

Special Focus
on Sculpture

16 Important Shows
Across the West

Plus: Landscapes,
Still Lives & More

Southwest Art

THE COLLECTOR'S CHOICE
for over **40** YEARS



JULY 2014

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 **on the cover:** Listening by Liz Wolf. Photo by Wendy McEahern.

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A Sense of Magic

The best artworks possess a wonderful, intangible mystery



MIKE BUCHER

FOR MANY YEARS, the July issue of *Southwest Art* has focused on the art of sculpture, and this month is no exception. But there's another theme running through the issue, too—one that wasn't planned at all: magic. Without any prompting from the editors and contributing writers, a surprising number of the featured sculptors use

that very word to describe their inspiration and goals for their artwork.

For example, **Greg Woodard**, who is featured on page 100, puts it this way: "To me, good art has a magic. It's hard to describe, but I think about what's really going to make a piece sing, what's going to grab you and make you feel something." **Liz Wolf**, featured on page 94, has this to say when discussing the primitive feel of many of her sculptures: "Sometimes it feels like I have lived other lives, because I have always enjoyed primitive things that are so beautiful but may come from prehistoric times. Where does the internal resonance with certain things come from? That is the magic of life. To me, it's all magical, all mystery."

The theme continues in our portfolio article, entitled "Taking Shape," which spotlights 16 sculptors and begins on page 104. **Heidi Kujat**, for example, says that one of the major turning points in her career happened when an instructor told her to let each sculpture speak to her; his words still guide her creative process today. "That's where the magic comes in for me," Kujat says. Finally, **Scott Rogers** talks about his early years spent watching his uncle, well-known western sculptor Grant Speed. "Growing up, every time I saw his work, it was like something went off inside of me that said that was magic," he remembers.

After two decades in the art world, I have come to believe that some of the best artworks happen when artists feel this sense of magic, of inexplicable "internal resonance," in one way or another. As collectors, we can feel it, too, because it shines through in the work itself. Which is not at all to say that the creation of great art is wholly dependent on some



PHOTO BY WENDY MCEAHERN

Liz Wolf, Vaquero, bronze, 22 x 11 x 7.

mysterious and intangible force; on the contrary, craftsmanship—the knowledge and skill that result from extensive training and practice—is essential. But craftsmanship alone does not necessarily yield pieces that stop you in your tracks. I hope you find some pieces like that in the following pages.

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SPIRIT WITHIN

For **Liz Wolf**, each work of art has a story to tell



PHOTO BY WENDY MCEAHERN

FOR SANTA FE sculptor Liz Wolf, the sight of animals in nature has always stirred her soul. Wolf is fond of recalling times she has encountered deer in the wild and how the experiences are always magical. For example, one day while walking in a field of high grass on a summer visit to a Wisconsin cabin she once owned, she came upon an area where the grass was flattened—deer had slept there the night before. The grassy oasis and brilliant sunshine were so inviting that she stretched out and took a nap.

To capture the magic of the moment, Wolf created the bronze sculpture *STANDING WATCH* [see page 97], which combines a human body and a deer's head. For the sculptor, deer are powerful spirits possessing qualities of gentle guardianship. If you listen to Wolf talk for any length of time and study her body of work, you sense her reverence for the animals she portrays. A student of her sculpture also soon discovers the many references she makes to Native American legends and themes. In fact, the casual observer might suspect that Wolf herself is Native American, or at the very least, that she grew up amid nature and wild-life. Both assumptions would be wrong.

On the contrary, the award-winning artist grew up in the city—specifically, in the penthouse of an upscale hotel in downtown St. Paul, MN. Wolf is the first to admit that her upbringing was a bit exotic compared to that of her friends' more “*Leave it to Beaver*” life in the suburbs.” But the very uniqueness of her upbringing also contributed to her lively imagination and future profession, she says.

FROM AN EARLY age, Wolf knew she wanted to be an artist. Her mother was a creative soul who regularly supplied her four children with rolls of brown butcher paper to pursue their artistic sides. Young Liz drew animals—primitive in style and a foreshadowing of what was to become a favorite subject in her fine-art career.

Wolf's mother festooned the contemporary-style penthouse with Asian art, as well as such diverse objects as Japanese armor and an array of Buddha statues, including an enormous gold one in a black lacquer case. On the hotel roof, her mother created a garden, complete with small trees and a trout farm, and the family built a sandbox and wading pool



PHOTO BY DAVID NUFER

▲ *Three Sisters*, bronze, 13 x 8 x 8.

◀ *Dreams in Flight*, bronze, 38 x 37 x 27.



representation

Manitou Galleries, Santa Fe, NM;
Goldenstein Gallery, Sedona, AZ.

upcoming shows

American Women Artists Show,
Addison Art Gallery, Orleans, MA, August
15-September 15.

Two-person show with Roger Hayden
Johnson, **Manitou Galleries**, October
3-15.

**Prevailing Winds: American Women
Artists Show**, Booth Western Art
Museum, Cartersville, GA, October
23-January 4.

BY BONNIE GANGELHOFF

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for the children and their friends to play in during the summer months.

