



scottsdale
LIFE

GARDEN ART • GAME-FOOD PREPARATION

20

SCOTTSDALE

outdoor adventures

FOUR EXTREME SPORTS

PROS RANK ARIZONA'S GOLF

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by jennifer cushman

a dog's life

Give nationally known artist Ron Burns the choice between fame and fortune or new homes for all the unwanted shelter animals and the choice is clear. No amount of money in the world is as important as happy lives for pets.

To say the artist and Buff, his high-school sweetheart and wife of 22 years, are animal lovers is an understatement. To this couple, few things in life are more enjoyable than a wet sloppy kiss from a dog. The best kisses in the world come from their "kid," Rufus, a large, loving 8-year-old mutt.

Rufus is now an only child. The Burns' other longtime family members, Jazzy and Sadie, "went to college" a few years ago. Now Rufus travels with mom and dad wherever they go. It's often Rufus, not Burns, who's the center of attention at fundraising events and art functions. "It's all about Rufus," the couple laugh, as they

rub his furry ears.

After more than 10 years of painting dogs, cats, pigs and cows, Burns finds himself in an appealing situation. His entertaining artistic style and commitment to animal causes have made him a celebrity of sorts. He's the first and only artist-in-residence for The Humane Society of the United States. "My goal in my lifetime is to have all the pets out there find homes. I'd much rather have that happen than have my art in museums," he explains.

But don't count him out yet. Just as artist William Wegman's humorous photos of dogs on roller skates have been collected by major contemporary art museums, institutions like MoMA could one day clamor to show Burns' paintings. There's no doubt his work resonates in 21st century popular culture.

Like a tuning fork reverberating its song, Burns' realistic-looking pop-art

paintings hit us directly in our emotional centers. Standing before one of the artist's adorable dogs and looking into its eyes, so full of expression and pure emotion, you can feel your heart beat a little faster. There's an intense desire to reach out and pet the animal while uttering "coochie-coochie-coo" under your breath.

It's enough to make the jaded art connoisseur sick. But for the rest of the world, there's an undeniable pull to his work.

The artist's subjects are most often found in animal shelters. During the couple's travels, Burns takes his camera to pounds and finds dogs and cats whose expressions are so irresistible he can't help but paint them. Rather than doing a simple portrait, Burns brings out the animals' anthropomorphic qualities by surrounding them with everyday objects. His dogs lounge on sofas or ride in vehicles. Sometimes the animals are surrounded by pop-art backgrounds, reminiscent of colorful rock-and-roll album covers from the 1960s. "The funny thing about my work is that dogs see in black and white. If a dog looked at his portrait, he'd know that I painted him realistically. He'd have no idea that I've used these crazy color combinations," laughs Burns.

Most of the animals have red, green or blue noses. Ears can be tangerine, yellow or a combination of both. Just as no two animals are alike, none of the paintings are the same. Colors are chosen in the mo-

"newman's big adventure"
36 inches x 40 inches



RON BURNS



ment and are used to express whatever emotions the artist feels when looking into his subject's eyes. Believing eyes are the windows to the soul, Burns always paints them first.

One of his most recent projects was an emotional tribute to Sirius, a yellow Labrador who, along with his handler Dave Lim, was assigned to search all cars entering the World Trade Center. The officers were working on September 11 when two airplanes flown by terrorists hit the Twin Towers. After the first plane hit, Lim told Sirius to wait in his cage while he went to see what happened.

Lim was trapped on the fourth floor of Tower One until late afternoon when rescuers found him and dug him from the rubble. Sirius died in the attack, along with 37 other Port Authority officers. When the dog's body was found three months later by those working at Ground Zero, Sirius was draped in an American flag and given the same respect as all fallen police officers and firefighters of 9-11.

The Burnses were so moved by Sirius' story that they contacted Lim and asked if the artist could paint his partner's portrait. Burns created a commemorative print of the original painting. Proceeds will be donated to the Sirius Memorial Fund to help train search-and-rescue dogs. The commemorative print can be purchased online at www.ronburns.com.

The artist's other big pet project is his first book, published this year, called *The Dogs of Ron Burns*. He'll be signing copies at his March 6 show at Bonner David Galleries in Scottsdale. Like all his work, a portion of the proceeds will go to animal causes.

unconventional gallery

When it came time to choose a logo for their new fine-art gallery (Bonner

David Galleries), Christi Bonner Manuelito and Clark David Olson drew a simple, unfinished picture frame. The gleaming white rectangle is a graphic testimonial to their mission in the local art community.

"We love art, and we think art is for everyone," Olson says. "That's one of the reasons why we have a friendly blend of art here. Christi loves contemporary, and I love traditional realism. It's one of our philosophies that you buy what you love and don't worry about mixing styles or colors. It'll all work together in your home because it's a reflection of you."

The gallery owners are hoping the empty picture frame tells their clients that loving art simply means choosing work that speaks to them. And Manuelito and Olson will do whatever it takes to help clients achieve their art-buying aspirations.

Manuelito and Olson have selected what they call a "family of fine art." Most of the 13 artists they represent are longtime friends. They also carry a variety of Shona sculpture. "We're an artist-friendly gallery. We wouldn't be open without them," says Manuelito. Olson nods in agreement and adds, "The artists, our publicist, our clients are all part of our family."

Another family-friendly aspect is a children's studio. A select group of talented youngsters takes art classes on Saturday mornings, and their work is featured in the next month's show. Parents also are encouraged to bring their kids to the gallery while visiting. The children are given art supplies to play with while mom and dad shop.

Manuelito and Olson have collectively worked in the Scottsdale arts district for more than five years. The two met and formed an instant friendship while working together at a well-established downtown gallery. Completely like-

minded in their thoughts about art and its essential place in society, the two decided to become business partners. They opened Bonner David Galleries on Main Street in September.

They hope the gallery becomes a community gathering spot for all the creative arts: dance, poetry, literature, performance art, visual art, music, etc. They plan to host salons throughout the year. Other diverse events have included a gala fashion show and a behind-the-scenes tour of the gallery for a local Girl Scout troop.

"Another reason why we leave the picture frame unfinished in our logo is that we're creating an outside-the-box concept for our gallery. We have an unconventional gallery. By being creative and fresh, we think we can offer something unique to our clients and to the community," Olson says. ☉



bonner david galleries

7040 E. Main St.
(480) 941-8500

