

# DuPont



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DU PONT

# ARTISTS IN AFRICA

ARTIST-PRINTMAKER DENNIS CURRY DETAILS AFRICAN WILDLIFE USING "MYLAR" FILM AND DUPONT HOWSON PRINTING PLATES



*"I am doing what I love and celebrating what I see on this planet."*

Says Dennis Curry – artist, conservationist and master printmaker – whose first African safari in 1982 opened his eyes to the beauty, the awe and the threatened future of some of earth's most remarkable creatures and habitats.

In a recent six-week expedition, Curry was joined by fellow artists Al Agnew, Brian Jarvi, Rick Kelley, Gary Moss and Daniel Smith, and by Christopher Law, director of The Foundation Fine Arts Ltd., in Hansville, Washington. Their work is captured in the Foundation's limited edition set of original lithographs, entitled "The Artists' Africa Portfolio."

The portfolio demonstrates a new and exacting method of fine art origination: the drawing of a richly detailed wildlife image one layer at a time. The artist creates a separate sheet for each color, each shade of tan in the parched African grass, each glint of orange in the eye of the leopard.

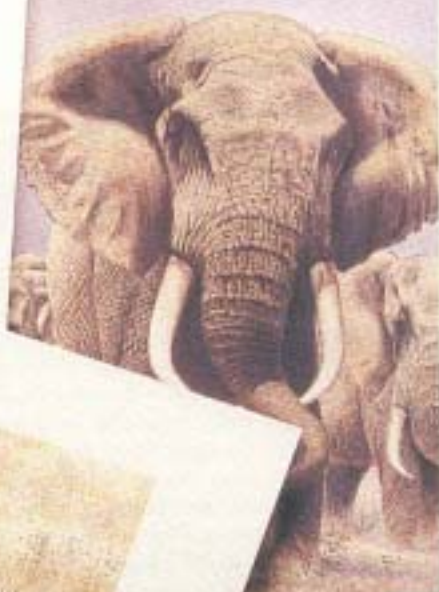
A completed wildlife study may consist of as many as 30 separate layers. Each is detailed in graphite on its own sheet of precision-coated "Mylar" polyester film, each needing to line up perfectly with the next. Later, the films will be used to expose DuPont Howson printing plates: direct reproductions of the artist's original pencil strokes.

That's as many as 30 plates, corresponding to 30 inks and 30 painstaking passes through the single-color, sheet-fed offset press at Curry's Blueberry Press in Cambria, California. But oh, the richness of detail and colors that result! Ink becomes nature's paints, as the artist watches the press put his original strokes onto the emerging lithograph.

Curry admits he was attracted to the process after being disappointed with his results using oil paints. His graphic arts training and fine printing skills made the "Mylar" film and Howson printing plates an easier fine art medium to explore. But he warns that it takes time to master.

"Even the original lithographers, who painstakingly engraved mirror images of their creations in stone, could stop for an occasional check on a work in progress," says Curry. "All they had to do was run a paper proof directly on the stone."

In a Curry wildlife study, by contrast, the colors must be carried in his head, untested until plates have been mounted and inks mix for the first time



Dennis Curry is one of six wildlife artists included in "The Artists' Africa Portfolio."

## OTHER DENNIS CURRY PRINTS:



"Night Watch"



"Cathedral of the Elephants"



"Companions of Ngorongoro"

on his press. The process differs from that of conventional lithographers, who see a color original, then filter it photographically into just four basic printing colors – magenta (red), cyan (blue), yellow and black. The printing that results (like that in this magazine) can be good, but it's not considered original art.

### **Hands-On, Original Prints**

"Make no mistake," says Christopher Law, publisher of Curry's work, "conventional prints can be high-quality pieces, turned out by real craftsmen. But it's still mass production. Curry's process – direct transfer of pencil strokes from the 'Mylar' onto the Howson plates, followed by hands-on ink mixing to create exact colors – means every lithograph is an original work of art."

Because the process avoids photographic filters and the limitations of conventional four-color printing, the resulting lithographs are richer in color saturation and better reflect the artist's original strokes.

"It's fine art in the truest sense," affirms Law. "An increasing number of wildlife artists are finding it to be the best medium for their work."

The Artists' Africa Portfolio contains six works – "Giraffes of Manyara" by Curry, "Cheetah Domain" by Agnew, "African Requiem" by Jarvi, "The Protector" by Kelley, "Serengeti Spring" by Moss, and "Cape Thunder" by Smith. Each artist used coated "Mylar" because of the film's strength, dimensional stability and receptivity to graphite.

