

Fine Art of Today's West Southwest Art

Sculpture

Tim Cherry's
elegant creatures

Star York's
personality-filled pieces

Behind the scenes in
a sculpture studio

plus
William Wray
paints the
streets of L.A.

Nathan Solano
captures life
in the West



Animal Magnetism

Wildlife sculptor **Tim Cherry** focuses on form to express the very essence of his subjects
By **Norman Kolpas**

ASK MOST ARTISTS to describe the latent glimmerings of their careers, and you'll likely hear some variation on a story of growing up with crayon or pencil in hand. That, however, is not the case for sculptor Tim Cherry.

His earliest memory of art? In the seventh grade in Nelson, a town in the Canadian Rockies in southeastern British Columbia, he was sent to the principal's office. "I was not partaking in the art class," Cherry recalls, his chuckle tinged with chagrin. "I explained that it was a waste of my time because art was never going to be a part of my life."

Instead, Cherry's hands were most often occupied with rod and reel. "I learned fishing from my grandfather and spent every second that I possibly could out on the creek," he says. "I think I knew every trout by name."

When the weather turned too cold to fish, he found other ways to spend time outdoors. "I'd be out on snowshoes, setting up trap lines to catch squirrels and martins. Everything revolved around animals," he says. "I always knew that somehow, some way, animals were going to be a part of my life."

At 16, he landed a summer job as a cook and wrangler for an outfit that ran wilderness excursions. Fresh out of high school in 1986, he became a full-fledged guide, a career he enjoyed for 12 years.

"We would round up and shoe our horses at the end of June, then trek in and set up a base camp in northern British Columbia, the Yukon, or the Northwest Territories," he explains. Such outposts could be extremely remote, as much as 150 miles from the nearest road and several hundred air miles from the closest village. "In the Yukon, we had 10,000 square miles virtually to ourselves," Cherry recalls. "It was very pristine, like going back in time."

One of his greatest pleasures in the wilderness was the sheer abundance of animals, he notes, as he rattles off a litany of common sightings: "In a single day, you might see moose, caribou, grizzly bears, red fox, golden eagles, ground squirrels, a few rabbits, a lot of ptarmigan, river otters, beavers, hoary marmots, some Dall sheep, wolves, wolverine. And the fishing was fabulous beyond description because so much of that water had never even had a hook in it."

By 19, Cherry had also developed an interest in taxidermy and applied to work for a month in the Maine studio of professional taxidermist Forest Hart, an expert in sculpting the finely detailed mannequins upon which the animals are mounted. While learning the process from literally the inside out as he sculpted mannequins him-



DOSSIER REPRESENTATION

Columbine Gallery, Loveland, CO; Diehl Gallery, Jackson, WY; McLarry Fine Art, Santa Fe, NM; Texas Art Gallery, Dallas, TX; Grapevine Gallery, Oklahoma City, OK; Sylvan Gallery, Charleston, SC; Peninsula Gallery, Sidney, British Columbia, Canada; www.timcherry.com.

UPCOMING SHOWS

McLarry Fine Art, July 17-31.

Prix de West, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, OK, through September 7.

Quest for the West, Eiteljorg Museum, Indianapolis, IN, September 11-October 11.

Western Visions Miniatures & More, National Museum of Wildlife Art, Jackson Hole, WY, September 18-28.

Sculpture at the River Market, Little Rock, AR, October 16-18.

Small Works, Great Wonders, National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, OK, November 19.



**FIRST LOOK, ALABASTER AND
BRAZILIAN SUBSTONE, 9 X 8 X 3.**



**CAT-TENTMENT,
BRONZE, 8 X 31 X 14.**



**SQUIRREL STRETCH,
BRONZE, 33 X 19 X 7.**



**MOUNTAIN DEN, BRONZE
AND STAINLESS STEEL, 19 X 11.**



BODACIOUS BUNNY,
BRONZE, 10 X 15 X 6.

self, Cherry discovered he had a natural talent for capturing his subjects' form, musculature, and movement.

In a serendipitous event that seemed somehow destined, Hart had just begun to create fine-art bronze sculptures, and he invited Cherry to the foundry for the casting of his very first piece. The process, and the magnificent way in which it captured nature, was a revelation. "This is it," Cherry recalls thinking to himself. "This is what I want to do for the rest of my life."

