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Combining nature and spiritual messages to create award-winning art

By Kara Navolio



"African Spotted Eagle Owl" by Dwight Yassany
Images provided

Lafayette artist Dwight Yassany has been creating stunning, life-like images of animals for only about six years but has received many awards for his spiritually-inspired work.

Two pieces, "African Spotted Eagle Owl" and "Indian Tawny Eagle in Flight" are currently on display at the Haggin Museum in Stockton. The 85-year-old museum hosts a juried exhibit biannually, coordinated with the Stockton Art League (SAL). This is Yassany's second time being accepted into the acclaimed show. Maria Flumiani, SAL Board Member and Chair of the Haggin Committee, stated, "We had 408 pieces submitted from artists in 18 states; 109 pieces were chosen by this year's Juror Sabina Turner, a watercolorist from Fiddletown, (Calif.) Dwight's work is one of the few pen and ink artists we have. His nature-oriented work is well-known and beautiful."

"Indian Tawny Eagle in Flight" received an honorable mention in this show, his seventh award overall.

Yassany, who retired after over 30 years at the East Bay Municipal Utilities District, has three goals in his art. He wants to promote pen and ink as a fine art medium, and he wants to accurately represent the animals he draws, which is why he works from photographic observations but also consults reference material and expert opinions. His third goal is to provide a platform for spiritual references from the bible. In most of his works he blends in a biblical reference with the hope that viewers will see it and further investigate the meaning on their own. These references are "hidden in plain sight" as natural shadings in feathers or, in the case of "African Spotted Eagle Owl," in the animal's eyes. Yassany stated, "I input biblical phrases or references with a theme for each piece, spreading God's word through His own creations."

The self-taught artist never received any formal art education except for a few art classes. Both of his parents had artistic interests and supported his drawing interests as a child growing up in the Sierra Foothills. He started pen and ink drawing seriously in 2011, working at first on a small scale as many pen and ink artists do. Now his pieces are large, about 30 by 40 inches, and can take up to 200 hours each to complete. Using a very fine-tip radiograph pen and making thousands of small marks on cotton paper, he uses a combination of soft and dark strokes to achieve the realistic renderings of birds and other animals. One of his favorite subjects is his 18-year-old cat Shasta (named for Mount Shasta).

Yassany's work has been shown in 20 exhibitions over the past six years, both locally and as far away as San Diego and Texas. He has a piece on permanent display in the Lafayette Library in the Art & Science Discovery Science Center titled "Lynx in Snow." His work has also been shown at the Lindsay Wildlife Museum and frequently in the Sacramento/Stockton area.

Yassany gains inspiration from the wildlife he sees in the Bay Area Open Space. "I'm fascinated by the birds of prey right now," added Yassany, who often sees red tail hawks while hiking in Briones, the Lafayette Reservoir and the De La Vega Trail in Orinda.

The exhibition at the Haggin Museum runs through July 15, Wednesdays through Sundays (1201 N. Pershing Ave., Stockton). For more information visit www.hagginmuseum.org or email Yassany at dwright0@att.net. His works and note cards printed with his images are available for sale.



"Indian Tawny Eagle in Flight" by Dwight Yassany.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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