"There's a variety of films available for lithography," Curry acknowledges, "but we need a drawing surface that will not shrink or grow in a hot or damp environment. When I overlay my drawings a week or month from now, there can't be any gaps or unwanted overlap. That's especially important when I'm ready to start exposing plates, which is why I rely on 'Mylar'."

Curry describes his art as "landscapes with wildlife." For a typical African scene such as "Giraffes of Manyara," he may use four or more sheets of "Mylar" for background trees and foliage and two or more for foreground turf and grasses. The remaining sheets get devoted to the giraffes – three for drawing basic coloration, plus additional sheets for drawing the colors that make up the facial details.

Like many other lithographers, Curry favors Howson "Super Amazon" fine-grained plates with an anodized aluminum substrate. The plates are exposed by ultraviolet light projected through the translucent "Mylar" film drawing. Where penciled graphite shields the plate from exposure, a subsequent aqueous developer bath leaves a smooth, hard coating – a mirror image of the artist's work. On-press, the image on the plate accepts ink and transfers it to a mat for imposition on paper.

"We actually designed 'Super Amazon' plates to offer crisp impressions in half-tone printing runs of 500,000 or more copies," notes Mike Jeff, DuPont Imaging technical manager. "The qualities that make the coating so tough and durable – resistance to solvent attack by ink, as well as to abrasion, chipping and flaking – are the very attributes lithographers need in order to produce high fidelity reproductions."

Completing a single print edition is a relatively slow process, according to Curry: "As much as two days to mount and print each of the plates involved; but that gives us more control. Modern four-color presses crank out hundreds of copies just while synchroniza-

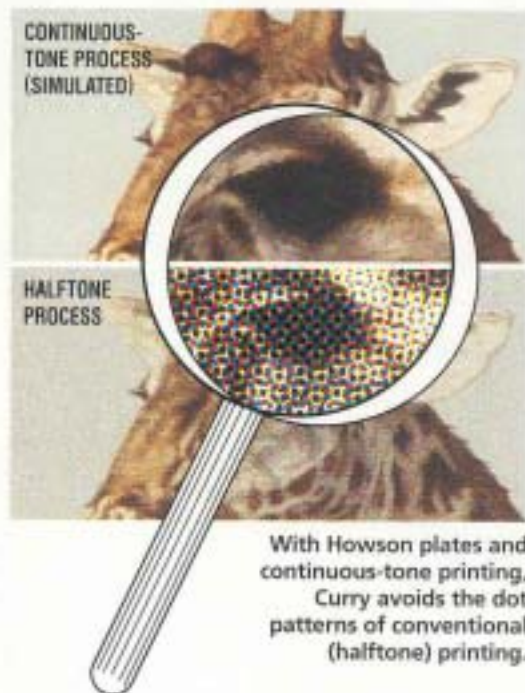


Collectors praise printmaker Dennis Curry's wildlife portraiture as "hands-on" art. To Curry, it's an expression of love for the animals and scenes he has experienced on safari.



CONTINUOUS-TONE PROCESS (SIMULATED)

HALFTONE PROCESS



With Howson plates and continuous-tone printing, Curry avoids the dot patterns of conventional (halftone) printing.

tion and ink-flow adjustments are being made. On my tiny press, I deal with only two or three proofs each time I heighten or lessen color to get an exact tone or shade. This is an important consideration when you're using such expensive, premium quality art paper.

"That's why Christopher Law calls this 'hands-on' art," Curry points out. "A true lithograph artist doesn't just sign each copy of his creation. He fusses over every detail and approves every print.

"And that," Curry concludes, "is why every one of my prints is truly an artist's original!"

Art collectors interested in "The Artisan's Africa Portfolio" can call The Foundation Fine Arts at 206-638-1240. For more information on "Mylar" film or Howson plates for fine printing, write: LITHOGRAPHY, *DuPont Magazine*, Wilmington, DE 19898. ■



Each color in a Curry wildlife starts in pencil — drawn in reverse — on coated "Mylar" film. He exposes Howson plates directly from the films, then mixes his inks for rich, detailed color printing.

#### FILM COATING IS IMPORTANT

To accept the ink, crayon or pencil graphite used in film lithography — or designing and drafting — "Mylar" polyester film must be coated. Two types of frosted or matte-finished "Mylar" film favored by artists are sold under the "Stabiltrace" trademark of Precision Coatings Inc., Walled Lake, Michigan, and the "Herculene" trademark of Azon Corporation, Johnson City, New York.

"Our coatings accept just about any impression, including 'fast' inks used on computerized designs," affirms Norman Sweet, Precision's director of research and new market development. "All of them combine dimensional stability with the translucency needed for sharp reproduction."

