

HUNTER'S ★HORN



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THE
AFRICA
OF OUR *Hearts*

DAVID LANGMEAD'S PAINTINGS REMIND US WHAT
THE VALUE OF WILDNESS REALLY IS.

BY TODD WILKINSON



David Langmead's life has been lived almost entirely on a frontier that most 21st century Americans would find difficult to understand. In his case, the South African painter's terra firma is the frontier of constant change.

In assessing what that means, consider that the country where Langmead was born (Rhodesia) is not the same that replaced it (Zimbabwe). And the nation next door, where he eventually resettled to start a new life (South Africa) is also undergoing its own radical shifts.

Before Langmead's eyes, the nature preserves he knew as a boy and that were once considered models for wildlife conservation on the planet are being transformed. Imagine, for example, if outlaws were to suddenly start plundering game animals in Yellowstone, Yosemite and Denali.

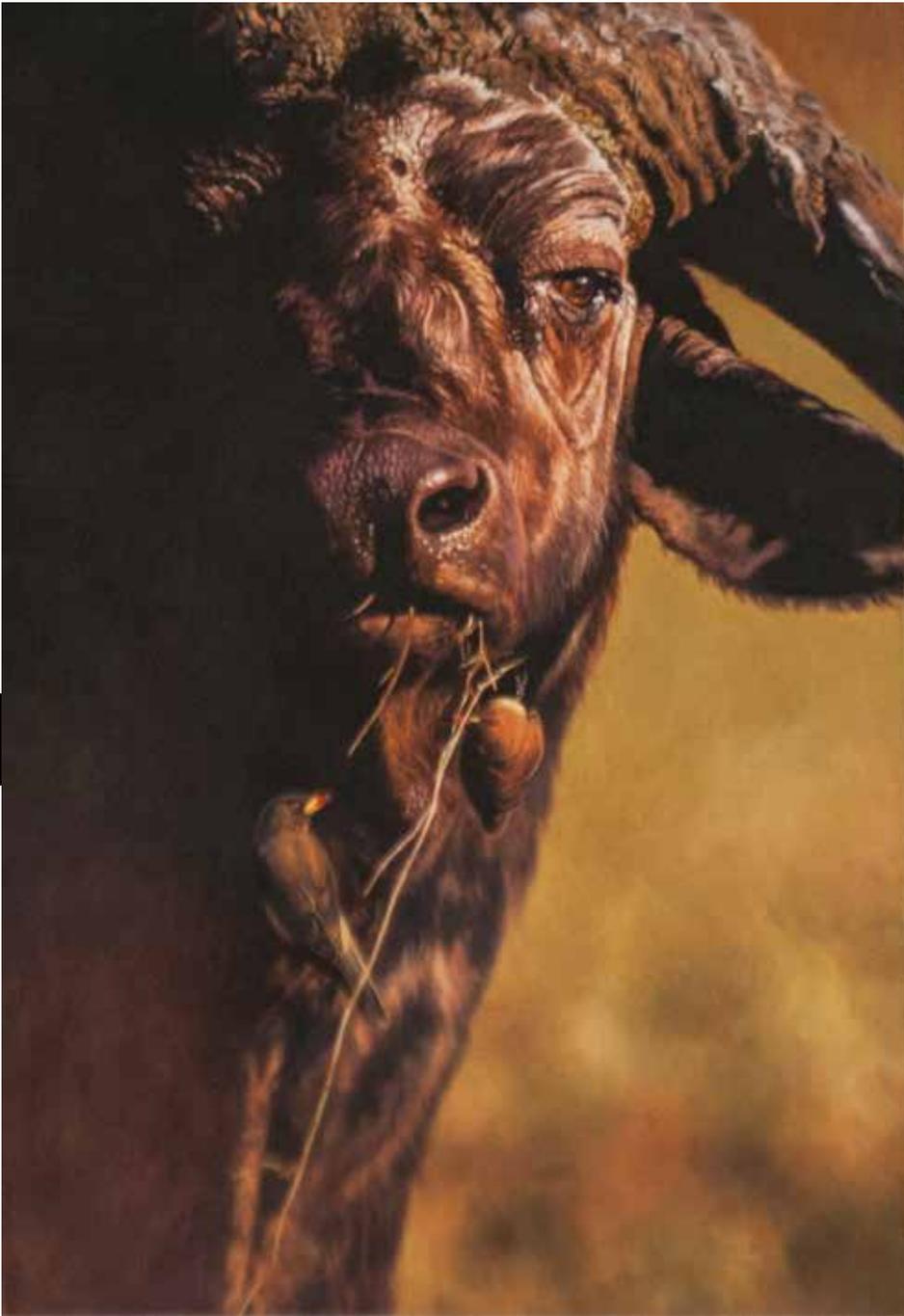
Lion populations in many corners of Africa in trouble, as are cheetah and leopard. A plague of poaching, stretching from Namibia to Kenya, is decimating elephants (for their ivory tusks), rhinoceros (for their horns) and other species steadily being erased by a growing human footprint of agriculture and industrial development.

