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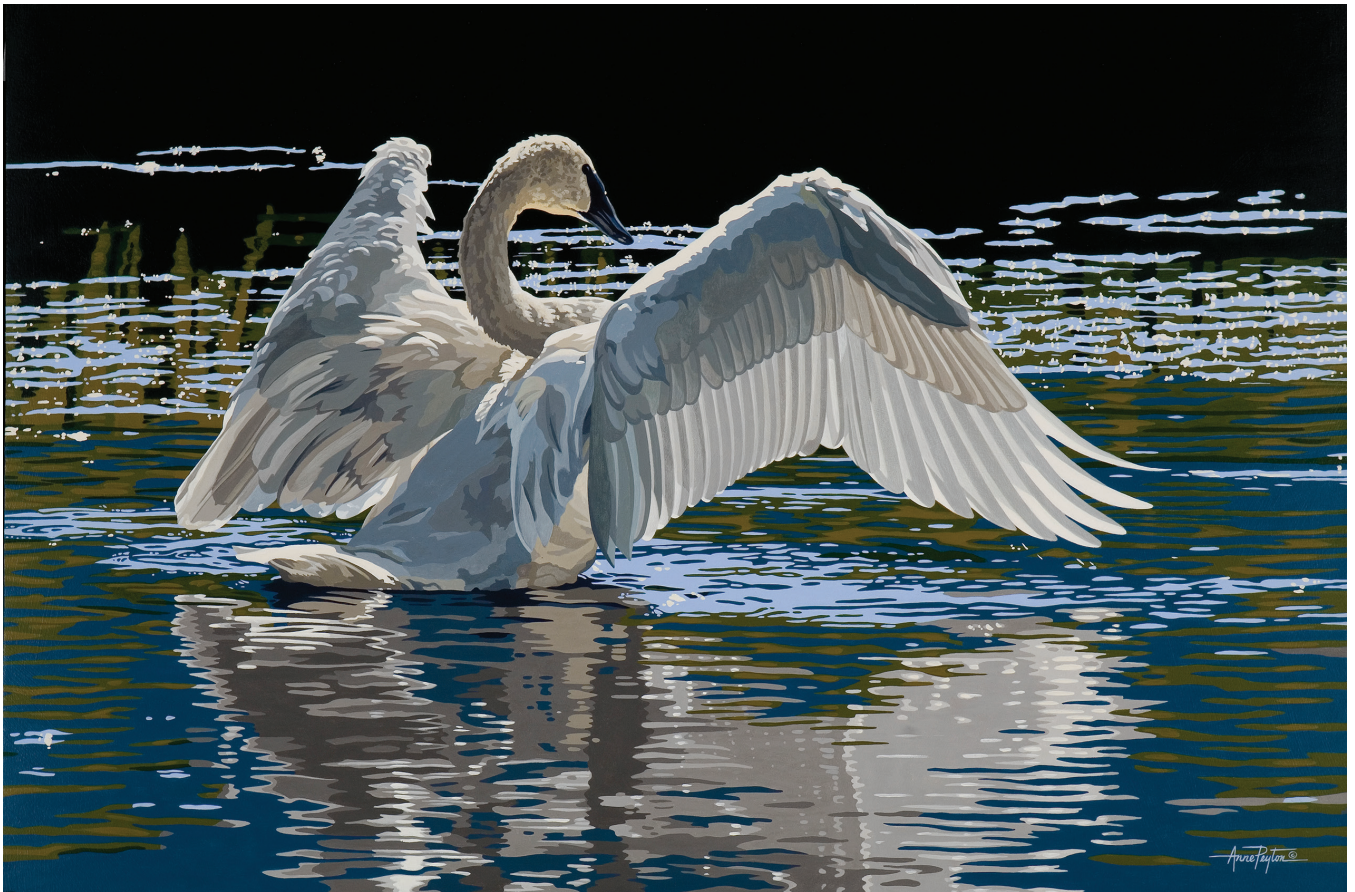
ANNE PEYTON

Art and Conservation

By Joe Tougas



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Morning Glory—Trumpeter Swan, acrylic, 20" by 30"

"Swans are magical. They are grace. Every move is like a dance—a slow ballet, a waltz, or an up-tempo modern form. And, when they splash, the light and the water become an integral part of nature's music."

