

*Previews of Works For Sale at Upcoming Shows*

AUGUST 2008

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# WESTERN ART

## COLLECTOR







# Answering the Call of the Wild

**Tim Shinabarger's passion for wildlife and the wilderness country extends to his sculptures.**

By John Geraghty

Approximately 15 years ago, highly respected artists Ralph Oberg and George Northrup, while in Jackson, Wyo., dropped into the small upstairs gallery of Legacy Fine Arts to visit their friends, representatives and owners of Legacy, Brad and Jinger Richardson. During their conversation both Ralph and George became persistent in suggesting they contact Tim Shinabarger, a young, extremely talented painter and sculptor they had become acquainted with. The conviction of their recommendation initiated an immediate interest in this young man's work. As Tim was living in Bozeman, Mont., Brad and Jinger called him and invited him to visit their Jackson gallery.

This was the beginning of a mutually prodigious relationship. Tim Shinabarger has become a nationally-recognized wildlife sculptor. Brad and Jinger's Legacy Galleries of Jackson, Wyo., and Scottsdale, Ariz., have evolved into one of the more prestigious fine art establishments in the country.

Shinabarger was born in Great Falls, Mont.—Charlie Russell country. He demonstrated his artistic talent at an early age constantly sketching. Tim spent a lot of time at the C.M. Russell Museum admiring the great works in its permanent collection. Upon a family trip to Cody, Wyo., he had the opportunity to visit the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, and today, Tim says, "they could have driven off and left me there, I would have been perfectly content."

Tim developed an obsession with the history of the early trappers, wildlife and the great outdoors. At age 12, Tim became proficient in the mounting of small wild game and during high school developed a lucrative business in taxidermy. He planned a career in the art of taxidermy and entered Montana State University where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in business.

**Black Timber Bugler monument**, bronze, 10 x 10 x 8,' edition of 7  
*The artist says: This piece actually started as a small study titled Windy Ridge many years ago. I did a table top version about 10 years ago, and finally the monument in 2006. It has seen many refinements in that time, and I am very proud to now have it at the National Museum of Wildlife Art.*



*Bear Grass and Blossoms*, bronze, 15 x 8½ x 7½"



*In the Buck Brush*, bronze, 20 x 8 x 9"  
The artist says: White-tailed deer are a very elegant subject for a bust. With this piece I wanted to work with all the curved lines created by an extreme turn.

As a freshman in college during one of his numerous backcountry trips into the Absaroka Mountains in south central Montana, Tim's snowmobile sank when the ice gave way on the Boulder River. He suffered severe frostbite to his feet and was confined to bed to convalesce for several weeks.

To overcome his boredom he experimented with sculpting. He fashioned a pair of elk bookends that he later had cast in bronze. Tim found that his knowledge of animal anatomy through his years of taxidermy helped him immensely.

This became the catalyst for his career in fine art. During his spare time he began sculpting small wildlife images, which drew considerable attention and provided a steady income. With his continued interest in painting, Tim enrolled in a life drawing class at the university and additional evening classes with Montana artist Hazin Alkire. Mr. Alkire recognized the potential in this young impressionable student, and he taught Tim the importance of painting outdoors to observe nature in a different perspective and to be less dependent upon photographs as a primary reference.

To further his art education Tim applied and was accepted into several workshops instructed by master artists Clyde Aspevig, Bob Kuhn, Richard Loffler and Hollis Williford. Hollis, known mainly as a sculptor, encouraged Tim's interest in sculpting while providing the critical link between painting and sculpture. Hollis described the self gratification an artist experiences from a well executed sculpture. It is like drawing your subject 100 times from every perspective. You can create a sense of shape and depth with value changes, however, that third dimension escapes you; it is only truly possible in sculpture.

Tim's paintings show promise and have been well accepted. However, it is the strength of his sculptures for which he is recognized. He has an innate understanding of his animals and possesses a natural cognizance of design. The time spent in the backcountry has provided him with an understanding of the natural movement and gracefulness of these animals.

As Tim describes the movement of a bull moose, "... there is a beautiful form and rhythm in their movement, made more obvious by their extra long legs. When I think of a moose I often remember the ones I have that jumped in a downfall thicket. They have a way of cocking their heads and looking back out of the corner of their eye as they lumber away. Sometimes they run without as much as the pop of a twig. At other times they run with all the grace of a bull in a china closet."