But through it all, two things have anchored Langmead: his family and his maturing art that blends realism with impressionism. Painting, he says, is the form of expression that keeps him grounded in the things that matter. Langmead never abandoned Africa as so many of his compatriots did. And today, because he's stayed behind, he is considered one of the continent's gifted portrayers of wildlife and natural landscapes.

"I don't think anyone can refute that given two artists of equal talent, the artist that lives, breathes and experiences his natural environment every day will recreate it better, in paintings, than the one who doesn't. David Langmead is an artist who does just that," says Ross Parker, co-founder of Call of Africa's Native Visions Galleries in Naples and Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Call of Africa is Langmead's exclusive representative in the United States, and it debuts his new oils every year at Safari Club events. In fact, Call of Africa arranged for an original Langmead depiction of a Cape buffalo, titled "Embossed," to be made available as part of Houston Safari Club's fundraising auction at their 2015 Convention.



The Departure, oil on canvas, 25 x 18 inches



On Edge, oil on canvas, 27.5 x 19 inches

“I started collecting his work because authenticity pours out of it”

Based in the outpost of Nieu-Bethesda, famous for being a tiny artist enclave in the coastal hinterlands of South Africa called “the Great Karoo,” Langmead and his wife, Bronwen, savor the seclusion. The community lies at the foot of the Sneeuberge, mountains that remind one of the Rockies or the Andes in Patagonia.

A former farm boy who became an avid skydiver and hang glider, he loves to soar. When his feet are earthbound, however, Langmead is constantly seeking out the last of sub-equatorial Africa’s still-wild places. They serve as inspiration for a body of art that has been a favorite among collectors who travel on hunts and photo nature safaris.

I have been to Langmead’s studio, which inhabits a tiny room that itself is nested within a quaint, clean and welcoming home that is actually a converted livestock barn. During my visit, rising from Langmead’s easels, were dramatic portrayals of elephants, Cape buffalo, leopards and kudu.

“I started collecting his work because authenticity pours out of it,” says Shawn DeRosa, a medical instruments entrepreneur from Florida, who owns two dozen Langmeads.

“The first ones I purchased were little 10”x10” studies but size didn’t matter because they were very striking. David’s work has a way of getting inside you and becoming the kinds of scenes you want to view every day in your home,” DeRosa says. “Eventually, I purchased larger works and their presence can fill up a room in the best possible of ways.”

Langmead speaks of mystical encounters that he’s had in the bush, the kind always balanced on edge between sublime peace and peril. It’s what collectors find exciting and his works are as beloved by women as by men. Langmead shares a recent anecdote: “We had a bizarre experience one morning while we were out observing megafauna in Zimbabwe. We had just spent a couple of hours watching some lions feasting on an



The Far Pavilion, oil on canvas, 35 x 47 inches

elephant they had killed the previous night. We finally drove off, all of us enervated by the experience,” he explains.

Later, a dozen miles down a dirt road, they were passing through thick mopane veld and were wooed by a pink tree Langmead spied off in the distance. It appeared to glow, all by itself, in the riverine forest beside them. They stopped the vehicle and decided to set out for it on foot. There was no hunting guide to protect them.

“The tree became more impressive the nearer we approached,” Langmead notes. “Finally, as we rounded the last stand of dense thicket to arrive at the base of the tree we came face-to-face with three lone buffalo bulls that had been out of sight.”