Wolf's father managed the hotel, so she had free reign of the premises. During the frozen Minnesota winters, Wolf donned a pair of roller skates and sped through the bowels of the hotel's basement, past

gigantic washing machines and dryers in the laundry room. She has fond memories of sneaking into the hotel's pastry room with her friends and pilfering apple pies meant for the restaurant. Wolf compares her childhood to that of the storybook character Eloise, who grew

up in the Plaza Hotel on Central Park in New York City.

By the time she graduated from an experimental high school on the campus of the University of Minnesota, Wolf had already taken a number of painting and sculpture classes, and she soon packed her bags and headed for the University of Northern Illinois, near Chicago. There she earned both her bachelor's degree and, in 1974, her master's degree in fine art.

To this day some of Wolf's favorite places to see art are not galleries or art museums but the venues she visited regularly during her studies in Illinois, such as Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History. It holds extensive collections of Egyptian artifacts, mummies, and Native American art, including works from tribes of the Northwest Coast. "Sometimes it feels like I have lived other lives because I have always enjoyed primitive things that are so beautiful but may come from prehistoric times," Wolf says. "Where does the internal resonance with certain things come from? That is the magic of life. To me, it's all magical, all mystery."

Today her sculptures depicting horses, dogs, and crows are reminiscent of the minimalist, elegant stone works of the Inuits, a Northwest Coast Native American

"I BELIEVE MY
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AND A STORY
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tribe. And like the Inuit pieces, Wolf's works feel both primitive and contemporary at the same time.

Traces of southwestern Native American culture also weave through Wolf's artworks. For example, in *UNTETHERED*, Wolf depicts the Koshari character known as the trickster, one of the ancestral

PHOTO BY PETER WRIGHT



▲ *Standing Watch*, bronze, 82 x 28 x 28.



▲ *Play is Good Medicine*, bronze, 6 x 13 x 6.
◀ *Untethered*, bronze, 11 x 10 x 13.

PHOTO BY DAVID NUFER

"WHERE DOES
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spirits of New Mexico's Pueblo culture. The trickster's role is to parody the culture's mores or tweak those in power. Wolf relishes attaching stories to her artworks. She likes to say that she makes up her own worlds that the sculptures live in.

Thus, in *UNTETHERED*, the trickster finds himself in the uncharacteristic position of being thwarted by forces beyond his control. In his rebellion against this fate, he cuts his marionette strings, untethering himself, and finds the inner strength to overcome difficult circumstances. "The piece was inspired by seeing my sister tethered to an IV pole during her treatments for leukemia," Wolf says. "In her case, the untethering meant her chance to leave the hospital when her body was ready to commence healing and recovery on its own strength, without the support or the fetters of the hospital."

For Wolf, ideas spring from a wide variety of sources. The inspiration for *A GENTLE REIN* [see page 99] was a turn-of-the-century photograph she discovered one day on the internet. The photo shows a woman riding a reindeer on the edge of a snowy forest. When Wolf researched the photo further, she learned that the domestication of reindeer began some 3,000 years ago, and that of the five million reindeer in the world, half of them are domesticated and used for transporting goods, riding, and for their meat and milk. "Reindeer are, for the peoples of the Eurasian Arctic and sub-Arctic, similar to



PHOTO BY DAVID NUFER

what the buffalo were to the American Indians,” Wolf says. “I was awakened to the importance of the beautiful and docile reindeer.”

Although viewers may find American Indian themes threading through her work, Wolf is quick to point out that her true inspiration originates from a deeper place in her soul that embraces many indigenous cultures. In some cases her fe-

male figures evoke an Asian sensibility—they pose seated in a Buddha-like position and seem captured in moments of rapt reflection or even meditating, as in the sculpture titled *IN THE MOMENT*. Perhaps this is reminiscent of her childhood, when Buddha figures inhabited her daily surroundings? Or perhaps she has studied Buddhism? When asked about this, Wolf says any sculpture

that suggests Asian art or religion was not her conscious intent or the result of any special knowledge. Of *IN THE MOMENT*, she says, “We spend so much time dwelling on the past or thinking about the future, but what about being in the moment? That’s what this sculpture is about—a visual reminder to live in the moment, not the past or the future but the present.”



In the Moment, bronze, 10 x 9 x 10.

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▲ **A Gentle Rein, bronze, 17 x 17 x 7.**

◀ **Mountain Dweller, bronze, 19 x 7 x 5.**



WOLF'S ULTIMATE DESIRE IS FOR EACH PIECE TO REFLECT A SPIRIT WITHIN.

As this story was going to press, Wolf was preparing for three upcoming gallery and museum shows. Her goals for each piece are her usual ones, she says. First, she is striving to give each piece its own voice, in the hopes that viewers hear the sculpture speak to them. The second goal emphasizes artistic form. Wolf wants the pieces to flow in harmony, grace, and balance, so that the viewer's eye moves continuously around

its many shapes and shadows.

Whether her sculptures are figures or animals or a combination of the two, Wolf's ultimate desire is for each one to reflect a “spirit within.” To explain this she refers to the Latin word *anima*, meaning breath or soul, and notes that since ancient times, one of man's beliefs has been that within every object, a spirit or soul exists. “I believe my artwork has breath, soul, and a story to tell,” Wolf says. “You

need only to listen. I want to keep the magic alive and living in my art.” ❖

Bonnie Gangelhoff is senior editor at *Southwest Art*.

See more of Wolf's work at www.southwestart.com/featured/wolf-1-jul2014.