He returned to Canada eager to embark on his new calling, but uncertain how to proceed. "It was frustrating," he admits. Fortunately, serendipity—or perhaps fate—once again played its part. It was 1988 and Cherry was at a remote base camp in the Yukon, awaiting a client to lead on an outdoor adventure trip. But bad weather kept the client from flying in. Another client managed to get there, only to find that *his* guide had been "weathered out." So for the next several days Cherry found himself paired up with the unexpected client, who just happened to be renowned wildlife sculptor Dan Ostermiller. "I guess you could say that weather threw us together. It was just one of those great Ma Nature things," says Cherry.

"Danny and I hit it off. He's a great guy, very kind, and we had a good time," he continues. Learning of Cherry's interest in wildlife sculpture, Ostermiller told him about the growing sculpture scene in his home of Loveland, CO. "He invited me down there to see what was going on."

Cherry soon took Ostermiller up on the invitation. He packed up his truck and headed south for what would be the first of four winters spent in Loveland. He quickly found a place to live and picked up work. "Everything is available there to learn about every facet of being a sculptor, and a lot of the studios needed help on different projects," he says. He paid the rent by working for a mold-maker and finishing metal in a foundry, all the while gaining knowledge from base-makers and photographers, foundry men and patineurs.

In addition to spending time at Ostermiller's studio, Cherry rented his own studio space from sculptor Fritz White, who became another mentor. "Fritz helped me enormously on the principles of design," Cherry explains. "He taught me that sculpture is oriented on mass, and it's a matter of design to come up with a form that is very contained."

THUS did Cherry's distinctive style begin to emerge, focusing on animals while streamlining the forms to express the very essence of the subject. "I like to think what I do is the middle ground between realism and abstraction, where I can straddle both worlds with a stylized design that still captures the characteristics of the animal," he notes. He generously cites a wealth of influences on this approach: "Fritz and Danny, of course," as well as the river stone sculptures of Steve Kestrel, monumental pieces by Kent Ullberg and Allan Houser, and the Art Nouveau and Art Deco movements with their "big sweeping lines and volumes."

"That's where individual style comes from: A work of art speaks to you in some way, and you take what's important and it becomes part of you and what you do," says Cherry with characteristic humility.

Cherry's particular style quickly gained recognition. While exhibiting his work at a show in Charleston, SC, in 1989, he met the

director of a gallery in Branson, MO, who took on some of his sculptures. "It started as a professional relationship," he says, "and took a year or two to become a personal one." Cherry moved to Branson to be with Linda in 1992, and they married four years later.

Working in the small studio alongside the home he shares with Linda and their daughter, Amber, in a quiet residential neighborhood of Branson, he usually starts a piece with a quick thumbnail pencil sketch that aims to capture an animal gesture he's observed, or perhaps an abstract form that has intrigued him. "Then I jump to working in clay," he says, noting that he always sculpts at full scale, with his works ranging in size from a few inches up to 8 feet tall. "There comes a point at which the sculpture takes over, and I just follow along."

When the time comes to cast his limited-edition pieces, Cherry returns to Loveland, where he works with his longtime foundry, Bronze Services, and then with expert patineur Patrick Kipper. Lately, Cherry has also been casting pieces in stainless steel, working with an outfit called Deep in the Heart Art Foundry in Bastrop, TX. "There's so much still to explore," says Cherry, pointing out that he's begun experimenting with pieces that combine both bronze and stainless steel. A few months ago he also started hand carving small, one-of-a-kind sculptures in stone.

Yet, for all his accomplishments as an artist, Cherry, age 44, remains essentially the same person who always knew that his life would revolve around animals. Just as he can vividly recall the animals he witnessed years ago in the Canadian wilderness, he now recites with equal vividness a roll call of Ozark wildlife he's likely to see whenever he steps outside his door: "Bald eagles, ospreys, great blue herons, green herons, mallards and wood ducks and cormorants. I just had a turkey run through the yard. Red fox, bobcat, armadillos, possums, rabbits. A group of white-tailed deer. Kingfishers. All the songbirds. Cardinals. Pileated woodpeckers. Redheaded woodpeckers."

With eyes trained since boyhood to revel in Ma Nature's wonders, he stands poised to turn any such sighting into a work of art. "There are a million miracles around you every day," he observes. "It's just a matter of being aware of them." ❖

Norman Kolpas is a Los Angeles-based freelancer who writes for *Mountain Living* and *Colorado Homes & Lifestyles* as well as *Southwest Art*.