimmy Huggins, president and CEO of the Southeastern Wildlife Exposition (SEWE), the largest celebration of nature and wildlife in the U.S. SEWE features a variety of fine art exhibits, viewings and auctions in addition to sporting demonstrations and workshops on conservation and awareness.

Recreational Representation

The expansion of sporting art to include more figures alongside wildlife has helped turn the once overlooked genre into a prominent American art form that represents some of the more popular types of recreation—especially in the South.

Along with Frazier, many others such as Peggy Watkins, Jean-Bernard Lalanne, Keith Cardnell, Bucky Bowles, Arthur Shilstone,

Ezra Tucker, Lita Gatlin, Roger Blum, Mike Stidham and Julie Jeppsen are at the forefront of modern sporting art. All of them are working to capture the spirit of the hunt and their love for the natural environment. Others, such as landscape artist Harley Bartlett, are making their mark in sporting art even though they do not necessarily specialize in it.

Frazier says that the genre revolves around passion, noting that creative types who want to break into the art world simply to express themselves typically don't do so through sporting art. "You tend to paint the things that you love. It's a very specific type of art," Frazier says. "[Being outdoors] is something I've always done and always enjoyed."

Born in 1970, Frazier grew up raising bird dogs, hunting quail and fly-fishing. After realizing in high school that he wanted to pursue art as a career, he went on to earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting and sculpture and a Master of Fine Arts in illustration.

The same year Frazier was born, wildlife artist Bob Kuhn put an end to his noteworthy illustrating career and opted to create fine art pieces full time. Twenty years later, Kuhn began mentoring Frazier.



SPORTING ART SHOWCASED

THESE SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS, AUCTIONS AND FESTIVALS PROVIDE ACCESS TO SOME OF THE FINEST SPORTING ART IN THE COUNTRY.

“Rivers and Tides”

Charleston, South Carolina

April 14 - May 15

The spring showcase at The Sportsman’s Gallery will focus on the upcoming fishing season, complete with works that range from scenes of the low country to riverscapes and trout fishing in the American West. (sportsmansgallery.com)

“Andre Pater: A Matter of Light”

Middleburg, Virginia

April 21 - Aug. 20

This exhibit at the National Sporting Library & Museum features the work of contemporary sporting artist Andre Pater. While visitors will see paintings of horses, jockeys, dogs and wildlife, they will also learn about Pater’s use of light and knowledge of animal behavior. (nationalsporting.org)

Jackson Hole Fall Arts Festival

Jackson Hole, Wyoming

Sept. 6-17

Now in its 33rd year, the Jackson Hole Fall Arts Festival combines artwork with music, wine and culinary masterpieces. Sporting and wildlife artwork can be found throughout the festival’s art auctions and at the Western Visions Show & Sale and Western Visions Artist Party. (jacksonholechamber.com)

Plantation Wildlife Arts Festival

Thomasville, Georgia

Nov. 17-19

One of Georgia’s fall highlights, the 22nd Annual Plantation Wildlife Arts Festival combines sporting and wildlife artistry with the region’s cultural history to present a fine art show with 65 different sporting and wildlife artists. Proceeds from the sale benefit the Thomasville Center for the Arts, which is dedicated to art and creativity in the region. (pwaf.org)

Sporting Art Auction

Lexington, Kentucky

Nov. 20

Keeneland, a Kentucky-based thoroughbred auction house, partners with Cross Gate Gallery each November to present the annual Sporting Art Auction. The event lines up with Keeneland’s horse sale, showcasing the artwork in the Keeneland Sales Pavilion for a few months leading up to the auction. (thesportingartauction.com)



“Out of the Mist” (left) and “Autumn Rush” (right), both by Luke Frazier

Rungius is another of Frazier’s idols thanks to his masterful approach and confidence, which Frazier says was evident in Rungius’ ability to put a stroke down and leave it there without fussing over it. Frazier says it takes years of practice and knowledge to be able to reach this point, but he also says it paints the perfect picture of what an artist is trying to say or showcase with his or her work.

