



Detail of *What the ...* (oil, 12 x 24") by John Seerey-Lester is part of a new series he's doing on historic hunts. Here, it's the 1940s in British East Africa and a pride of lions has forced a Cape buffalo into a hunting camp. Fortunately, the beast ran off without harming anyone.

John and Suzie Seerey-Lester

All-Around Consummate Professionals

BY MICHAEL SCOTT-BLAIR

For two people who never really set out to be professional artists, John and Suzie Seerey-Lester have probably put together one of the most complete artistic family packages in the world. Art, books, writing, business skills, sales expertise, historical appreciation—it is all there with hard experience to back it up, and all tied together in one package by this fun-loving couple from Florida, who not only practice what they preach, but are delighted to share their knowledge with one and all.

John is a master artist—a legend in the wildlife art world. Suzie concedes that she started out in his shadow, and that the name opened some doors for her at first. However, as an eager and willing student, sharing each day with not only a master artist but a master teacher, she is now acknowledged as an artist in her own right. But the separate and earlier lives of these two hard-charging perfectionists have qualified them to bring much more to the art world than another beautiful picture of a leopard, a bear, a bird or a barnyard.

The Seerey-Lesters have extensive business backgrounds, along

with publishing, editing, writing, sales and corporate experience, all reflected in Suzie's new book, *My Painting Is Done, Now What Do I Do?* It is a business manual aimed directly at artists who, generally, have notoriously poor business skills, says Suzie, and have few, if any, places to learn such skills.

Recently released, the book took two years to develop. It covers everything from developing and keeping track of inventory, to copyright laws, the role of proper framing, where to get frames, how to set prices, the documentation needed to accompany pictures to galleries, and how to add value to a painting. There is an entire chapter on artist etiquette, plus a guide to galleries vs. shows, and how to photograph a painting that is being offered to a gallery. "It seems amazing," says Suzie, "but I have seen photographs by artists with the picture sitting on a lawn chair and a garden hose running in front of it. That's not going to impress a gallery owner."

Though it is a serious business book on a serious subject, Suzie has kept it light in style and liberally scattered John's cartoons



This 8 x 10" graphite street scene of Wellington, England, done in 1974, is typical of the work that first brought fame to John Seerey-Lester in his native England.

throughout the pages. "It is easy for a book on business to put you to sleep—we don't want that," she says. "The book is based on the principle that winners will do what losers won't. This is definitely a book for winners."

Englishman Drawn to Old England

John, who is fascinated by the English Victorian and Edwardian era of the late 1800s to early 1900s, was born in Manchester, England in 1945. "There was no art background in the family—my dad and my mum couldn't draw a straight line. But they were fascinated with what I did and being an only child, they encouraged me. I was not spoiled, but they indulged me, and my dad would take me down to Wilson's art store each Saturday for some supplies. I still have a plein air piece I did when I was 8."



John Seerey-Lester's style is already evident in his first plein air painting, done at the age of 8.



John and Suzie Seerey-Lester

commissions. The first was to do a big wooden sign to hang outside a pub called the Lower Turk's Head. I did it in my bedroom with a Turkish head and a fez with mosques in the background. I had to use two mirrors to get exactly the same scene on the other side. It was big, made out of wood, and maybe 5 x 5'. I was 13 and got a whopping five pounds for my sign" (slightly less than \$3 at today's exchange rate), and the rest, as they say, was history—well, not quite just yet.

John's father was working in the family business, which grew out of his grandfather's invention of sheep dip—still big in Australia and New Zealand, though the family no longer owns the company. He did not want John to follow him into that business and, having faith in John's artistic talent, he persuaded the local art college to let John take the entrance exam at 15, instead of the usual 17. John passed and was immediately admitted into the art department of Salford Technical College. That was fine, says John, except that he couldn't get any girlfriends. "The 17-year-old girls were looking for 19-year-old young men, not a 15-year-old kid. But I did get into a life class, which let me sketch and paint the 17-year-old girls with no clothes on."

Father Misses Son's Fame

However, says John with obvious regret, his father died when he was 18 and never got to see his faith in his son's art talent justified. College didn't work out. "Their idea of art was to stretch a canvas on the floor and have the students ride bicycles through paint and then across the canvas. Pop art was big. Some of it was interesting,