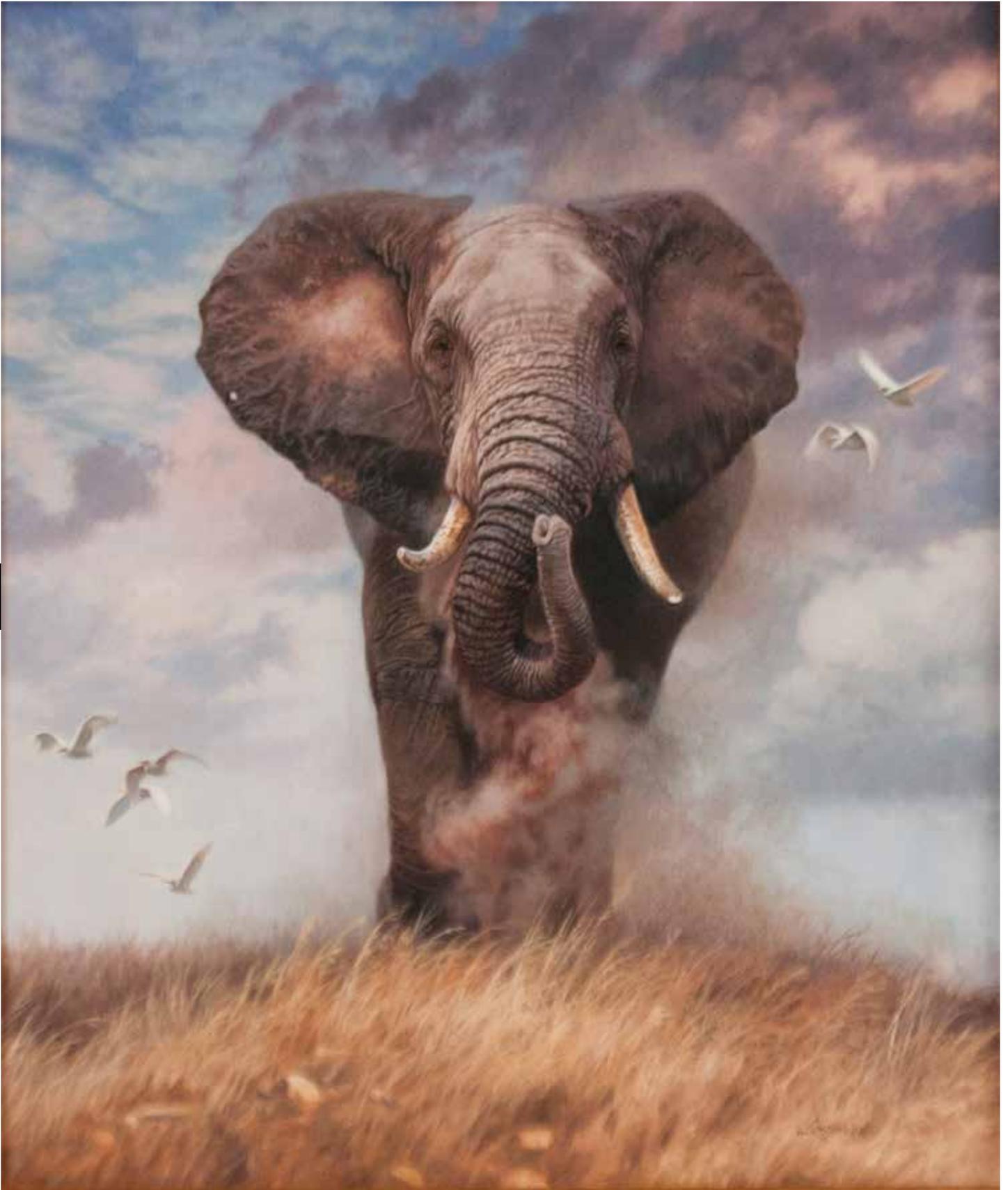
There was only a split second of recognition and panic, he says, noting that the startled bulls were not amused by the intruders. “We screeched out of there like Olympic sprinters,” Langmead says. “Fortunately, the buffalo did not catch us, but needless to say not a single photo was taken of that mesmerizing tree.”

Langmead has commemorated those kinds of trees, that cause viewers to stop and wonder before them, in many paintings. Long ago, Langmead started as a pure landscape painter and moved to include wildlife in his scenes. “Nothing shows better the transformation from a premier South African landscape painter to a wildlife artist than the work of David Langmead,” Call of Africa’s Parker adds. “David’s careful

design, accompanied by authentic colors and nuances, makes him one of the best in his generation.”

