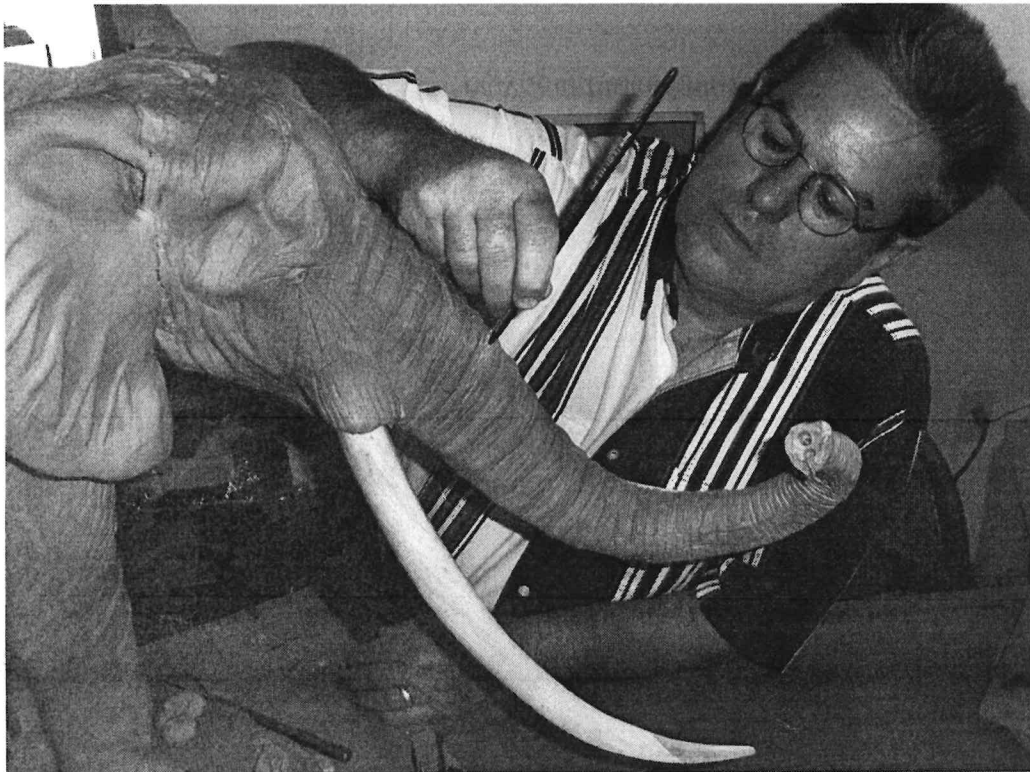


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Living the Wild Life

 Jim Hart  June 26 2012

Sandy sculptor, w ho has loved wildlife all his life, creates lasting images



by: STAFF PHOTO BY JIM HART - Sandy sculptor Steven Fair does some fine tuning on the beginnings of the sculpture of an African bull elephant. This clay image is eventually covered with ceramic, which is used to cast the final bronze figure, a process that could take up to a year.

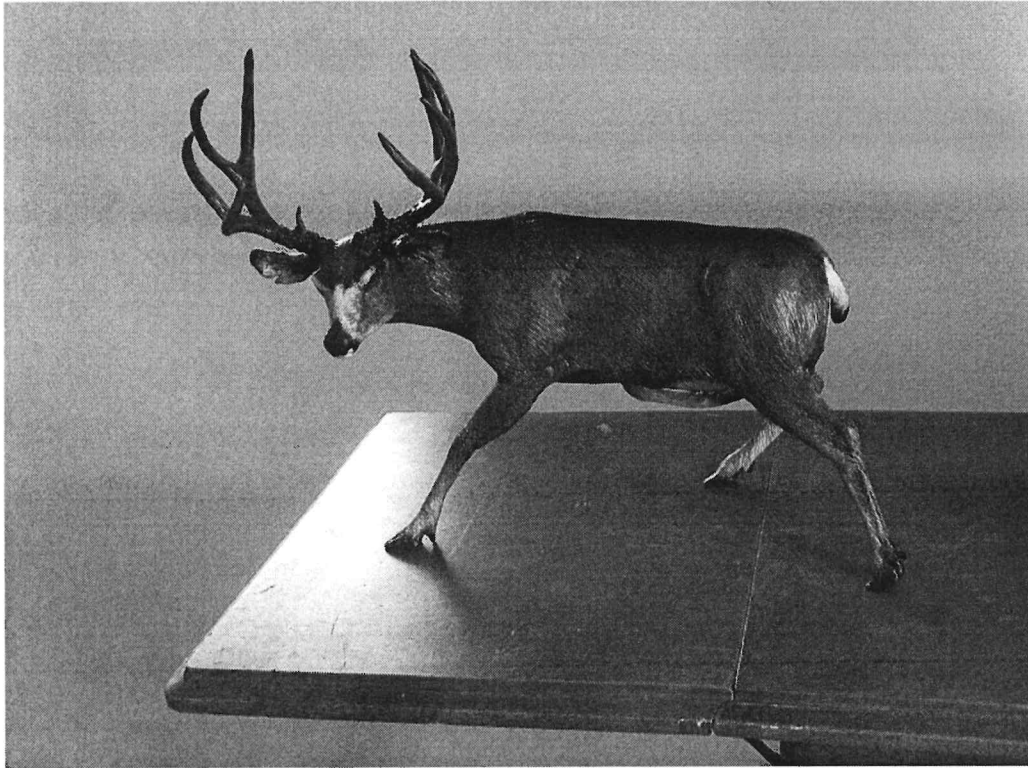
(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003423643837.jpg>)Steven Fair of Sandy is a lover of wildlife and a bronze sculptor who has earned the respect of his creative peers.

