

Nature art on display at Carolina Brewery

By Deborah R. Meyer

Wouldn't it be funny if animals had happy hour? This postulation was the impetus for Forrest Greenslade to create a series of five paintings depicting animals — frogs, pigs, cows, penguins, and crows — delighting in their own version of happy hour.

Greenslade and his good friend, photographer Juan A. Pons, another nature lover, are exhibiting their work through the end of November at the Carolina Brewery, 120 Lowes Drive, at the intersection of Highways 15-501 and 64 north of Pittsboro. A reception is scheduled for Nov. 2, 4-6 p.m.

Greenslade is president and Pons is vice-president of the Chatham Artists Guild (www.chathamartistsguild.org)

"I think the coolest thing about the show is that Forrest has been creating an alternate reality for the animals. Mine are as close to reality as possible," Pons said.

Pons offers consultations to anyone wanting to learn about digital photography or enhance the skills they already have (www.wildnaturephoto.com) and is starting to offer photographic workshops out in Yellowstone Park. He explained to me how he got the shot of the Great Gray Owl that accompanies this article. Pons learned in February 2005 that a group of Great Gray Owls was in a remote area outside of Duluth, Minn. These owls are usually found in Canada's boreal forest or in the western mountains of the United States. But when the population of voles, their



"The Great Gray Owl" photo by Juan A. Pons

favorite foodstuff, greatly declines, the owls will migrate south. Thrilled to learn of such avian activity, Pons hopped a plane, rented a car and drove to the bog, which is one of Minnesota's premier birding spots. "I could not believe my eyes. I counted more than 1,000 owls," Pons said. These owls are 24-33 inches tall. One perched in a tree about 50 feet from Pons caught his eye. A few people walked up behind the somewhat still Pons. The owl looked in Pons' direction, flew over his head, went up about 50 feet off the ground and dove head first into the snow. "He had heard a mouse beneath the snow. He went down about two feet into the snow and pulled out the mouse," said Pons, who aimed his camera to capture the spectacle, but found his digital card was full.

"I booked to the car to get a new card and took photos of him just as he is done eating the mouse. He just looks relaxed as if he had a meal and is trying



"Happy Hour at the South Mash Shine Shack" painting by Forrest Greenslade

to figure out where he is going to get his next mouse." Now he will forever be seeking his next prey. The 20 by 30 inch framed photograph will be in the exhibit.

Three things that fascinate Greenslade really shape his work — motion, emotion and surface (www.forrestgreenslade.com). These traits are what he works to incorporate into his freestanding sculpture. However, art to be displayed at the Brewery needs to hang on the wall, so creating the work for this show has pushed Greenslade artistically. "While the works are still sculptural, you have to find a way to increase the dimension when pieces are going to be on the wall. You exaggerate things like a fish or a feather to make them have the feeling of being rounder. You want to trick the mind into thinking there is a backside to this," Greenslade said.

When he begins a sculpture or painting, he starts out with the general idea of the animal and then thinks of the motion or emotion he wants it to have. "I go to Google Image and if I am going to make an owl, I capture 15 images of owls and hang them in my studio. Then I am absorbed in the aura of owl," Greenslade said. Then he creates using rebar, hardware cloth, concrete, peat

moss, acrylic fortifier, copper and bronze pigment in acrylic material, RustOleum and colored stains. His Forrest Dwellers, as he calls them, reflect Greenslade's wacky, offbeat view of nature. Most of them have a theme from Egyptian or Greek mythology.

"My wife said, 'Boy, you wouldn't want to be in Forrest's head very long,'" Greenslade said.

Oh, but what a wonderful short trip it would be! For example, to create *Happy Hour at the Sour Mash Shine Shack*, Greenslade first sketched his vision of crows having happy hour on canvas and then built up the surfaces with a modeling paste, an acrylic based medium with crushed marble in it. The crows and the whiskey barrels do pop off the canvas. "Then I use Golden's Heavy Bodied Paint. It is thick and doesn't flow. You can almost actually sculpt with it. It adds shadows and highlights and intensifies the sense of surface," Greenslade said.

"I think the juxtaposition of Juan's work and mine will be fun for people to see," Greenslade said.

Truer words could not be said.

Deborah R. Meyer is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. She can be contacted at 942-3252.

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