Langmead, as a Baby Boomer in his 50s with grown children, is deeply troubled by the ravages of black market poachers that have descended upon the region. Yet he’s pleased to know that a percentage of money earned from his artwork is funneled back by artist representative Parker (also a Zimbabwean by birth) directly to wildlife conservation causes.

“We are now losing 1,000 rhino a year to poaching,” he says. “The populations are soon going to be unviable and extinction will be inevitable. Americans need to use whatever influence they have. We cannot



Ivory Tower, oil on canvas, 27.5 x 23 inches



Homeward Bound, oil on canvas, 19.5 x 35.5 inches

exploit our planet, as we are doing, at the cost of our children's future."

Today, Langmead is immersed in a new series of African landscapes that do not depict wildlife yet emanate the powerful allure of the bushveld, the temperate forest and high savanna. "On many a safari it is actually the settings that you most remember," Langmead says. "The dusty jeep tracks, the flowering acacia, the sundrenched camelthorn trees, and the dramatic descent of the evening sun."

During a recent trip to Mana Pools National Park that flanks the Zambezi River in northern Zimbabwe, Langmead, Parker and friends did several long distance walks, having close encounters with lions, elephants, Cape buffalo, crocodile and hippo. Mana Pools is not only one of the wildest preserves in southern Africa but it is among the most dangerous and rewarding for an artist who dares leave the safe confines of a vehicle.

Langmead emailed Parker the following

note once they returned home: "I am back in the studio feeling really inspired after one of the best weeks I can remember," he said. "The bush was an absolute balm for the soul and I could just keep walking and never stop. As a lifestyle profession, this is like no other. It can be magical. I am truly blessed to have your friendship. Good mates are rare."

Bronwen Langmead, the painter's wife and co-navigator on several expeditions they've taken into Botswana's Kalahari Desert, is credited with pushing him to reach loftier heights with his art. "When David first started painting full-time many years ago his inspiration came from the resplendent beauty and light that oozed from the Karoo landscape literally on our doorstep," she says. "Those paintings were incredibly popular with the South Africa market as they captured moments in time even more than simply a magnificent panorama."

As Langmead's reputation expanded in North America, thanks to the exposure delivered by Parker, it also led to an

expansion of his own vision. "There was a sense of 'fleetingness' and a special feeling of impermanence that remained evident in his work," Bronwen suggests. Her husband also spoke to the longing all viewers possess for the primordial and untamed aspects of wildness automatically associated with the continent. Langmead's depictions of birds, bathed in evanescent light, have been judged into the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum's prestigious Birds in Art Show and some of those works have gone on a national museum tour. Meanwhile, his celebrations of the "Big Five" are coveted by collectors of sporting art.

"We admire his artwork. It has a wonderful painterly quality and his ability to capture water reflections of birds and animals in wetland settings is tremendous," says Kathy Foley, director of the Woodson Art Museum in Wausau, Wisconsin.

All one needs to do is peruse the list of available artwork at Call of Africa's Gallery webpage (www.nativevisions.com) to

understand that new arriving works are often purchased fast.