The added durability of the coating on "Stabiltrace" and "Herculene" films used for manual drawing permits an artist to erase and correct work in progress.

# There will not be a second chance. That's the concise but powerful motto of the Friends of Conservation, an international organization that has been working exceedingly hard over the past decade to put an end to the threats facing the wildlife and habitat of East Africa. The speed at which many of the flora and fauna in that part of the world are disappearing makes even a last chance seem unlikely. Structured to respond immediately so that the African wildlife experts receive assistance when they need it, the Friends of Conservation boasts no less a patron than HRH The Prince of Wales. Additionally—and impressively—the group puts 86 cents of every dollar it raises back into the environment. (The other 14 cents goes toward administration.) It's easy to understand why this environmentally aware organization was chosen to share the proceeds from a new series of limited-edition lithographs entitled *The Artists' Africa Portfolio*. The collection is the brain-child of two men who have an

# Painting, and Preserving, the Environment

kind is something else." Curry painted wildlife art for a number of years but eventually found he was growing tired of having to produce the same thing over and over. "The people who put up the money for projects will inevitably say, 'Hey, guy—do some more of those cats. The cats always sell!' But after awhile," Curry notes, "You just want to draw what you want to draw."

When Law first saw Curry's work in the early 70s, he was impressed enough to become the artist's manager. While Curry had already

proven himself a gifted and popular wildlife artist, it was after his first trip to Africa in 1982 that his career went into high gear. And that, notes Law, was what eventually led to *The Artists' Africa Portfolio*. "We had been doing the Collectors' Society Show in Minneapolis for four years and had already won two blue ribbons," Law recalls. "Other artists had begun hanging around our booth just to see what Dennis was doing and to talk about it with him." These artists also expressed dissatisfaction with, as Curry puts it, the humdrum side of the business, so Law thought of getting a group of artists together and taking them on an African safari and having them draw the animals they encountered.

"I went home one night," says Law, "sat down at my computer,



## To create *The Artists' Africa Portfolio*, a set of limited-edition original lithographs, six top wildlife artists set out on an African safari

by James van Maanen

abiding respect for both art and animals: Christopher Law, director of The Foundation Fine Arts, Ltd. in Hansville, Washington, and multi-award-winning wildlife artist Dennis Curry.

The relationship between Law and Curry goes back some 20 years. Curry, who was affiliated with the combat artist program during the Vietnam War, came out of that conflict with a deep-seated desire to protect, rather than destroy, the environment. Consequently, he chose wildlife as his subject. "A lion is always a lion," Curry says. "You know where you stand with him. Man-



The King of Beasts feasts on his prey in Brian Jarvi's "African Requiem." The image in Jarvi's duo-tone study, shown here in black and white, is almost identical to that in the finished lithograph, above. The six artists whose work appears in *The Artists' Africa Portfolio*—(top, left to right) Al Agnew, Brian Jarvi, Daniel Smith, Dennis Curry, Rick Kelley and Gary Moss—went on safari in East Africa last October.



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A cape buffalo from the Serengeti is featured in Daniel Smith's "Cape Thunder." All the final lithographs in the *Portfolio* are 18 by 24 inches.



Gary Moss' "Serengeti Spring," left, features zebra on the Serengeti plains. His duo-tone study, shown in the black-and-white photo, and those of the other artists, are only available in the Royal Edition of the Portfolio.

and spent ten-hour days, for almost three months, putting the thing together." When his prospectus finally appeared, it involved taking six award-winning wildlife artists to Africa and producing an original lithographic portfolio featuring a drawing from each artist. "Our prospectus came out during a particularly bad point in the recession," Law recalls, "but within 30 days we had raised the entire amount of money we needed." The Artists' Africa Portfolio's final roster, led by Dennis Curry, includes some of the finest wildlife artists in the world: Al Agnew, Brian Jarvi, Rick Kelley, Gary Moss and Daniel Smith, all of whom used the Mylar lithographic technique to make their prints.

What is the Mylar technique? As Law explains it, the artist draws his images, using pencil or ink, on frosted opaque sheets of Mylar, which offer a wonderful surface texture that holds the lines and gives extraordinarily delicate tones. "You begin with your key sheets—or plates, as we call them—which have most of the image you want. Your next sheets will have the different highlights. Once you lay each sheet atop the next, you see the entire drawing. And you can take one or more sheets away and re-work them individually."