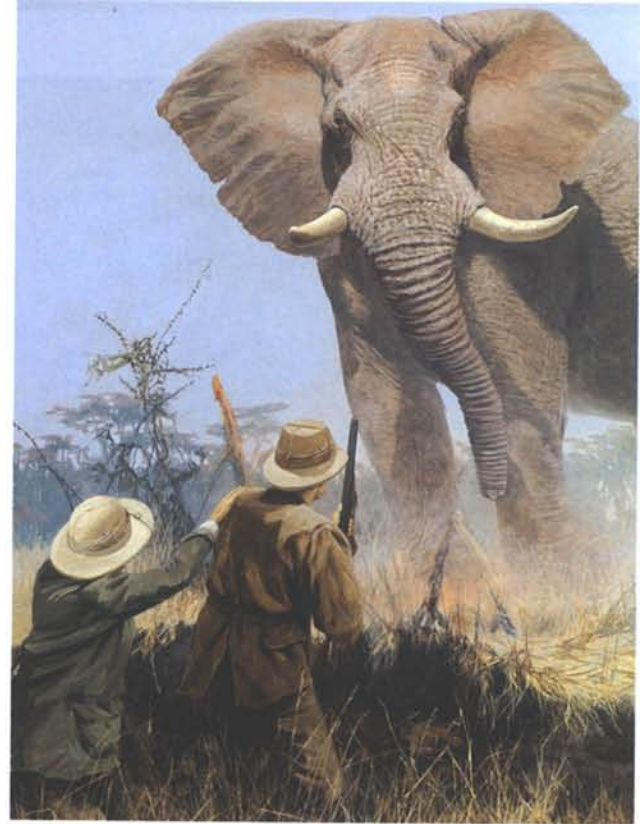
In *We Have Company* (oil, 20 x 30"), it is 1919 and three elk hunters are startled by the appearance of a huge grizzly. The man on the right is raising his Winchester. "Gunfire will now be heard," John says, "but will the hunters gain a trophy?"

but it was not where I wanted to go." In school, John had enjoyed history and biology—"I didn't say I was any good; I just enjoyed those subjects"—and he started studying pond water under a microscope, finding all kinds of tiny, otherwise invisible, bugs and pond life. "I thought I could break into the contemporary market by doing big paintings of bugs—you know, splash something you can't see with the naked eye across a 12-foot canvas, but nobody seemed to want 12-foot bugs."

He moved into graphic arts, at various times editing and publishing five different magazines simultaneously. He opened and ran his own magazine, though it folded after three years. As chief public information officer for the county of Derbyshire, he wrote speeches for visiting dignitaries, including former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and British athlete and Member of

Parliament, Sir Christopher Chataway. He was on a major advertising corporation's board of directors before he was 30, when, as so often happens, chance caused a change in direction.

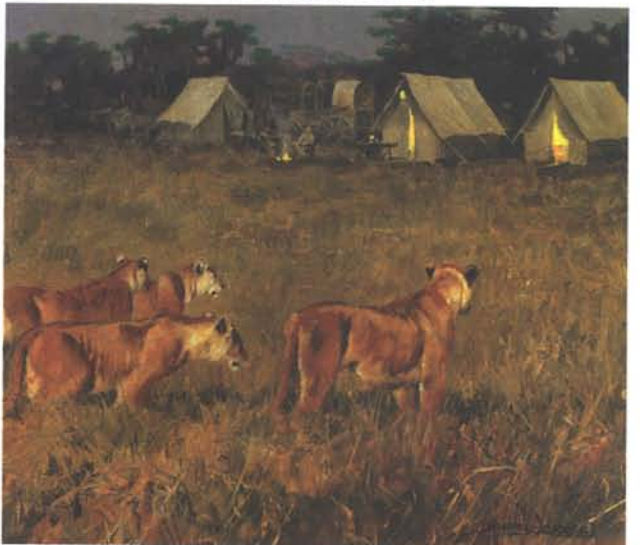
"At an agency board meeting one day, a former soccer player came in seeking public relations help with a new club called Sobers—a club for former alcoholics. The board said no, but my assistant, Ian Purdon, and I saw a future in it—which is a little ironic, because Ian and I were probably the two most serious drinkers in Manchester at that time," says John. They both quit the agency and went with Sobers, "which failed, of course," but John finally got to begin his artistic career, though it was a shaky start. He had been having some success, especially with local pen-and-ink scenes of Manchester and Lancashire, and the idea was for him to draw and sketch while Ian sold his work and set up one-man shows.



In *Shoot!* (acrylic, 40 x 30"), famous white hunter Bill Judd exhorts his son, Jack, to shoot a charging elephant. Bill was killed—trampled and gored by the elephant. Jack never hunted again.



Lion at Bay (oil, 18 x 24")



In *Sisters at Twilight* (oil, 8 x 10"), it is 1914 and hunters have traveled far by horse and oxen cart to reach one of the best hunting areas in Africa, the Serengeti Plains.

But when a "good sale" brought in about nine pounds (around \$9 at that time), it was tough for the two of them to make a living.

It was 1974 when John decided to take the plunge and become a full-time artist. "It was a tough call. I had to give up the company car, the expense account, and I had a mortgage and a baby," says John, who was first married in 1968. "We had some tough years," but he was gaining popularity, especially for his historically based street scenes of London and Northern England, and he became a top seller in the genre. There was still no wildlife.

Wildlife Enters the Picture

It was 1980 when John, influenced by the work of fellow English artist David Shepherd, made his first trip to East Africa and was introduced to wildlife. In 1982, he came to the United States and,