For 20 years, Anne Peyton was immersed in professional car racing. She had a fast and furious career shooting photos and painting race cars for several automotive magazines, ultimately working for several hot rod publications

as photographer, painter, and art director while living in California.

Working for publications that included *Motor Trend* and *Road & Track*, Peyton's artwork was considered top-tier in the racing industry, praised by the likes of *Automobile* magazine as one of the best racing painters in the nation. That was all before the year 2000, which is when her art changed—drastically.

"In the middle of 1999, I called all of my art clients [for whom] I'd done auto racing stuff and told them that, when the clock ticked over to 2000, I was never going to do a car painting ever again so, 'If you want something, get it now,'" she says.

Peyton was getting tired of rac-

ing in general and didn't want to carry 40 pounds of camera gear around anymore. She wanted quieter work, and she stuck to her statement about the changeover. "On 2000, the minute it ticked over, I walked away from it and started [painting] birds," she says.

Peyton, who lives in Phoenix, Arizona, is now 25 years into life as a successful fine artist. Her work in acrylics is informed by a lifetime of observing birds—from the city park in Greeley, Colorado, as an enamored 3-year-old, to her work today, as she volunteers at a rescue and rehabilitation center for wild birds of prey.

Peyton is drawn to birds largely as a mission, one that offers new in-

(Left) *Antelope Island Beauty—American Avocet, acrylic, 20" by 15"*

"Antelope Island near Salt Lake City, Utah, is a great place to see a diverse number of waterbird species. Among the most beautiful are the American Avocet. The marshes offer a productive environment where these birds can successfully raise a family in relative safety."

"Why not birds?"



Not Quite Ripe—White-winged Dove, acrylic, 18" by 18"

"In the Sonoran Desert, saguaro are a combination condo and grocery store. Woodpecker holes become a residence for several bird species. The large and beautiful flowers attract all sorts of pollinators from bees to bats. When the fruit ripens, the saguaro become a smorgasbord for the fruit and seed eaters, while others pick at the scraps that fall to the ground. This painting depicts a White-winged Dove that can't wait for the proper time. The flower stalks have closed, and the fruit is still forming, but it will be a few more days before the diner opens."



Summer Sentinel - Gambel's Quail, acrylic, 12" by 14"

"During breeding season, male Gambel's Quail are in charge of family safety. The females and chicks stay on the ground, foraging for food. The male will find a nearby elevated perch where he will stand guard while his family eats or moves from one place to another. This allows him to warn the family in case of nearby predator danger."

formation about the animals, information that includes behaviors and even personalities that she gets to observe while taking care of owls and the like at Liberty Wildlife, a center in Phoenix devoted to caring for injured birds. "They're animals that come into our wildlife hospital and that have injuries that will keep them from surviving on their own," she says from her small studio in the home where she has lived and worked with her husband Craig for more than 30 years. "It's awareness about the animals around us that we never see."

Peyton's acrylic paintings of birds are another opportunity to show people the amazing beauty of creatures that share the earth with them. "My message is, in the end, conservation," she says. "That's who I am and what I do. I'd like for people to care about birds as much as I care about them, but they're not ever going to do that if they never actually see them."

"When they see them at a store parking lot, or they see them at their bird feeder, or when they're eating lunch and a sparrow wants to take the crumbs from their French fries or something, they're getting superficial looks at things. But having a painting in front of you allows you to see all the cool little things that are impossible to see when the birds are trying to move away from you. This brings them close to people; that's what I'm trying to do."

The birds that Peyton helps care for at Liberty Wildlife are not the subjects of her paintings, but the work has given her insight into how some birds behave, which is far more individual and interesting than she ever expected. "On Mondays, I take care of our eagles; there are 12 of them," she says. "There are eight bald eagles and four golden eagles, and every one of them is as different as 12 kids. It's really interesting."