His three-dimensional bronze image of an Alaskan coastal brown bear fishing for salmon drew so much attention at a recent national show, held in Ellensburg, Wash., that he was given the prestigious John Clymer Award - the first time it has gone to a sculptor in the 40-year history of the show.

"It must have been the first time that a sculpted piece fulfilled their guidelines," he said.

Even though the John Clymer Award was the pinnacle of his career, to Fair the more meaningful award was the peer award for Best in Show-sculpture at Ellensburg because his work was chosen by other exhibitors at the show.

"That's huge," he said. "When the people you work with and have known select a piece and consider it the best sculpture, it's a great honor."



by: STAFF PHOTO BY JIM HART - This Eastern Oregon male mule deer is scaled to one-fifth its actual size and is detailed to match the animal it represents, even to individual hairs on its coat.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003423643868.jpg>) Both awards are, in Fair's words, "as good as it gets at the Ellensburg show."

Fair is unique in the way he creates images, which are mainly of animals. He says he is one of few sculptors who work from memory - no photographs or sketches.

He admits a photographic memory is necessary for such a technique, which requires him to sit for hours observing the habits, body language and attitudes of each animal he sculpts.

His college background in zoology and life science as well as 10 years living in Alaska, he said, certainly help his observations.

To sculpt a pair of tufted puffins, Fair said he went to the Oregon Aquarium in Newport and sat for four or five hours watching the birds and their habits.

"I'm trying to get a feeling for them and how they operate," Fair said of the way he memorizes each animal. "I need to understand the animal's character and where its heart is. I want to capture a part of the animal's heart - its spirit."

For the African elephant he is currently working on, Fair observed the animals at Kruger National Park in South Africa as well as at Wildlife Safari, a zoological park near Roseburg. He couldn't look at the elephants at the Oregon Zoo because they are Indian elephants - different from the African species in their ears, tusks, head and toes.

Capturing the heart and spirit is different with each animal. Fair says it requires watching how the animals interact with one another, seeing how they posture and move.

Fair's ability to read the minds and hearts of the animals he sculpts is rare, it seems.

For example, he sculpted a Brahma bull - the kind used in bareback riding at rodeos - and titled the image "Seven Seconds."

"Since (a bareback rider) has to stay on for eight seconds," Fair said, "the bull's goal is to buck him off in seven seconds or less.

"(In the image) he's got his head up with a little twist of arrogance looking back (at the rider). I've seen this at rodeos, and I just wanted to capture that little bit of arrogance."

At that moment, the bull must be thinking, "In less than one second you'll be airborne."

That's an example of how Fair can capture images of fleeting moments in time that sometimes go unnoticed.

With each rising sun, Fair goes to the sculpting area of his home and continues the creative work he was doing the previous day. It's a ritual that never loses its excitement, never becomes boring and is always is exhilarating.

"This is the world I love," he said. "It's the world I grew up with as a little boy. When everyone was saying duck, I said mallard."

Fair grew up near Roseburg alongside the South Umpqua River, where he often floated a boat - Tom Sawyer style - to a large river island.

"Where I found peace and security was in the natural world," he said. "I don't always understand people, but there's order in nature. This is where I can escape, where politics doesn't determine anything - everything has order."

Casting off several shells, Fair says he realizes he becomes very vulnerable when he exposes the way he feels in his art.

"(It's important) for me," he said, "to take my hands and create pictures that occur in my mind that nobody will ever see, and be able to show you what's in my mind and heart. And it's rewarding to have people say they like something I have created."

Even though his sketches - which he hasn't done for years - are works of art in themselves, Fair admits he doesn't like sketching. But he loves working with his hands in three dimensions.

Each sculpted image must be set to a scale of one-fifth of the actual size, which makes creating the image even more difficult since it comes from memory.

The process involves creating a skeleton from aluminum wire, gluing open-cell foam to it and covering the foam with one-half-inch of oil-base clay before beginning to carve the details.

With the finished (but soft) image, a hollow-cavity mold is created from polyurethane rubber and plaster. The mold is then coated with wax to make a wax image that is coated with ceramic, which is fired before the bronze (at 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit) is poured in to create the final figure. The foundry work is done at facilities near Estacada,

Bend or Kalispell, Mont.

For large figures, pieces are created separately and then welded together with bronze in a tungsten inert gas (TIG) process.

Then the welds are ground smooth, and through a heating process using certain chemical compounds, colors are produced through oxidation that enhance the image.

Fair described the process, but it's not new. He said the same process has been used for 3,000 years to create bronze images (without the TIG welding, of course).

Fair wasn't involved in art when he was young, especially after a teacher heavily criticized him for his artwork. Instead, he studied science all the way to university.

While working for the Alaska Fish and Wildlife Protection agency at age 28, he flew into the Kenai Mountains and found a moose antler that he carved with a pocket knife. He shaped it into the image of a Northern pike and felt like he had found an activity that gave him pleasure.


He sculpted many award-winning images from moose antlers in Alaska, but by 1992 he had developed a condition in his hands that required him to switch to a less strenuous activity.

That's when he studied sculpture at Mt. Hood Community College and began to sculpt clay and form numbered, limited-edition, long-lasting bronze images.

Local residents can see Fair at work in Sandy in mid-July, alongside the work of artist friend Kathleen Butts. Both are longtime exhibitors at the Sandy Mountain Festival and will be side by side at Meinig Park.


For more information, visit www.stevenfair.com (<http://www.stevenfair.com>), call 503-668-6836 or email steve@stevenfair.com ([http://stevenfair.com](mailto:steve@stevenfair.com)).

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