Another incident Tim recalls was one morning in Alaska while he was observing probably the biggest bear he has ever seen walking by a caribou. The bear was taller than the caribou and twice as heavy, despite his size and weight. He started zigging and zagging like a cutting horse across the face of the mountain meadow. It turned out he was chasing an Arctic ground squirrel that he eventually caught. What impressed him most was the fact that these animals cared not one bit about his presence, they were the kings of their world and they knew it.

During and after college Tim worked at diverse jobs—a firefighter in the Custer National Forest in eastern Montana, a forest ranger in the Gallatin National Forest, a guide and packer with the north Yellowstone outfitters. Those jobs not only provided him the



*Sik Sik Shell Game*, bronze, 59 x 44 x 46," edition of 12

The artist says: Sik Sik is the Inuit word for Arctic ground squirrel. Grizzly bears love to dig for them in the soft tundra of interior Alaska. Often the squirrel's burrow has many tunnel entrances. While the grizzly is anxiously digging, the squirrel may escape through the back door. Sometimes, the bear sees the squirrel leave and pursues it to another hole, and starts digging all over again. This can go on for quite some time. As in a shell game, it is always a game of chance for both predator and prey.



*Headed for the High Country*, bronze, 21½ x 59 x 7¼"

opportunity to be in the great outdoors, it offered him the best of all opportunities. While guiding an elk hunting trip he met Roxanne, an attractive registered nurse and the girl he would propose to and eventually lead down the aisle. He recounts their honeymoon; it was a 24-mile trip into the Montana backcountry. Roxanne has become his support, critic, companion, best friend and the love of his life. She provides the serenity that makes everything possible.

Following in the footsteps of such pathfinders as Carl Rungius and Belmore Brown, Tim continues to take numerous reference trips into the wilderness gathering materials and observing his animals up close, sometimes too close. These experiences provide inspiration, immediacy and realism to his work. The result of working from life empowers him to say something artistically, something that comes from the heart.

Whether it's in the Brooks Range in remote Alaska, where he has spent weeks trailing the grizzly bears and migrating caribou, the Wranglee, where Tim has ascended the rugged crags in search of Dall Sheep, or the greater Yellowstone ecosystem where he has followed after moose and the majestic wapiti, when the opportunity materializes he sets up his clay stand or easel and captures that magical moment. Tim says it just doesn't get any better than that.

In 2001, Tim and Roxanne traveled above the Arctic Circle to the Kongakut River in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

"It was an awesome experience," recalls Shinabarger.

They floated approximately 65 miles downriver to the Beaufort Sea on the Alaskan Yukon border. They stopped along the way exploring the drainage and deep canyons branching off. Unfortunately they missed the caribou migration as the weather had pushed nature's calendar back a couple weeks.

When Tim speaks of his work he becomes serious and focused. It



*Bound for Cover*, bronze, 20 x 8 x 9"

The artist says: White-tailed deer are so graceful and light on their feet. I wanted to convey that light bouncing movement as they make a rapid departure.



***Mother's Watch***, bronze, 25 x 20 x 20"

*The artist says: Working with young animals is always a challenge.*

*The tendency is to make them too cute. I wanted the cubs to look as they truly would look in the wild. I decided to use late fall as my time frame.*

*Unlike spring or summer, the cubs would be more filled out and the mother would be in her prime.*

the illusion of deep hair, muscle and bones. His patinas have been carefully selected and they consist of multiple values adding to the visual experience through the reflection of natural light and shadow.

Since 1993, when Tim received the Tuffy Berg Memorial Award from the C.M. Russell Museum, his first major award, it has been a continual progression of honors.

I had been observing Tim's work for some time, and in early 2000 Brad Richardson called me and suggested I consider him for the Prix de West Invitational. As I was on the board of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and one of the Prix de West committee members, with the blessing of my friend and fellow board member Bill Kerr, we tendered his application. It was unanimously approved and Tim participated in the 2001 exhibition and sale.

In 2003, I invited Tim to join the group of distinguished artists of the Masters of the American West, held at the Autry National Center and Western Heritage Museum in Los Angeles, Calif. His entrance in the 2004 Masters presentation was well accepted and brought an exciting new perspective to the exhibition.

