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Art OF THE HUNT

BY TODD WILKINSON

Introducing "Art of the Hunt" SAFARI Magazine's New Column Celebrates Not Only Wildlife Art But It Explains Why Art Matters For Conservation And Saving The Things We Love

I have a dear old friend—a grizzled man of the outback, you might say—who owns a classic wildlife art painting. He jokingly refers to it as “his therapist.” Every year when he and his wife head to their summer home in the Rockies, he takes the framed oil with them; and in the fall, as they depart southward to spend winters in a warmer climate, the original work by Philip R. Goodwin (1881–1935) again goes along on the journey.

Season after season, in good times and bad, over many decades as his children grew up, and as he passed through his distinguished working years into retirement, the Goodwin hunting scene has consistently given him a feeling of solace and grounding. Today, the artwork hangs in a place where he encounters it in the evening as he heads to bed and it awaits him in the morning light.

“It reminds me of the happiest moments I’ve had in my life, going back to my childhood when I

spent summers at the lake with my dad,” the sportsman of 60 years says. “That’s what great art does—it transports you. Without fail, art gives you a personal escape when you need one, and it’s something you can always share with those closest to you.”

There is no doubt that, if sold, the piece would command a handsome price at auction, but to him it is priceless as a visual fixture in the identity of his family. Pausing, and reflecting on its inestimable emotional value, he adds, “Should it stay with my offspring after I’m gone, I hope it will continue to bring joy and a sense of vicarious adventure to those I care about.”

Yes, every one of us clings to memories that we hold sacred—and it is the pursuit of these moments that summons us again to the 2013 SCI convention. Along with the camaraderie, finest guns and outfitted trips money can buy, you have ready access here to some of the best purveyors of fine art in the world.

For many SCI members, art fills a special niche. As my friend knows all too well, it’s a treasure that keeps giving back. Chances are that you already carry an emblem of wildlife art in your wallet. It’s called the federal Duck Stamp, but we’re talking

Left: Flight Of Fury by Peter Gray.
 Right: Shumba by Kobus Möller.
 Below: Savage Land by Brian Jarvi.

about art that requires a different kind of investment. Just as hunters and anglers stalk deeper meaning in nature, so, too, does a wildlife artist try to bring us closer to the truth.

"Collectible and decorative sporting art is an important part of our hunting heritage and culture," says Safari Club International Executive Director Phil DeLone. "The art purchased at our gatherings over the years has, for many families, become heirlooms passed down from one generation to the next."

