

Alison Nicholls

Nicholls Wildlife Art

Artist's Statement

Although I have traveled extensively all my life, I have yet to find a place as intoxicating as the African bush. During years of camping trips in southern Africa I have had countless unforgettable experiences: lions walking out of the darkness into the light of my campfire; wild dogs chasing impala past my tent; leopards hunting at night. But it is the quieter times which remind me most vividly of Africa: watching storm clouds silently build over the Kalahari Desert; listening to barking geckos as the moon rises over the salt pans; watching sparrow weavers build their untidy nests in a knarled acacia tree.

To paint a wild animal correctly and convincingly you have to know how it moves and behaves, where and how it lives. My knowledge comes from years of observation and sketching wildlife in its natural habitat. I sketch in pencil, pen and watercolor, writing extensive notes and soaking in my surroundings. This is my life-drawing class, allowing me to replenish my mental library of images, colors, smells, sounds and sensations, all of which are an integral part of my sketches and my studio paintings.

In my studio paintings, I aim to eliminate all unnecessary detail to reveal the true character of a species. I find composing a new painting easiest when I am out walking, visualizing the painting in my mind's eye, making decisions about the time of day, the age and gender of each animal. Back in the studio I create small thumbnail sketches to test my composition, followed by a larger detailed drawing of the animals. Then I am ready to paint.

My painting style consists of 3 key elements: quiet times, space and color. Knowledge of African wildlife is the essence of my work. Animals spend most of their time feeding and resting so this is how I like to paint them - behaving naturally, undisturbed and unaware of the viewer. I call this my 'quiet times factor' and I enhance the painting's tranquil atmosphere by using a limited palette of colors, reflecting the relaxed nature of the animals.

Space is another vital element – it leaves room for imagination and interpretation. Animals are just one portion of each composition and they are balanced by large areas of minimal detail which I carefully preserve in each painting. This use of space, where overlapping washes of color fill the paper, was not initially a conscious decision on my part, but became more prominent in my work as I spent more time in the Kalahari and Namib Deserts.

Color is immediately evident in my art but I use it to convey a mood or a time of day, not to mimic the colors of nature. I use oranges and reds to create the effects of hot blazing sun, blues and grays for cooler shadows, purples for dusky evenings. I often visit Botswana in the dry season when there is a huge amount of dust in the air and the sun appears to set long before it reaches the horizon. Many of my paintings make use of these dusty effects and I often paint animals disappearing into a dusky evening.

My paintings are based on sketching in the bush, long hot hours watching elephants, waking to the sound of francolins, sandy roads traveled in a hot vehicle, the call of the scops owl and the smoke of the campfire. These are my experiences of Africa and they inspire me to pick up my brushes.

Résumé

Selected Exhibitions

2011 – Art and the Animal Exhibition, Society of Animal Artists, Denno Museum Center, Traverse City, Michigan

2011 - President's "Best of the Best" Watermedia & Pastel Exhibition, Salmagundi Club, New York City.

2010 - 97th Annual Exhibition, Allied Artists of America, National Arts Club, New York City.

2010 - 54th National Juried Fall Open, Southern Vermont Arts Center, Manchester, Vermont.

2009 - 49th Art and the Animal Exhibition, Society of Animal Artists, Rolling Hills Wildlife Adventure, Kansas.

2008 - The Art of Conservation, Artists For Conservation Annual Exhibition, Hiram Blauvelt Art Museum, Oradell, New Jersey.

2008 - Painting the Painted Dogs, Solo Exhibition, Audubon Greenwich, Greenwich, Connecticut.

2005 - Beneath a Big Sky, Solo Exhibition, Botswana Mission to the United Nations, New York City.

Selected Awards

2010 - Ogden Pleissner Memorial Award, Annual Members Exhibition, Salmagundi Club, New York City.

2010 - Honorable Mention, The Art of Conservation, Artists For Conservation Annual Exhibition.

2008 - Award of Excellence, The Art of Conservation, Artists For Conservation Annual Exhibition. Hiram Blauvelt Art Museum, Oradell, New Jersey.

Association Memberships

Artists For Conservation, Signature Member

Society of Animal Artists, Signature Member

Explorers Club, Resident Member

Salmagundi Club, Artist Member

Selected Lectures

Explorers Club (with Dr Gregory Rasmussen, Painted Dog Conservation Founder), New York City.

Bronx Zoo & Central Park Zoos, Friends of the Zoo Associations, New York.

Wolf Conservation Center, South Salem, New York.

Audubon Greenwich, Greenwich, Connecticut.

Somerset Park Environmental Education Center, Basking Ridge, New Jersey.

Biography

Alison Nicholls is a wildlife artist who lived in Botswana and Zimbabwe for 9 years. She returns on an annual basis to sketch in the bush and only paints species she has observed and sketched in their natural habitat. Alison is a signature member of Artists For Conservation and the Society of Animal Artists, and a member of the Explorers Club and Salmagundi Club in New York City. In 2007 she was awarded a Conservation Fellowship Grant by the Artists For Conservation Foundation and spent 6 weeks at the Painted Dog Conservation project in Zimbabwe, tracking and sketching highly endangered African Wild Dogs. This inspired the creation of her Conservation Expeditions program, in which she visits African conservation projects and uses her expedition sketches and paintings to raise awareness of conservation issues and funds for the project. Alison's work has been featured in wildlife art magazines in the USA and UK. Her work has been exhibited at the Botswana Mission to the United Nations in Manhattan and used by the US Department of State to promote the "Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking" initiative. Alison frequently lectures about art, Africa, wildlife and conservation. She was invited to give a members seminar at the Explorers Club titled 'Expedition Journals and Sketchbooks' and was part of a 4-artist panel discussing 'The Art of Expedition and Exploration'. In 2011 she guided Art Safaris in South Africa on behalf of Africa Geographic magazine.

Alison is English by birth but has traveled widely throughout her life. She currently lives in Port Chester, New York.

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