



CALL OF AFRICA'S NATIVE VISIONS GALLERIES CELEBRATE'S IT'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY

A fixture in South Florida for years,
Art Dealer Ross Parker Heads Into His Fourth Decade
With One Of The Leading Wildlife And Nature Themed Art Galleries In The World

By: By Todd Wilkinson

At Ross Parker's Call of Africa's Native Visions Galleries—a fixture for collectors of wildlife art—you'll find a massive piece of leadwood 1200 years old. Once upon a time when the trunk of this great tree was still growing wild on the veld of southern Zimbabwe, and long before the arrival of Europeans, elephants, white and black rhinos, Cape Buffalo and wildebeest, zebra, impala, kudu, a dozen other species of African antelope, and, of course, lions, cheetah and leopard roamed free in abundance.

Opposite page: Mopho Gonde
Call of the Matriarch, Sculpture, 5'x8'



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“To the bushmen, leadwood have always been known as rubbing posts, where many different animals come to scent-mark their territories. Standing leadwood trees represent a crossroads,” says Ross Parker. “You can only imagine the kinds of things this ancient giant bore witness to.”

Epic animal migrations. Generations of predators and prey. Warriors and other humans passing through. And the extraordinary passage of time, Parker adds, that brought Africa of yore into this newer age of profound uncertainty.

But one day when the big tree reached the end of its life, he said it isn't beyond reason to believe an elephant might have pushed it over hundreds of years ago while scratching its side. So the pillar tumbled and lay there, slowly working its way into the earth, like a relic whose natural history had reached its end.

That is, Parker says, until Mopho Gonde, a carver hailed as “the Michelangelo of native African sculptors,” found it and gave it new life. Petrified and hard as rock today, the hulking leadwood alone could make for a mesmerizing conversation piece in someone's den. Yet in Gonde's hands, it's been meticulously chiseled into something breathtaking.

Titled “Call of the Matriarch,” the composition appropriately portrays a mother elephant (the sculpture stands five feet tall and almost eight feet wide) and alongside of her, two young calves. Given the excellence of its design and the fact that it was created by a Matabele artisan, “Call of the Matriarch” is of a caliber one might find at a museum.

“This is, without question, Mopho's greatest masterpiece among hundreds of big game pieces he's created and that are collected around the world,” Parker says. “Last year we brought “Call of the Matriarch” to our Naples gallery so that people could get a sneak preview of the unfinished work. Now, as part of our 30th anniversary celebration, Mopho has applied the finishing touches, including addition of tusks carved from kudu horn, and it will serve as the centerpiece of our gallery for the 2017 winter season.”

Against long odds, Call of Africa's Native Visions Galleries itself has endured the test of time. A demonstration of its high



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profile is the magnificent 71 X 50-inch elephant painting by the Master David Langmead, “Carmine Chaos” featured on the current cover of Safari Magazine.

When Parker built his first gallery in Boca Raton in 1986, the life-expectancy of a fine art gallery was less than that of a bird dog. Most galleries went out of business in

the first five years. But Call of Africa has had staying power, “because quality matters, because being on the cutting edge of bringing new talent to the forefront matters and because having great clients who recognize value matters,” Parker says.