Forging the Way

With festivals and galleries all over the U.S. showcasing some of the finest sporting and wildlife art in the country, it’s clear that the genre is thriving. Huggins says that SEWE has seen increased sales and interest in the genre over the last five or six years. More than 100 artists exhibited their work at this year’s festival, with a limited auction occurring in addition to the annual show and sale. Aside from festivals, galleries play an important role in the future of sporting art. Michael Paderewski, owner of The Sportsman’s Gallery Ltd. and Paderewski Fine Art in Charleston, South Carolina, has been in the art business for over 20 years, specializing in sporting and wildlife pieces. His gallery, which also has a Colorado location, features luminaries including Ogden Pleissner, Lynn Bogue Hunt and Frank W. Benson. He, too, has seen an increase in the popularity of sporting and wildlife art over the years. “The American sporting art market remains strong and vibrant,” Paderewski says. “The true sporting enthusiast is passing along their outdoor passions to their children, who in turn gain an appreciation for sporting art. ... [Sporting art] is very much a matter of what each person experiences in the outdoors. It is generally works of art depicting those experiences which draw them in and to which they can relate.”



“River Babies” by Luke Frazier

Sporting art specialist Fred Polhemus helps run the J. Russell Jinishian Gallery in Fairfield, Connecticut, which has about 1,000 paintings on hand at any given time. Though it also has a strong focus on contemporary marine art, the gallery partners with sites all over the region—including the Orvis Sandanona Shooting Grounds, various prestigious New York City clubs and many regional hotels—to bring sporting art to the community. While Polhemus says hunting and fishing won’t be disappearing as popular pastimes, the future of the artwork it inspires still remains somewhat uncertain.

“There’s definitely going to be a future for the subject matter, it’s just a matter of who will be the practitioners,” Polhemus says. “Fewer artists are receiving the classical training [in figure drawing and composition] that is favored in sporting art. ... People want imagery that is fresh and spontaneous, but they also want stuff that’s done well.”

Whether the genre continues to be characterized by animal accuracy, realistic human figures and vibrant colors, or whether artists embrace new approaches and techniques, the classic imagery of sporting and wildlife will certainly still inspire. ○



“Shadow Casting” by Luke Frazier

TOP AND BOTTOM LEFT: LUKE FRAZIER

PHOTOS BY LUKE FRAZIER

JEWELS OF THE CLOISTER

STOP BY THE CONCIERGE DESK TO BORROW A COPY OF THE BOOK, “THE ART OF THE CLOISTER,” TO LOCATE THESE EXAMPLES OF SPORTING ART AT THE CLOISTER AT SEA ISLAND.

“Three Setters in an Open Landscape”

Edmund Henry Osthaus

A well-known sporting artist, Osthaus primarily painted images depicting hunting and fishing, like this one, featuring three hunting dogs. Osthaus’ paintings were beloved by prominent American families including the Morgans and the Vanderbilts in the early 1900s.



“Les Epagnuels Devant un Canard”

B. Roussel

This 19th century French painter, known for his love of dogs, nearly always incorporated bird dogs in his paintings. The practice of creating works of art “en plein air” also developed around this time, allowing Roussel to flourish by painting outdoors.



“Spaniels Flushing a Pheasant”

George Armfield

A British artist, Armfield painted landscapes, game birds and wild animals, but was best known for dog paintings with the subjects portrayed in action, such as this one. The piece is especially emotive, with the spaniels engaged in hunting the wild animals within the scene.



“Hawk and Heron in Flight”

Victor Gifford Audubon

An American painter who was prominent in the 1800s, Audubon focused heavily on birds in his work. His father, John James Audubon, was a renowned bird painter, and Victor’s pieces reflected what he learned from his father’s techniques and subjects.

