



Man's Best Friend **In The Spotlight**

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, FROM THE EARLIEST CAVE PAINTINGS TO CONTEMPORARY CANVASES, ARTISTS HAVE BEEN INSPIRED BY DOGS. TODAY, THESE ARTISTS BRING A UNIQUE VISION TO THEIR WORK. BY JACQUELIN CARNEGIE

Animated Dogs Come to Life

Paul Fierlinger's parents were caught up in an international life of Czech politics, diplomacy and intrigue. They had little time for or interest in their young child. When they were called back to Czechoslovakia from the States, they left Paul with an American foster family they'd found through a newspaper ad. To cope with this benign neglect, Paul found solace in the company of loveable dogs.

At the tender age of 10, due to a regime change in Czechoslovakia, Paul was abruptly yanked from the American home he'd come to call his own and sent off to an elite boarding school in Prague (future playwright and president Václav Havel and film director Miloš Forman were his schoolmates).

Miserable, homesick for America, and unable to speak the language, Paul expressed himself through drawing. It turned out he had quite a talent. Art school followed, coupled with an intense desire to return to the U.S. (no mean feat during the Communist era).

Eventually, using his artistic talent to forge documents, Fierlinger escaped to America. Over time, as his acclaim as an animator grew, Paul and his wife Sandra, a fine arts painter, began to create animated films together. Shown on PBS and at prestigious film festivals such as Sundance and the Toronto Film Festival, their work received numerous Peabody Awards, an Oscar nomination for Best Animated Short, and several other major film festival awards. Paul's lifelong love of dogs informed many of these projects.

Some favorites include the award-winning films *Still Life with Animated Dogs*, starring dogs Paul had come to love over his lifetime, and *Drawn From Memory*, an autobiographical film featuring the canine companions that helped him survive those unhappy years in Czechoslovakia.

In their latest feature from New Yorker Films, *My Dog Tulip* (based on

Above: Painter Juan Torcoletti used his love of dogs to turn his life around by painting their portraits.

British author J.R. Ackerley's book), an animated German Shepherd gets top billing alongside the voices of Christopher Plummer, Lynn Redgrave and Isabella Rossellini.

Through a Photographer's Lens

Award-winning photographer Rosanne Olson is mostly known for her stunning portraits of people. But as she photographed her *Knowing Portraits* clients, she noticed that their pets were intrigued by the process, often hovering at the edge of the proceedings.

Olson became intrigued with them in return and came up with the concept of photographing dogs in the painterly style of the Old Masters. Her regal dog portraits à la Thomas Gainsborough and John Singer Sargent look as if lit by the natural light of a window.

"When photographing dogs—and children—I am very patient," explains Olson. "Sometimes it works quickly and sometimes it takes a while—there's no forcing anything. Animals (and kids) are so honest. They don't know how to 'fake it,' that's something we learn as we grow up.

dressed in black leather with two black dogs, a Rottweiler and a German Shepherd. In a stroke of bad luck, the Rottweiler bit me so badly that I had to go to the hospital for stitches.

"I wanted to sue the lady, but felt sorry for the dogs. Also, because I was here illegally, I feared being sent back to South America. I was happy and in love with New York City, fully determined to fulfill my American dream.

"At first, to 'heal' myself from the frightening experience with that Rottweiler, I painted dogs with ferocious teeth, wild dogs and all black ones. I started selling my paintings on the street, at the corner of Prince and Greene. Luckily, many sales followed.

"I had famous clients such as Giorgio Armani and many artists. Also, neighborhood residents and tourists bought my work. But, finally, I was arrested for selling on the street and was almost deported. However, fortune smiled and I got my paintings back—and my freedom—as well as my papers and a green card. So, I decided to change my life and stop selling my work on the street. I started doing dog portraits on request.

"First, I'd meet the dogs and their owners (the clients), do sketches,



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HAVE A HEART

Animator Paul Fierlinger and *Mutts* cartoonist Patrick McDonnell teamed up to create commercials for The Shelter Pet Project (www.theshelterpetproject.org) to encourage people to adopt a pet.

Other ways to help: Visit 4pawsforability.org, which provides service dogs to people with disabilities; www.humanesociety.org, the nation's largest animal protection organization; or www.asPCA.org, which rescues and shelters abused and neglected animals.



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Left: Esther the Great Dane, as photographed by Rosanne Olson, has the regal look of Gainsborough's *The Blue Boy*. **Top Right:** Art imitates life. In the award-winning *Still Life with Animated Dogs*, Paul Fierlinger gets his dog Spinnaker to do a barking "voice over." **Bottom Right:** In the film, Paul Fierlinger also goes sailing with Spinnaker.

"I simply try to make photographing them an enjoyable experience so that the expressions I get reflect the genuine feelings of the subject."

Yes, you can almost see the dogs smiling.

Canine Creatures on Canvas

Argentine painter Juan Torcoletti's inspiration for painting dogs is best told in his own words:

"My history painting dogs was born in the streets of New York. I had just moved to the city in 1993 and found a place in Soho. One morning, like any other, I went for coffee at Dean & DeLuca on Prince Street. I passed a lady

make drawings and take photos. Afterwards, I'd work on the paintings in my studio (by then, I'd moved to an old storage building in Tribeca with a hotplate and a bathroom down the hall). That's where I lived until I became disillusioned with my beloved America. And, when I started painting ferocious dogs again, I knew it was time to move back to Buenos Aires."

Since 2004, Juan Torcoletti and his amazing dog portraits have been represented by boltax.gallery on Shelter Island, New York.

These very different portraits by this group of talented artists pay tribute to the long relationship people have had with dogs—not only as hunters, guardians and guides, but as loving companions.