Peyton also finds quirks in the wild. "Sometimes birds walk instead of flying all over the place," she says. "There's no reason to get up and fly and use all that energy when you could just walk. And a golden eagle will just walk. All these things I nev-



er thought about, I started noticing when I was working with birds.”

The actual subjects in Peyton’s paintings are those that she and Craig spot in the wild. “Arizona’s got great birding,” she says. “We’ve lived here just over 30 years so we know where a lot of great spots are. If I want to get some pictures of some neat little songbirds in southern Arizona, we have a whole bunch of places where we can go and just set up a couple of chairs for the afternoon, get the camera out, and shoot away.”

Peyton has been fascinated by birds since she was a young girl. In fact, when she was 3 years old, she was drawing birds she saw at a park in Greeley, Colorado. “My mom was an artist, so we’d got to the park, and she’d give me something to draw with,” she says. “The first things I remember was drawing ducks at the park. My grandfather had bird feeders in his back yard in Colorado. He constantly had bluejays and cardinals and all these really pretty things in his backyard; his whole back yard was designed for ‘his birds,’ as he called them. We all knew the yard wasn’t for us, it was for his birds.”

When her grandfather moved further out into the country, Peyton’s opportunities to see birds increased. “I saw magpies and bigger things, because it was out in the countryside, so I got to see bigger birds out there,” she says. “I remember doing drawings of birds and giving them to his neighbors, who put them on their fridges like I was their granddaughter.”

Peyton’s fascination with birds continued, even during her long foray into the racing world. During that time, she and Craig took a road trip and attended a showing of works by Canadian wildlife painter Robert



Larger Than Life —Great-horned Owl, acrylic, 20" by 10 1/2"

"Great-horned owls do not have many natural predators. However, human beings often pose the most dangerous threat to them and to other large predatory birds. It's one reason I use my art and volunteerism to talk to people about raptors."



On His Territory—Red-winged Blackbird, acrylic, 18" by 13"

"Every morning, the marshes along the Salt and Gila rivers are alive with the songs of blackbirds, and it can be so noisy that you cannot talk with others by your side. The males are such show-offs, climbing to the top of a cattail or tree branch and belting their songs while flaring their red-and-yellow epaulets."

Bateman at the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History. Peyton was so moved by his work that she decided that, when she left the racing world behind, she would become a painter. "When I was thinking in the middle of 1999 about what I wanted to do next," she says, "it just popped into my head: Why not birds?"

During her first year of painting,


Peyton submitted some of her works to the annual Birds in Art competition at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wausau, Wisconsin, and was accepted. She mistakenly thought that getting accepted into Birds in Art exhibitions was easy; she was wrong. "It took me 10 years to get in the second time," she says with a laugh.

(Right) Daytime Hideaway—Black-crowned Night-Heron, acrylic, 20" by 16"

"Black-crowned Night-Herons hunt from dusk to dawn. They roost during the day, but it often takes patience to discover their hiding places."

Over the years, Peyton has become a member of several art associations. She's a master member of Women Artists of the West and a signature member of the Society of Animal Artists, Artists for Conservation, the American Plains Artists, and the American Women Artists. She is also an associate member of the National Society of Painters in Casein, a signature artist's guild member of the National Oil and Acrylic Painters Society, and a professional member of the International Guild of Realism.

Her paintings are featured in several permanent collections throughout the country, including the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum; the Driftless Glen Distillery in Baraboo, Wisconsin; the Bennington Center for the Natural and Cultural Arts in Bennington, Vermont; the Arizona Sonoran Desert Museum in Tucson; and the Great Plains Art Museum in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Peyton has spent her entire life in the West—in Colorado, California, Utah, Nevada, and Arizona. It's a region of the world that suits her goals as both an artist and a conservationist. "The West is really important, and conserving the land out here is important," she says. "Western people really care about the outdoors and preserving the outdoors. One way to do that is to get people to care about the animals that live in those spaces because, if you can touch somebody on an emotional level, they'll care about things more." 

Joe Tougas lives in North Mankato, Minnesota.



Anne Peyton ©