His national awards and honors are at this point in his young career most impressive. Louis Bennett Award, National Sculptor Society (1998); Elliot Liskin Award, Society of Animal Artists (1999); C. Percival Dietsh Award, National Sculpture Society (2001); Placement of *Sik Sik Shell Game* monument at the Oklahoma City Zoo (2003); Elected to the National Sculpture Society (2003); Placement of *Sik Sik Shell Game* monument at the Leaning Tree Museum of Western Art, Boulder, Colo. (2004); James Earl Frazer Sculpture Award, Prix de West (2004); Robert Loughed Memorial Award, Prix de West (2004); *Push Comes to Shove* placed at the Autry National Center as part of its permanent collection (2005); James Earl Frazer Sculpture Award, Prix de West (2005) and *Black Timber Bugler* monument placed at the National Wildlife Museum of Art (2007).

It has been exciting to observe Tim Shinabarger's progression. His continued dedication and commitment to his craft shall certainly result in recognition as one of America's great wildlife artists.

Tim and Roxanne have purchased 160 acres, 15 miles west of Billings, where Tim has just finished his new dream studio. Tim's father, who owns Yellowstone Traditions and built Clyde and Carol Aspevig's amazing studio and home in Clyde Park outside of Billings, assisted Tim in the construction of his studio. It has the same unique prematurely rusted metal roof, the use of old barn wood siding provides a distinctive timeworn quality, and at first glance one would assume it has been there for years.

The main building measures 36 feet by 48 feet with a 21-foot

is extremely important that he is able to communicate his emotions, reverence and the passion he has for his art and his admiration for the land and particularly the animals.

Tim says, "My work, whether sculpture or painting, is driven by the same philosophies. I always try to say something to the viewer. It may be an emotion created by light, mood or a gesture. I work from life in order to bring experiences and emotions that I have felt to my work. My intention is not to imitate life but to interpret it in my own personal way and share it with the viewer. My technique is cerebral. I strive to have it flow freely and naturally like one's signature. As an artist I am faced with many problems, which need to be resolved in order to create my illusion. My technique is a result of these solutions, a learning curve; a way of reaching a higher level of credibility. I don't ask how I should apply the paint or clay, but why it should be applied in a particular way. Since my childhood I have been enthralled with wildlife and the wilderness country. My work is an extension of this obsession."

Tim's sculpting process begins with a sound composition and design. His impressionistic approach is well balanced with pure realism complemented often with abstract forms and purposeful attention to negative space. The heavily textured surfaces appear almost as bold deliberate brushstrokes. He has the ability through the use of light and shadow to suggest rather than define, creating



*Call of the North*, bronze, 18 x 19 x 7," edition of 35



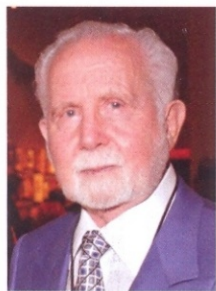
*Push Comes to Shove*, bronze, 18 x 20 x 55," edition 25

ceiling, large doors that provide the movement of monumental sculptures, windows open to the west to view the spectacular views of Granite Peak, Montana's highest summit, the Bear Tooth Mountain Range and the land that was crossed by Lewis and Clark and the Corp of Discovery 200 years ago. The north light windows, which supply his main light source for working, look over the great Yellowstone River Valley across the buffalo plain that Chief Joseph crossed on his way to Canada. The Little Big Horn Battlefield National Monument is within 50 miles. This is truly God's country U.S.A., and their home is at present about 10 minutes away. They plan in the near future to build Roxanne a new home closer to the studio.

Tim finds solace in the words of master wildlife sculptor, Alexander Phimister Proctor (1862-1950), who stated, "I would not change my life for any other, but my love has always been divided. I am eternally obsessed with two deep desires, one to spend as much time as possible in the wilderness and the other, to accomplish something worthwhile in art."

Tim Shinabarger is represented by Legacy Galleries of Scottsdale, Ariz., and Jackson, Wyo., Collectors Covey in Dallas, Texas, Demott Gallery in Vail, Colo., Ponderosa Art Gallery in Hamilton, Mont., and J.N. Bartfield Gallery in New York City, N.Y. Tim and Roxanne are considering representation overseas as there has been considerable international interest in his work. They have shipped over 20 sculptures to European collectors. 🐾

## About John Geraghty



*John Geraghty, Trustee and Special Advisor to the Autry National Center's Masters of the American West Fine Art Exhibition and Sale, has served on the board of the CAA Museum, on the board of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame's (National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum) Board of Directors, and reorganized the existing National Academy*

*of Western Art into the Prix de West Invitational Art Exhibition and Sale. John shares his insights on the Western Art scene and both he and wife Saralynn are afflicted with the incurable passion of collecting Western Art.*



*Ruffed Grouse,*  
bronze, 15 x 8 x 9,"  
edition 40