

INTO THE WILD

Lisa Gleim's internationally acclaimed narrative pastel paintings capture wildlife in the majestic nature of coastal and mountainous regions, and more recently the African savanna

ALTHOUGH LISA GLEIM has always been drawn to wildlife, it was when a collector commissioned a pastel of their swimming water dog that Lisa began to apply her skill as a professional portrait painter to the wonders of the natural world.

In a popular body of work, which she refers to as her "Map Series", animals that have inspired her – such as bears, bison, wolves and other creatures of the American West – are often depicted on a background formed of printed ephemera, from park maps to fishing permits. Proclaimed a foremost Northern America wildlife artist, Lisa is represented by leading galleries and is a frequent participant in events such as Montana's CM Russell Museum's annual exhibition and auction.

"I was drawing before I wrote my name," says Lisa, who divides her time between Big Sky, Montana and Atlanta, Georgia. "If I wasn't inside drawing, I was outside exploring nature. Being able to combine my passions is a dream come true."

While Lisa regularly spots bears and wolves in their natural habitat out west, she also visits West Yellowstone's Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center, a sanctuary for wildlife. There, Lisa can sketch from life and photograph many of the subjects of her work.

A graduate of Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the oldest art school and museum in the US, Lisa honed her talent in pivotal classes that included live animal drawing and anatomy. Her success is evident in the numerous awards she has received, such as the Audubon Artists Gold Medal of Honor for Pastel, which she won in 2012 and 2016.

"Understanding the structural foundation of the skeleton and muscles," she says, "allows me to realistically recreate the physical form of the



animal, where one can see the mass of the muscle beneath its fur or feathers. People respond to the subject matter, the narrative and the medium I use. I work in pastel because the sticks have a higher portion of pure pigment and less binder, unlike other mediums, making my colour marks brighter and more vivid. The medium reflects light without darkening light refraction, allowing for very saturated and beautiful colours."

Lisa also strives to capture the essence of the animal – the soul of a creature revealed in the eyes or through certain aspects of posture. And she tries to tell a story through her work, often using ideas and themes from Native American mythology, as seen in her paintings of bears or foxes and ravens – creatures imbued with great significance in traditional folklore. This is another aspect, along with her background and sheer technical skill and imagination, that allows her work to stand out in the wildlife genre. Some pieces are finished with subtle touches, including gold leaf and pearl, to add texture and create further elements, encouraging the viewer to wonder about the story being told – an example of which is *One Must Be a Fox to Recognize a Trap*, in pastel and pearl on geographic maps (measuring 24 x 33in).

After spending time in Africa, Lisa is now beginning to include the majestic animals of the savanna in her work. "During my safari, I took some phenomenal photos of subjects that I am looking forward to painting. As a member of Artists for Conservation, I am able to support animal and environmental conservation programmes with a portion of my art sales, which is very important to me."

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