What about color? "That doesn't happen until the point at which you print," Law explains. "Until that time, all the colors are just waiting around in the artist's head." When the Mylar sheets are complete, all are put together and



placed in a vacuum box against an aluminum plate that is treated with emulsion. Then ultraviolet light is passed through, transferring the drawn image onto the final plate. When it's time to add the color, the artist begins to literally paint with the press, mixing his inks as though they were on his palette. He inks and proofs his own color, then inks the press and watches it print. Then he waits until that color is dry—usually within one day—before beginning on the next color. Using Mylar lithography, the artist has a control over his color that's unheard of

in standard printing. "We've used up to 30 colors [in a Mylar lithograph]," says Law.

Not every artist can or wants to tackle the Mylar process; this was a major factor in determining which artists would participate in The Artists' Africa Portfolio. Al Agnew, for instance, enjoyed all the thought and experimentation that goes into working with Mylar. "I found that this process closely paralleled my own style of watercolor, so it didn't involve a major change in my approach to art," he explains. Daniel Smith, on the other hand, says he became a bit frustrated because it took him a long time to print his piece. "It's really a challenge to break the image down into individual plate colors when you're used to working with all the colors at one time. It'll be interesting to see how the pieces fit together."

Smith found dealing with the Friends of Conservation an important part of the project. "Working with this group really makes me more committed to global conservation. And it also makes a difference that 86 cents of every dollar donated goes directly into the field." Another artist who worked on the Portfolio, Rick Kelley, feels that while many groups and corporations look at



Al Agnew chose to draw a cheetah seen in Kenya for his piece, "Cheetah Domain." Notice the different impressions conveyed by the two works done of this subject: the study's closed-mouth cheetah, left, and the final print's cat, which has a more aggressive stance.



Shown above is an unfinished version of Rick Kelley's "The Protector," an elephant bull that charged the safari. Two to three more plates are yet to be printed. His study is seen above right. Christopher Law, director of The Foundation Fine Arts, Ltd. is shown below presenting the Friends of Conservation chairperson, Jorie Butler Kent, with a check for monies raised from the Portfolio. Dennis Curry looks on.



Mylar lithography was one of the finest experiences I've ever had as an artist."

"When you're over there [in Africa]," says Law, "everything you used to think was important just dissipates." Then he tells us of the Ngorongoro crater in northern Tanzania, which is often referred to as Africa's Garden of Eden. The crater is ten miles in diameter and 2,500 feet deep. "No one knows how it came into being, but it's now the permanent home of some 30,000 animals. Everything is here; there's a soda lake in the center with 5,000 flamingos, rhinos, lions, and for some reason, only male elephants. When you're there in the crater, it's amazing. Thoughts are coming at you, and both your motions and your emotions are full and strong. You're seeing like you've never seen before."

That, evidently, is how the artists felt, too. Their work, now collected in one spectacular portfolio, stands as permanent proof of this. Limited to 450 sets, The Artists' Africa Portfolios will be available this fall at \$6,000 each. Fifty Royal Editions, which include the added bonus of the artists' original studies, are also

Jarvi. The Artists' Africa Portfolio project was something very special: "This opportunity to go to Africa and try the new medium of

available. To purchase a Royal Edition, the collector must pledge \$3,000 to the Friends of Conservation. Law notes that, as of last June, 114 portfolios had already been sold, sight unseen, including four Royal Editions, which have already provided the Friends of Conservation with \$12,000. Another \$40,000-plus was raised for the organization this past June at a special auction held at Sotheby's, New York City.

"People occasionally ask me," notes Law, "how we can cut down trees to produce the paper for these editions and still help the environment? Well, we don't use

the dollar figure and then market ideas that primarily help themselves, Friends of Conservation is different. "They do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. I believe in this."

The artists involved in the Portfolio also believe in Africa—in saving it and experiencing it. Says Gary Moss, "I'd done a lot of reading about Africa, but what I experienced there was not what I expected. Usually, when I gather information on wildlife—say, a duck—I try to become part of the marsh to blend in. But I'd never been on a trip where you can't get out of your vehicle. I've always painted animals I can walk among, rather than the kind that can eat you!" For Brian



Dennis Curry, who with Christopher Law originated the Artists' Africa Portfolio, had not completed his "Giraffes of Manyara" at press time. His duo-tone of the giraffes seen in Tanzania is shown here.

trees. Our paper is made of 100-percent cotton fiber." If it sounds as though Law and his troop of artists have covered all the bases, perhaps they have. "From the very beginning," Law tells us, "everything about this project seems to have been blessed. And everything was so interrelated: the paper, the art, the animals, us." That's exactly as it should be, Law maintains. "I believe that if we don't weave a tapestry of balance between all the important things in the world, we simply won't survive."

For more information about The Artists' Africa Portfolio, contact The Foundation Fine Arts, Ltd., 39101 Hood Canal Dr. NE, Hansville, Washington 98340; (800) 545-2529. ■

