

Arts and Ideas

The art of bird sculpting expresses love of nature

Joe Coutts was born in London, Ontario in 1948. He grew up in St. Catharines. In his teens he started to carve birds. His hands, and the tools that became the extensions of his hands, allowed him to express what he felt about nature. Art making became worship for him. To make a living, he worked on mechanical jobs, where the dexterity of his hands was a paramount requirement.

From 1975 to 1985 he lived in British Columbia, and there, where large birds in flight could be observed by him on an almost daily basis, he started to make his complicated bird sculptures that have become desired objects on the art market.

In 1985 he moved back to Ontario with his family, and had been living and working near Georgetown, in Cambridge. Since January, in Glen Williams.

I have admired his work for a long time. Last week I went to Glen Williams to visit him in his studio. I found him working on a huge sculpture commissioned by a Canadian collector:

"Two Bald Eagles, each with a wingspan of about two yards, cartwheel in the air, with their feet touching, a routine the great birds go through during their mating games."

Joe Coutts is not carving his artworks in the traditional way, out of one block of wood. He assembles them from countless individual pieces instead. This enables him to work in very big sizes and to attempt daring compositions that would be impossible to do in the traditional manner.

Most of his works are of birds in flight or birds in agitated postures, and every detail of these astonishing creations is shaped by aerodynamics. Different woods from all over the world, woods with wonderful names, suggest, but never imitate, the colors of the depicted bird or birds. The Bald Eagles, for instance, are fashioned from ziracote grown in Africa, pau farre grown in Brazil, amarella grown in Spain, and maple grown here in Canada.

Joe Coutts' animals are neither carved nor painted in imitation of nature. Each piece in the complicated puzzle is cut, whittled, steamed, and polished to express speed, function, purpose. His wings are symbols of power, comparable to the wings of the angels that fill the vaults of heaven in the glorious mediaeval altar carvings in the old churches of Europe.



Ideas and The Arts by John Sommer

I regret that these extraordinary and awesome creations, made by a master in our neighborhood, are hardly seen by anybody. Once they have entered the collections they are designed for, they will be shut away like treasures in a safe.

It would be a great and generous thing if somebody with money and vision would ask Joe Coutts to make a sculpture for one of our public spaces. Both, our Cultural Centre and our new Civic Centre, have ceilings high enough for a sculpture suspended in mid-air.

Right now a splendid exhibition of 75 watercolor paintings is on view at the John B. Aird Gallery at 900 Bay Street in Toronto.

Everybody who admires the art of painting in watercolors should not miss this show which will be at the John B. Aird Gallery (a government sponsored gallery housed in a government building) until May 31.

Three renowned watercolor societies, the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolor, the American Watercolor Society, and the Royal Watercolor Society (England), got together and selected 25 paintings each from their members. The exhibition will tour Canada, the United States, and Great Britain for the next two years.

The watercolor technique imposes a severe discipline on the painter.

It is one of the most difficult techniques to learn. Because of that the general decline of technical discipline in the visual arts of our time has affected the painters in watercolor very little, if at all. Therefore, the standard of this exhibition is very high, higher than anything I have seen lately.

The exhibition is a visual feast. A catalogue, with everyone of the art works reproduced in color, is available for the modest sum of \$12., if I remember right.



Swooping eagles

Glen Williams wood sculptor, John Coutts, holds up a miniature of the swooping eagles sculpture he's currently working on in his Glen Williams work shop. The magnificent piece was commissioned by a private art collector in Ontario and was started in January. Mr. Coutts designed and created the entire sculpture (seen here halfway through completion with only the frame and wing spans completed) which he hopes to finish by August. (Herald photo)

Milton Choristers to perform

Find it hard to name some Canadian folk songs? Then the Milton Choristers will present some of the country's finest music lore with songs that will remind you of Canada's great history and people. The Choristers will perform May 24 and 25, 8 p.m. at Bishop Reding Secondary School in Milton.

The 50-member community choir plans to take an imaginary journey with folk songs from coast to coast. "Fellar from Fortune" is guaranteed to immerse you in a Newfoundland outpost while "Song for the Mira" is a wistful ballad planting you on the Cape Breton trail. Move along the St. Lawrence River valley and you'll pick up the haunting tunes of French-Canadian songs - sung in French, of course. Then it's on to the west coast with "Mary, Come Home" which first appeared in verse in the Cariboo Sentinel in British Columbia in 1869.

One section of the program is devoted to a potpourri of solos,

Then it's on to the final set with a medley from the popular theatre production Les Miserables. Listen for your favorites, whether they be "I dreamed a dream" or "Master of

the house" or the rousing "Do you hear the people sing?" Dawn Brodie is concert accompanist and Dr. Patricia Phillips conducts the choir.

Father's Day crafts

Registration starts Friday, May 24, 1991 at both branches of the public library for a Father's Day Craft Session to be held at 2:00 p.m., Friday, June 7, 1991.

School-age children Sr. K and up are invited to join us for one hour of creative activity. We'll start off with making our own cards, then get out the paint and scissors and try our hand at some additional art projects that you can make for yourself or give to that special guy!

Group size is limited so please register early to avoid disappointment. For more information, please call 873-2681, Children's Services, Georgetown Branch or 853-0301, Acton Branch Library.

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