



Sporting Art That Sparkles

The watercolor paintings of Connecticut artist Arthur Shilstone convey a superb sense of place along with the challenges and excitement of fishing and hunting. A handsome new book, *Arthur Shilstone: A Lifetime of Drawing & Painting*, by Fred Polhemus, provides a retrospective on the life and art of this talented Pratt Institute graduate whose work has decorated the pages and covers of *Life*, *Smithsonian*, *National Geographic*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Field & Stream* and other publications.

In a foreword William Sisson, editor of *Angler's Journal*, notes that throughout his career Shilstone—still painting at age 93—has made use of the time-honored transparent watercolor technique, “which allows the light to shine through to the watercolor paper and the white of the paper to reflect back, giving his work a wonderful sparkle and a distinct vibrancy.”

Structured chronologically, the book starts with Shilstone's service in Europe during World War II with a unit that included students from art schools throughout the US. Dubbed “The Ghost Army,” those creative young men were charged with persuading the Germans that they represented a much-larger force than they truly did. They devised bogus tanks, trucks, planes and artillery to trick the enemy into deploying forces that otherwise would have been engaged to fight genuine Allied units. Between missions and engagements, Shilstone used fountain pen

and index cards to sketch what he saw around him: fellow troops, damaged buildings, fake inflatable tanks. (These lively drawings reproduce as black & whites; the rest of the paintings in the book are full color.)

After the war Shilstone carved out a career in commercial illustration, and the book includes examples of his evocative, highly professional paintings of courtroom trials, sporting events, historical topics, musicians, book covers, American industries and NASA rocket launches.

Shooting Sportsman readers will find much delight in the sporting art that Shilstone produced between 1980 and the present; those 76 paintings comprise about half the book. “To do sporting art you have to fish and hunt or you have no authenticity,” Shilstone says. “Many of my paintings were inspired close to home in Redding, Connecticut, where I've lived for 57 years.” He adds, “We have four seasons, so the light changes, the foliage changes, the weather changes, the mood changes. It's all here.”

Writes author Polhemus: “Shilstone's work puts the sportsperson, both participant and viewer, into the picture . . .

capturing the fleeting effects and dramatic views that are so integral to art that portrays sporting pastimes.” Polhemus notes that Shilstone uses a “wet-on-wet” method, applying paint in layers “without waiting for one color to dry before applying another color.” This approach “results in dramatic washes of color and an exciting feeling of movement and life.” Shilstone's sporting work has been compared favorably with that of the legendary Ogden Pleissner.

Shilstone is great at depicting rivers, waterfalls, plants, rocks—as well as people and dogs and gamebirds. He can capture the mood of a stormy day's surf fishing on the Atlantic coast, a guide maneuvering a canoe on a river, ducks lifting off of a pond in fog, a cock pheasant's electrifying flush, a hunter swinging on a woodcock skittering across a stream. The majority of the sporting paintings in the book portray fishing, with enough hunting scenes to amply entertain bird hunters who enjoy fine art.

Arthur Shilstone: A Lifetime of Drawing & Painting is published by Tide-Mark Press of East Hartford, Connecticut, and sells for \$44.95 plus shipping. The 160-page hardcover features high-quality paper and excellent reproduction of images. The book can be ordered online from the publisher or directly from author Fred Polhemus, 802-598-8301; jrusselljinishiangallery.com. A slip-cased collector's edition (100 copies; \$150 each) includes a certificate of authenticity signed by the artist and the author, and a fine-art print of the cover illustration signed by Shilstone. —CHARLES FERGUS