



Denman painting

Representational Artist Brings Local Area to Life

Artist Andrew Denman

By Jennifer Wake

Mountain Lions. Red-tailed Hawks. California Quail. It's just part of the menagerie of wildlife found in one of the area's favorite recreation spots: the Lafayette Reservoir. For Orinda resident and award-winning wildlife artist Andrew Denman, however, the recreational area is not only a jewel of the East Bay Parks system, but a locale with an abundant source of subject matter for his paintings.

Over the past 15 years, Denman has found sources for his intricate representational paintings in various locations throughout the Bay Area. Whether it is in the hills surrounding his Orinda home, on walks in Mount Diablo State Park, or at the Reservoir, Denman looks for ways to connect people with nature.

"The living element in my paintings allows us to place ourselves in the setting," he said. "If we can relate to a painting, it can elicit from us a genuine emotional response."

But mountain lions?

"Despite the fact that I've never seen one, mountain lions are frequent visitors [to the reservoir]," said Denman. "We also have a resident bald eagle which I have seen once or twice.

Also, anyone who visits the reservoir frequently is very much aware of them, but new visitors are often amazed to see the large flock of wild turkeys often visible quite close to the road along the dam."

In his painting, *Sunset over the Reservoir*, Denman used the view from the fire trail at the top of Meadow View Court in Orinda, just a few blocks from where he lives. "It's one of my favorite spots," he said, "Of course the coyote was not present at the time I came up with the idea for the piece, though I have seen coyotes along the trail before."

Denman continues to expand the confines of the term 'wildlife artist' by sometimes incorporating elements of modern art into his pieces, as well as architectural themes and infrastructure (such as the windmills on the Altamont Pass) that traditional wildlife artists would avoid.

For example, one of Denman's acrylics, entitled "Transport," shows the contrast between the stark cement beams of the 680 corridor temporary overpass towering in the sky and birds taking flight from beneath the freeway, while miles above the exhaust of a jetliner cuts through the clear blue sky. His paintings are so intricate he often borrows taxidermy specimens from local museums to ensure the accuracy of his work.

"If I can find the subject in the wild setting in which I wish to paint it, that's great, but this rarely happens," he said. "It is much easier to photograph captive specimens, like at the Lindsay Museum, and then place them in an environment."

Once while photographing a full grown male white tiger, the trainer let the animal get a bit closer to Denman than she intended. "I was crouched on

the ground when the tiger approached, gently butted its enormous head into my chest, and licked my face," he said. "He wasn't really being threatening, but it was a bit unnerving none the less. Having been around wild animals with some frequency, I just tried to stay still and hold my ground until the trainer pulled him away."

Other than his shirt being wet with tiger slobber, Denman says he was unscathed.

Over the duration of his 15-year career as a wildlife artist, his award-winning work has been featured in magazines such as *American Artist*, *Wildlife Art*, *The Artist Magazine* and *Southwest Art*. His one-man-shows have garnered national attention, and his representational acrylics have hung next to such artistic greats as Robert Bateman, Carl Brenders and John Seerey-Lester.

"I feel grateful every day that, despite the struggles, I am actually making a living doing what I love," he said. "I feel fortunate to have the opportunities to observe wildlife that I have had, to connect with my audience and help foster a love of art and nature, and to meet such interesting people, from other artists, to collectors, to wildlife enthusiasts and experts. Art has the ability to expand one's world; it certainly has mine."

To view more of Andrew Denman's work, or to contact him directly, you can visit his website at www.andrewdenman.com.

Although Denman showed artistic talent in grammar school, he says he didn't take private art classes until junior high because no one would teach light and shadow, color theory, and composition to little kids. He sold his first painting when he was only 13-years-old, and soon after sought gallery representation at Pacific Wildlife Galleries in Lafayette where he continues to display his work.

Gallery owner Dennis Salvo recalls, "He started coming in when he was just 13. At that time he worked in colored pencil and water color. I'm very selective about what I display, and I politely told him, 'You're not good enough,' but he kept coming back. I've never seen anyone so determined and focused." A few years later, thirty five of Denman's paintings were sold at his first show at Pacific Wildlife Galleries.



"She"



"R is for Raptor"



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