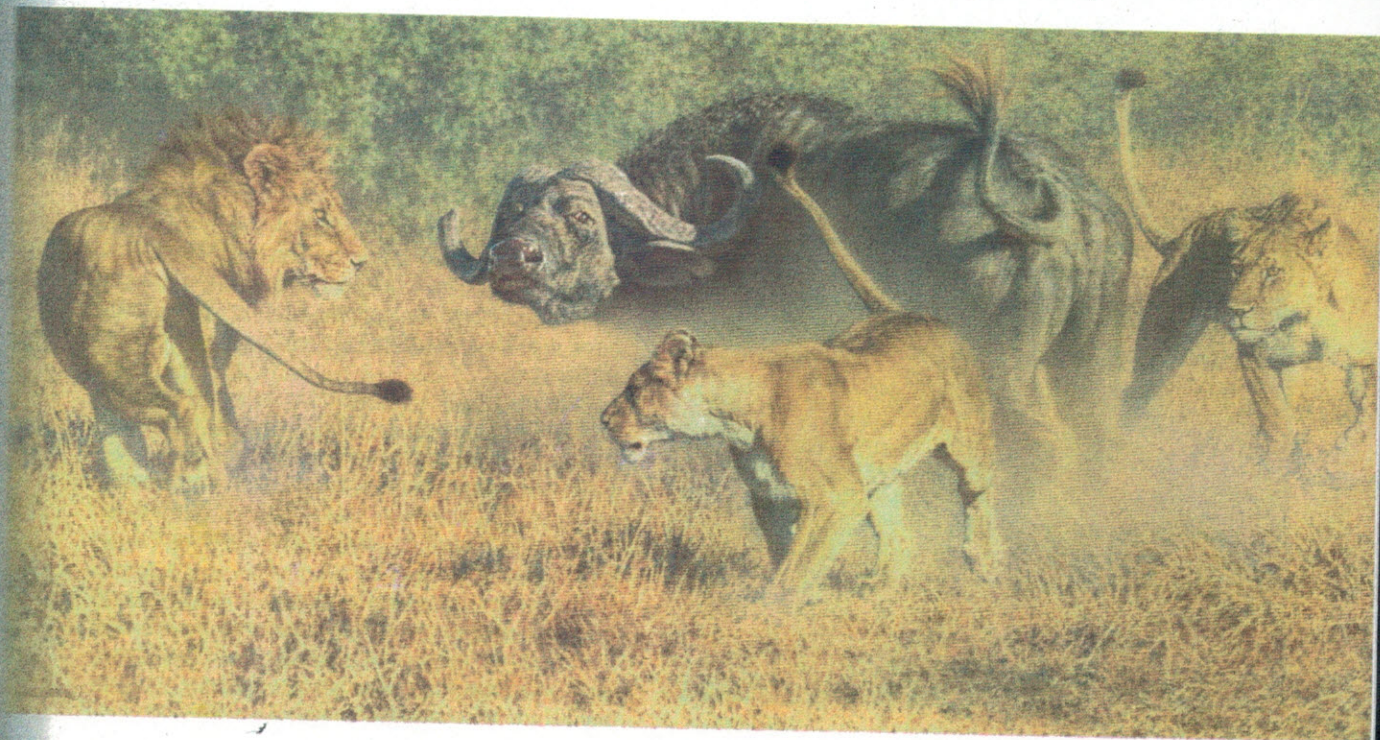
Over the past quarter century, I've traveled the globe on writing assignments that have allowed me to meet hundreds of wildlife artists, gallery owners and collectors. I've been to Africa, South America, Asia and explored the backcountry from coast to coast on this continent. This much I know: the caliber of contemporary sporting art that greets the SCI faithful is unsurpassed.

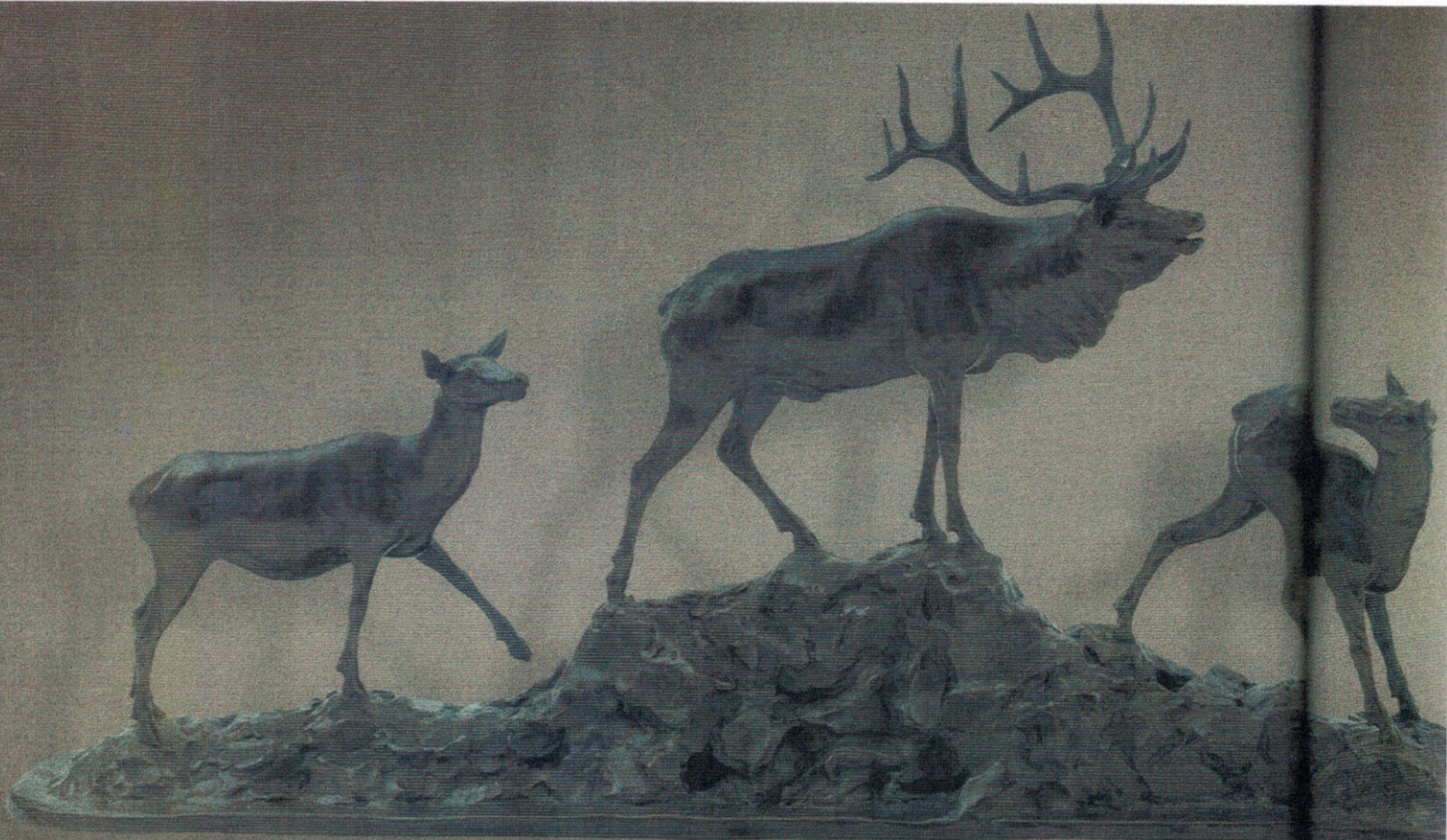
"SCI has gained a deserved international reputation. It's one of the places where savvy collectors come to see some of the best paintings and sculpture coming on the market. And it's all concentrated in one venue. That's rare and it's unique," says Ross Parker, founder of Call of Africa's Native Visions Gallery, a mainstay at SCI for the past quarter century.