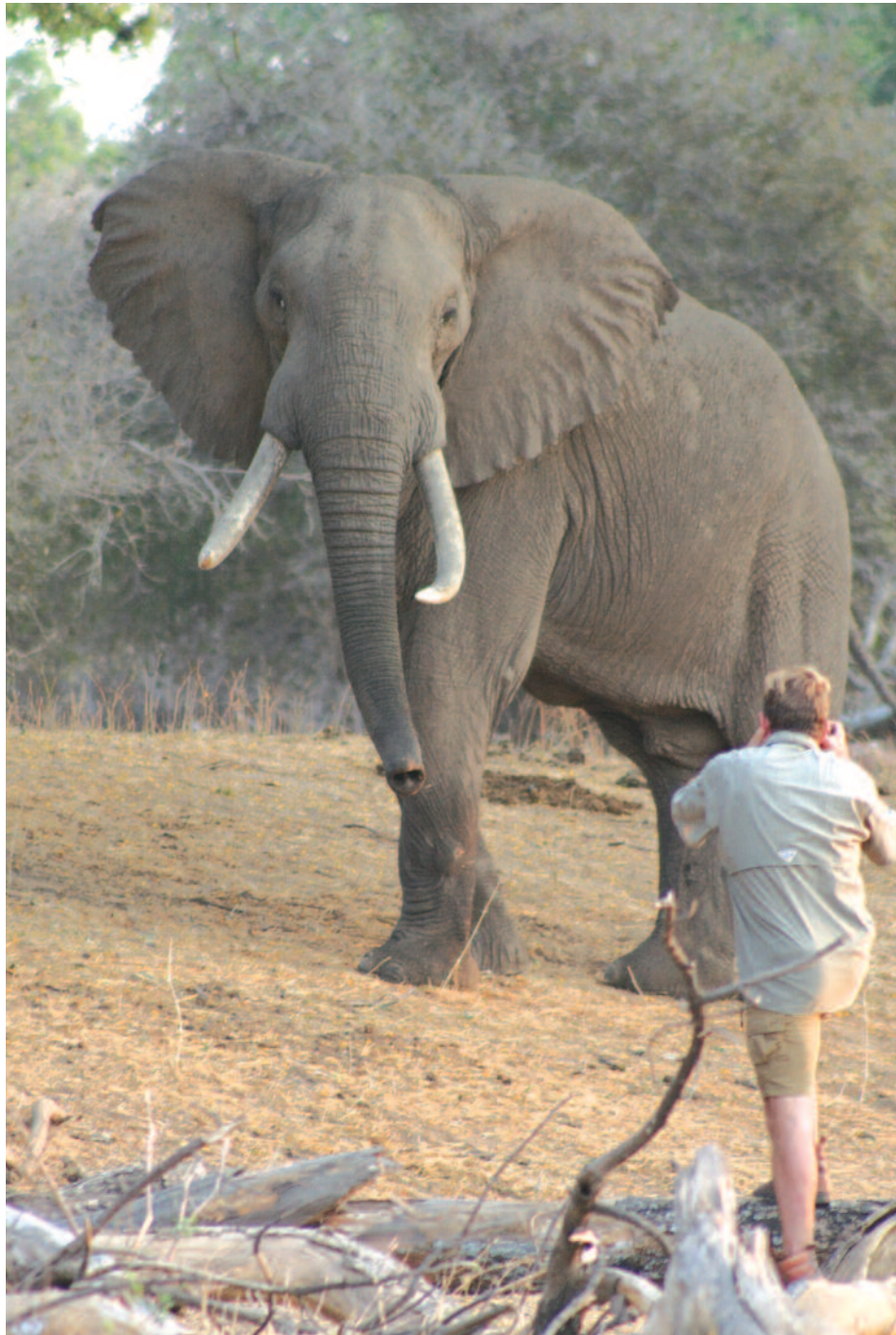
Parker readily admits there are easier ways to make a living than selling paint-

ings, sculptures and other one-of-a-kind collectibles. Still, he believes there are few careers more rewarding. “Owning art galleries has enabled me to build the careers of some of the world's most talented artists and to build valuable collections. I've watched families, from grandparents down to their adult grandchildren, dis-

cover how much fun and rewarding it is to own a piece of original art that no-one else in the world has. Think about that,” Parker says.

Parker has a number of special events planned for 2017 including an exhibitions on February 22nd and February 23rd of seascape paintings by world renowned

artist, Rob Macintosh featuring some of South Florida's most breathtaking coastal treasures. As with all of the exhibitions Native Visions hosts, a percentage of sales will go to charity. This year they will be donating a percentage of sales to the Elephant Orphanage of Zambia. Then on March 22nd and 23rd Native Visions



Ross Parker photographing the Majestic African Elephant.

Galleries in Naples will host its 30 year Anniversary exhibition with eight of their premier artists flying in from around the world. There will be an array of South African wines served plus unveilings of new works by painters John Seerey-Lester, David Langmead, Kim Donaldson, Jaco Van Schalkwyk, James Stroud, Margaret Gradwell, and Rob Macintosh, fresh sculptures by Gonde and elegant glasswork by Italian Master Gianluca Vidal. A percentage of proceeds for this event will benefit the Shy Wolf Sanctuary in Naples, Florida and a live wolf and two dingos

from the sanctuary will be present at the show.

