



The background is a detailed painting of a forest. The scene is set during the 'magic hour' of twilight, with a soft, hazy light filtering through the trees. The color palette is dominated by deep blues, greens, and earthy browns. In the lower right, a person is crouching on the ground, possibly observing or interacting with the environment. In the center, a bird with outstretched wings is captured in mid-flight, its feathers rendered with fine detail. The overall mood is one of quiet observation and connection with nature.

*For artist David Langmead, the truth
of wild Africa lies in its 'Magic Hour,' when
tranquillity and danger converge.*

DANGEROUS

by Todd Wilkinson

Liaisons

contemporary wildlife symbol of Langmead's valley is the kudu bull, presiding over harems which move between the river corridors and grasslands that erupt in neon color following spring rains.

In spite of the serious problems southern Africa faces, there is good news. All around the Eastern Cape Karoo, sheep ranchers are allowing nature to take back vast expanses of scrub pasture, and managing their property for wildlife, which is attracting Americans to hunting and photo safaris. New national parks are planned, too.

Along with wildebeest, mountain rheebeek, eland, klipspringer, springbok and other antelope are growing populations of leopard in the mountains and common predators such as aardwolf, jackals and rooikats, and bat-eared foxes. Complementing the conservation gains on private lands is the presence of Mountain Zebra and Addo Elephant national parks, an hour's drive from his front door, that afford sanctuary to rhino, buffalo, cheetah, zebra and elephant.

Langmead has been known to paint for twenty-four hours straight, rewarding himself upon completion by driving out in the countryside to embrace the rising sun. And he's always thinking about the next scene, whether he's with his wife and young son and daughter at Kruger Park for a vacation or hiking through the Karoo. When he needs to recharge the batteries, he heads for the Tuli Block in Botswana and camps along the

Shashe River beneath the cathedral pillars of ancient trees towering over a nexus of elephant trails and predator day beds.

"In this place I feel absorbed," he says, "swallowed up by the massive power and consciousness of rhythms that have reverberated for millennia." This is the kind of reverential emotion he brings to canvas.

In his painting *Dangerous Liaisons*, he invites the viewer to contemplate a reminder of Africa's ability to command humility and respect. His stage is an estuary along the shores of Lake Kariba, where Langmead, his father and brother were going to fish. As they crested a knoll, a large snorting buffalo appeared on the other side. Instinctively, they tossed their gear and darted into a tangle of deadfalls, with horns on their heels. As they scrambled to safety, the buffalo returned to the point of encounter and proceeded to stomp their rods and tackle into the ground.

In his large oil, *Who Goes There?*, he recounts the adrenaline rush of a walk that he and Bronwen took to the Shashe River. While following a game trail through a dense thicket, they encountered a baby elephant and within seconds the trumpet of the matriarch descended on them from above. "It was not a time for standing one's ground, as matriarchs don't mock charge in these situations," he says. "Fortunately, we had both been good sprinters in school, and the race back to camp was filled with the sound of crashing bush." On this



day, the pachyderm matron turned around.

Africa may be called the Dark Continent, but artistic expression of it lies in conveying the light, Parker says. Dry season dust kicked up by the winds and massive movement of animal herds saturates everything in a tint of rouge. Experienced painters like Langmead understand the way that light refracts and reflects, seeing splashes of color hidden even in the shadow beneath an elephant's belly. In *Sunset at Shashe River*, he wields colors that other artists are blind to seeing. Retreating into the background is a vastness as deep as the human imagination, while in the foreground, game animals nervously approach the water.

Even David's pure landscapes, Parker says, profuse an extra-sensory quality when you see them up close. "You feel as though you can whiff the stirred up dust and the dry grass and the sweet scent of mopane," he says. "In David's skies, there is the hint of an approaching storm, the kind that reveals itself to you when put your nose to the breeze and smell the rain coming from twenty miles away."

The first Langmead paintings shown in the U.S. were

Like all of Langmead's paintings, Afterglow and Buffalo Soldier (right) are based on personal observations and encounters with African wildlife.



displayed at the 2003 Safari Club Exposition in Reno. All five of his works featuring African sporting scenes sold quickly. Later in 2003 another Langmead, a watercolor of ibis, was juried into the prestigious Birds in Art exhibition hosted by the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum. And this year, Parker's Native Visions Galleries plan to premier several new Langmead paintings at Safari Club and then prepare for a major one-man exhibition of sixteen works in 2005.

"When Americans view my work, I hope it will move them to think of the rich diversity of natural beauty here in Africa," says Langmead. "There is texture and nuance to attract the most travel-hardy soul."

Although these days Langmead totes a sketch kit in place of his rifles, hunting guides regularly invite him to their bush camps where he makes drawings of trophies and skins to use as reference material. Upon their return home, more than a few Yankee and Canadian hunters have phoned Parker to purchase original Langmeads as vivid reminders of their experiences in the bush.

Today, out of personal passion for their subjects and rational self-interest, Langmead believes deteriorating environmental conditions in the world present African artists with a call to action, a chance to sway the opinions of leaders in power and future generations that we need to be responsible stewards, just as Shepherd affected him.

In corporate board rooms, public museums and on den walls, his work is having its own subtle impact. "I hope my paintings serve as reminders that beneath all the industry, mechanization and development, there is a fragile ecosystem that sustains the whole of life," he says.

"If I have any legacy, I want it to be that of an artist who was passionately in love with Africa."

David Langmead wouldn't have it any other way. It is, after all, his home. 