Parker, a Rhodesian by birth, operates two galleries—one in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida and a second in the Gulf Coast hamlet of Naples. He says that rendezvousing with collectors at SCI is the highlight of his year.



With this issue of *SAFARI* Magazine, DeLone and editor Steve Comus have asked me to premiere a new column, "Art of the Hunt." The purpose is three-fold: To share the dramatic stories of artists who pursue first-hand contact with their wildlife subjects in the field, to showcase exceptional art





Zebra Eye by Jan Martin McGuire.

worthy of your attention, and to provide SCI members with useful information about how they can start or expand their sporting art collections.

For this inaugural installment, I'd like to offer a preview of the 2013 show and make the point why supporting the galleries that set up shop at SCI are worth your patronage. Whether it's meeting an artist personally in a booth or securing a one-of-a-kind piece in a fundraising auction, the dividends add up.

While you're able to go home with a great work of art, your investment is value added. DeLone notes that a huge percentage of the proceeds generated from art sales at SCI are channeled back into critical programs that benefit members, ranging from wildlife habitat enhancement programs and public access initiatives on public lands to Second Amendment protection efforts and campaigns to introduce more kids to the joys of hunting and fishing. By buying art, you are helping to forge the future.

Perhaps there is no greater testament to SCI's rising stature as an art mecca than the growing representation of galleries. North American and African big game are well represented. Parker's Call of Africa, which has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for SCI and for the charity, Wounded Warriors, is led by seven perennial favorites—David Langmead, John Seerey-Lester, Jaco Van Schalkwyck, Peter Gray, Margaret Gradwell, James Stroud, and Matabele sculptor Mopho Gonde, who have recorded sell outs of their works at SCI in recent years.

"We try to offer a few surprises every year and 2013 is no exception," Parker says. "For those collectors who desire scale and want to fill out a wall with a large dramatic scene, we'll have masterpieces and, at the other end, there will be smaller works that appeal to first-time buyers and those with a smaller budget."

Two other showstoppers certain to again excerpt their presence are John Banovich, who is exploring a new series focused on African lions and Brian Jarvi, master of the contemporary predator and prey predicament scene. When I spoke with Banovich



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Leopard Dawn by Jaco Van Schalkwyck.

and Jarvi, both credited SCI with serving as springboards to their careers.