In addition, Parker is making available the last pieces cast by the late Loet Vanderveen (one of the most collected wildlife artists in the world) and Native Visions is unveiling a line of elegant ostrich-egg products from Avoova. "Art can take any form. We've heard from some clients that the most limiting factor in their homes and offices isn't a desire for more fine art, it's wall space. So this year, we are introducing for the first time ever, Avoova's line of high-end decoratives ranging from jewelry to

bowls. If you find Faberge eggs or Indian pots of the American West to be intriguing, these artworks from Avoova will blow you away."

Parker, a Zimbabwe expatriate and former special forces soldier who fought in the Rhodesian bush war proudly became an American citizen a decade ago. An artist himself, he's been a lifelong naturalist and was raised as a farm kid in the Zimbabwe bush before attending the renowned Plumtree School. Upon arriving in the US, he worked for a time in the diamond and sports car businesses but returned to his passion, art, when he opened his first gallery in Boca Raton in 1987. Not long after, he also married wife, Kirsten, the business's co-owner.

Their operation is not only a labor of love and a fine art hub for a network of over 30,000 collectors but a family affair. Today, the Parkers' eldest son, Ross, is a fine art consultant in Call of Africa's Native Visions' Gallery Naples location and their second son, Cole, is a consultant in the Jupiter gallery.

"I am very blessed to have been given the opportunities I have had here in America," Parker says. "My family are conservationists and avid wildlife watchers, making our business a perfect fit for us all. Thirty years ago, I set a goal to build galleries that would be counted among the finest in the world. I'll let you be the judge of that today."

Back in the 1990s, Robert Koenke, founder and publisher of the magazine, *Wildlife Art News*, said that in terms of wildlife art galleries in the US, few came close to providing the full-service offerings that Call of Africa does, including free advice on proper lightning, designing, insurance and it gives customers an opportunity to trade up smaller pieces for larger ones and world-wide shipping. Over the years, the artists represented by Call of Africa's have won juried art awards, had their works exhibited in major museum shows and appeared on the auction catalog covers of both Sotheby's and Christies.

From the very beginning, Parker aspired to be more than just a retail warehouse for selling art. "I wanted to run a gallery where art became a vehicle for giving back in every sense of the word and I knew there is nothing more powerful in bringing the plight of Africa to the attention of the world than showcases African Art," he says.

Parker also wanted to establish a nexus between artist and collectors, who, no matter where they are in their collecting lives, have access to full-service expertise in displaying and stewarding their artworks. Moreover, under Parker's careful selection, Call of Africa has a stable of African artists—well-established and emerging—that is second to none.

Native Visions has endured, Parker says, because, number one, there is a universal human fascination with the great wildlife species of Africa and, secondly, successful people never grow tired of artistic portrayals of the things they love.

While Parker is reluctant to ever promote art as an investment certain to appreciate in value, he points to works by sculptors and painters whose values have soared. During the mid to late 1980s when Parker was representing Zimbabwe animist carvers Nicholas Mukomberanwa, Henry Munyaradzi, and John Takawira, he gave his clients an opportunity to discover their work before the rest of the

world did.

"A piece by Nicholas that I sold for \$5000 in the 1980s was sold a decade later for \$25,000 and who knows what it would go for today," he says. "And we've proudly represented other artists over the years with similar stories from Bone to



Owners of Call of Africa's Native Visions' Gallery, Kirsten and Ross Parker

Gonde and David Langmead. Paintings by David that you could have purchased for \$10,000 15 years ago today could sell for four times as much. But the real investment in art isn't the potential that it will go up in financial value, it's the unquantifiable joy you derive from it becoming

an important backdrop to your life. Like the love you have for a favorite hunting dog, can't put a price tag on that."

Among Call of Africa's clients are Royalty, billionaires, famous business people and sports & Hollywood stars. But the Parkers make a point of having affordable offerings available for young people looking to own their first pieces.

"The best hedge against artwork losing its value is to buy good works," Parker says. "If you just want to throw something up on the wall, that's one thing but if you think of art as an object that commands a presence based on increasing rarity over time, then it pays to focus on quality. I'm very particular about who I represent. I take pride in finding younger artists who possess incredible talent and great potential but who are largely unknown. It's a journey artists and collectors take together."

For collectors and art enthusiasts alike you can view the artwork Native Visions has to offer online at: www.NativeVisions.com

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