

## Mentors a Necessity for Budding Professional Artists

By Jennifer Wake



Andrew Denman, Out of the Cradle



Andrew Denman

During the time of da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rembrandt and Raphael, artists were often discovered and supported through a patron system, in which wealthy individuals would offer artists room and board as well as guidance to develop their career, or artists could work with other more established artists as apprentices.

Times have changed.

Unfortunately, says Orinda resident and award-winning artist Andrew Denman, the handshake and support of old has been replaced by fellowships, art colleges and institutions. "There is a big difference between meeting someone who wants to help you out versus getting a Guggenheim Fellowship," he said.

So how do budding artists of today succeed?

The first step is to develop your skill; the second is to find a mentor.

Four years ago, Lafayette native Matt Jacuzzi started taking private lessons from Denman, who has taught art privately to children, teens and adults in Lamorinda for the past 17 years.

Denman said he saw Jacuzzi's promise right away. "It's rare you encounter someone who has the talent to make art their life – to make it a career," he said. "But when I do find them, I work closely with them, like with Matt."

Jacuzzi was interested in becoming a professional wildlife artist, like Denman, but he lacked certain connections. "Nobody knows where to find a live wolf," explained Denman, who frequently visits wildlife refuges and has traveled the globe to photograph some of his subjects in the wild. "If I go to photograph a live mountain lion or other wild animal, I make it a point to give Matt a call and invite him to come along."

The relationship between Denman and Jacuzzi has open doors for the younger painter. "Almost everything I know about pursuing art professionally, I have learned from Andrew," Jacuzzi said.

Not only did Denman help Jacuzzi master and understand some very basic techniques to painting realistically, but he also taught him about the print world, how to price his work, how to communicate with a gallery, and gave him advertising ideas.

At a recent artist conference in Colorado, Denman was asked to give a marketing seminar to other artists.

"I said: what do I know about marketing? But because my work has been in national magazines and I'd had three one-man shows by that time, they told me, 'We don't know what you're doing, but you're doing something right,'" he said. "It's hard to find someone to discuss on a practical level how to pursue a career in the arts. When people talk about career placement in the arts, most people focus on the commercial element. The conversation I've had with many of my students is that a person can make a living as an artist."

Denman and Jacuzzi hope to produce an instructional DVD to teach other artists about Denman's painting process, including how to obtain reference material, how to have a show and, finally, how to sell their work.

For Jacuzzi, having a mentor in Denman has been extremely important. "Finding out what has worked for Andrew and what has not has been very helpful."

In 2006, Jacuzzi was invited to show his work at the Lafayette Reservoir Art Show, regularly shows his work with Arts Benicia and Connectedworlds, and has his work available at Pacific Wildlife Galleries in Lafayette, which frequently showcases some of the world's leading representational wildlife artists such as Robert Bateman, Carl Brenders, John Seerey-Lester, Mort Solberg, and, of course, Andrew Denman.

"I am very honored to have the opportunity to have my work on the walls with some of the best artists of our time," Jacuzzi said.

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# LAMORINDA WEEKLY



Wednesday, April 16, 2008 ■ Volume 02; Issue 3 ■ [www.lamorindaweekly.com](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com)

Last week, Denman opened his fourth solo exhibition at the Gallery, which consists of more than 20 new acrylic paintings featuring wildlife subjects ranging from local birds and mammals to exotic species from around the world, all approached with the artist's unique combination of hyper-realism, stylization, and abstraction.

Denman, an award winning member of the Society of Animal Artists, has participated in international ensemble exhibitions at the National Museum of Wildlife Art (NMWA) in Jackson, Wyo., the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum (LYWAM) in Wisconsin, the Hiram Blauvelt Art Museum in New Jersey, and the Wildlife Experience Museum in Colorado. His work can be found at the Natural World Museum in San Francisco, and has been seen at the Oakland Museum, Bedford Gallery in Walnut Creek, and Hearst Gallery in Moraga.

The Gallery will host an artist's reception this Saturday, April 19 from 5 to 8 p.m. at 3420 Mt. Diablo Blvd. in Lafayette. The show runs through May 3.

For more information about Denman, or to view some of his work, you can visit his Web site at [www.andrewdenman.com](http://www.andrewdenman.com). You can view Matt Jacuzzi's work online at [www.matthewjacuzzi.com](http://www.matthewjacuzzi.com).



Matt Jacuzzi, Sierra Gold



Andrew Denman, The Larus Touch