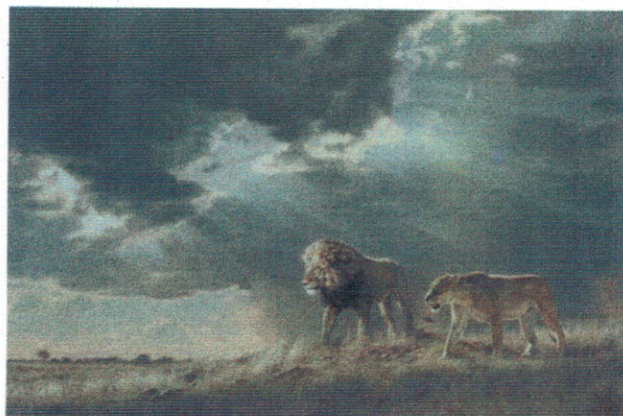
Along with those critically acclaimed stars are Craig Bone, Jan Martin McGuire, Eric Forlee, Rick Taylor, Jerry McKellar, Daniel and Adam Smith, Scott Lennard, and southern African Kobus Moeller. Convention goers will want to check out Muller's piece "Shumba" that tells the story of a lion encounter. "I met this particular lion at a private game reserve in South Africa. When I first approached him, he lifted his lip on one side slightly as a warning, but he did not move. What impressed me was his relaxed, yet totally assured attitude. When I was younger—and possibly much less wise—I may have tried to provoke him into some kind of aggressive reaction. But after spending a long time studying each other, I left him in peace. Throughout the whole process he did not once falter his gaze," Muller explains.

Entering the SCI line-up this year is Gerald Peters Gallery of Santa Fe and one of its headliners is famed bronzeman Ken Bunn, known internationally for his representations of African and North American big game, especially cats. Some 40 years ago, Bunn was among a group of artists who burst on the scene at Game Coin in San Antonio. Bunn was flanked by the late Bob Kuhn, Robert Bateman, and David Shepherd.

"This is the first year that I've had my work at Safari Club and in a lot of ways it feels like I'm coming home," Bunn, who got his start with Jonas Brothers Taxidermy 50 years ago, told me. One of his pieces, worthy of notice, is "Cutting Corners," a portrayal of a running cheetah.

Bunn has inspired plenty of younger artists, among them, American sculptor Mike Barlow who is back at SCI for his eighth year and this

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Banner Of Heaven by David Langmead

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Art of the Hunt

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Cutting Corners Cheetah by Ken Bunn.

year is debuting an exciting new series of works designed for tabletop display in the trophy room or over the fireplace mantel. "Royal Escort," a bronze celebration of a bugling bull elk and four cows in its mating harem, attracted attention at the 2012 Buffalo Bill Historical Center show in Cody, Wyoming. Two other works that Barlow plans to unveil at SCI is "One Minute Mile" portraying a fleet-footed herd of pronghorn and "Prize Fighters" depicting sparring bull moose during the rut.

Why does art matter beyond the pleasure it brings us? Skip Tubbs, a lifelong hunter, falconer, and owner of Out of Africa-In Montana Gallery in Bozeman, represents the work of the late Simon Combes, his son, Guy Combes and artists like David Alexander and Andrew Ellis. What's great about art, he says, is that it's not political, it's available at every price point, and it doesn't have any agenda other than rallying people together around the things they love.

Tubbs has engaged in fierce debate with folks, including artists, who are anti-hunting. "What I tell them is 'Name just one constituency that has done more for wildlife conservation than hunters?' The fact is they can't," Tubbs explains. "Hunters are not only the biggest conservationists but they are the most avid collectors of wildlife art and SCI does a wonderful job of bringing art, hunting, and conservation together. Supporting this organization makes you feel good." 🐾

A lifelong sportsman, Todd Wilkinson grew up hunting, fishing and trapping in the North Woods of Minnesota. For the past 25 years he has traveled the world as a journalist and holds a special expertise in writing about wildlife art. He is editor of the online magazine *WildlifeArtJournal.com*, author of more than half a dozen books and his award-winning work has appeared in two dozen different major newspapers and magazines. He is author of a new book: "Last Stand: Ted Turner's Quest to Save a Troubled Planet" set to be published in April 2013.

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