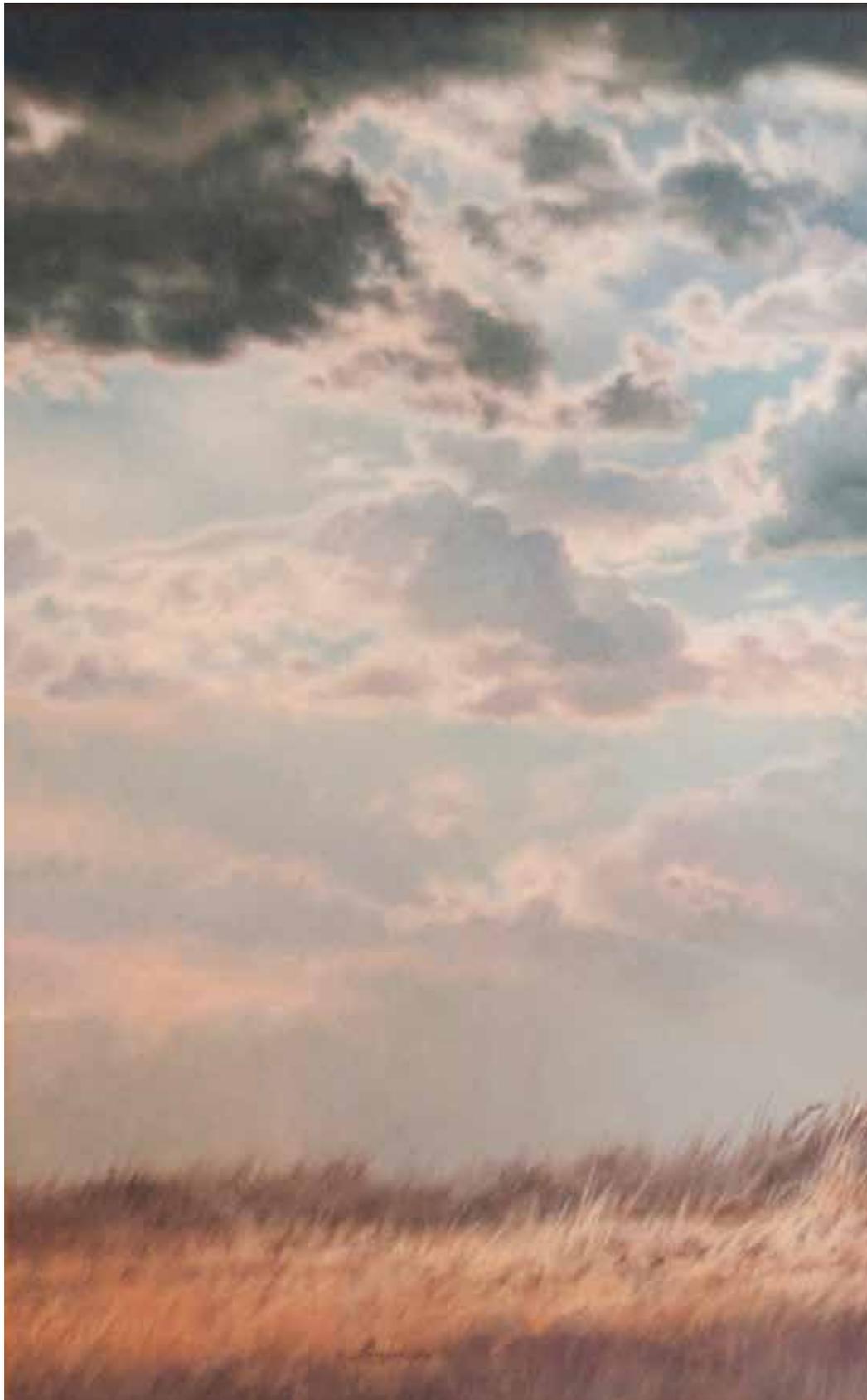
“Even in my twenties, I knew I needed to find places where I could get out of the rat race, if not to the wilderness then at least into landscapes that are very pastoral,” Langmead says. “Once you become hooked on the visual narcotic that is Africa, you spend the rest of your life pursuing it.”

In 2015, Langmead will be unveiling an ambitious selection of large and small works in the US as part of a traveling art exhibition Parker is organizing called “The Great Zambezi.” The works, displayed with pieces by John Seerey-Lester, Jaco Van Schalkwyk, and leadwood carver Mopho Gonde will be available for viewing and purchase at Parker’s galleries in Florida and at Safari Club shows in Texas and Las Vegas.

Some art historians say that Langmead is, in a way, like the great romantic painters of the American 19th century who captured the last gasp of the western frontier. He isn’t aiming for fame but the paradox is that’s exactly what is finding him.

“David’s latest pieces have an honesty and simplicity to them. To me, this is where David’s genius lies,” Bronwen says. “Often, just as one only spots a kudu briefly against a backlit bush, this is what he captures in paint. When out on the veld, it is unlikely that one will come across a charging lion. Yet it is highly likely that one will see an exquisite grass scape – one that stands alone as a place you would love immortalized in paint forever. This is what David now captures. And sometimes, if you look carefully, a lioness may be lounging and hidden within.” ★

[Todd Wilkinson has been writing about the outdoors and art for nearly 30 years. He is founder of the online art magazine Wildlife Art Journal and author of the recent critically-acclaimed book, Last Stand: Ted Turner’s Quest to Save a Troubled Planet. Todd lives in Bozeman, Montana.]



Banner Of Heaven, oil on canvas, 24 x 36 inches

