

Gray's Sporting Journal

VOLUME FORTY-ONE ISSUE 2 MAY/JUNE 2016



Fine Art, Fine Food

by Chris Camuto

ARTHUR SHILSTONE'S sporting art has become as familiar to us as memories from our own days outdoors. His paintings of fly fishing, especially, constitute memorable renderings of the appeal of contemporary angling. And he knows his way around the mystique of upland game and duck hunting as well. With an aesthetic somewhere between the brightness of Chet Reneson and the darkness of Russell Chatham, Shilstone's compositions pose anglers and hunters in nature with an unforced soulfulness that makes them uniquely appealing and instantly recognizable. Fred Polhemus's *ARTHUR SHILSTONE: A LIFETIME OF DRAWING & PAINTING* (TIDE-MARK PRESS, LTD., HARDBOUND, \$44.95) gives us a fine retrospective on and sample catalog of Shilstone's work across a varied career.

We learn from Polhemus's elegant biographical essay that Shilstone was born in 1922 in Weehauken, New Jersey, a historical moment that cast the shadow of the Depression across his childhood and put World War II in his path. He had started working his way through Brooklyn's Pratt Institute, cutting his teeth on drawing and illustrating, when Pearl Harbor led him to a three-year hitch in the "Ghost Army," a top secret unit assigned to create the illusion of troop and armor movements as the Germans retreated from Normandy. Shilstone's wartime sketches have the gravitas you might imagine, a young artist's depiction of soldiers, army life, and a war-ravaged landscape. Minor gems of this collection, they show a young artist at work amid the important circumstances life has thrown at him.

He had come full circle in connecting the worlds he knew best: art and sporting pastimes.

Fred Polhemus, *Arthur Shilstone: A Lifetime of Drawing & Painting*

Shilstone's postwar career led him to illustrate a fascinating range of American life, from the Pacific Airlift during the Korean War to the celebrity murder trial of Sam Sheppard to covering the jazz and Dixieland scene to illustrating NASA's space shuttle launches with work that hangs in the NASA museum. His credits include *Life*—the mother ship of all the illustrated magazines—as well as *National Geographic*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Smithsonian*, and *The New York Times Magazine*. Glimpses of the Shilstone we know—an artist deeply attached to nature—come through in his illustrations for an edition of Thoreau's *Walden* and anywhere botanical detail and landscapes were needed in his far-flung commercial assignments.

As Polhemus notes, Shilstone came late but prepared for his turn to sporting art in 1980, when the artist was in his late 50s: "The new direction

was a natural one for Shilstone. Even during his busiest years as an illustrator, he often painted pictures for his own enjoyment. His love of the outdoors, nurtured while growing up in Mahopac after the Depression, became the foundation of much of the work he created."

As sometimes happens in an artist's life, Shilstone got to his most important subject last, but this delay seems to have benefited the subtle depth and power of his work. This volume includes a rich selection of Shilstone's sporting art, where you can enjoy that aesthetic for yourself—the darkness of *The Long Cast* and *Winter Sun*, the boisterous power of *Down the River* and *Casting for Strippers*, the thin-water tension of *The Bone Fisherman* and *Fishing in the Glen*. There are also