

# THE SPORTING LIFE

*The Art of Joseph H. Sulkowski*







# THE SPORTING LIFE

*The Art of Joseph H. Sulkowski*



TEXT BY BROOKE CHILVERS





*This book is dedicated  
to my family, friends, and other  
art enthusiasts who share my passion  
for the sporting life.*





# THE SPORTING LIFE

## *The Art of Joseph H. Sulkowski*

Published by Sporting Classics  
117 Alpine Circle  
Columbia SC 29223  
[www.SportingClassics.com](http://www.SportingClassics.com)

Copyright © 2017 Sporting Classics

The works of Joseph Sulkowski are copyright  
© Joseph Sulkowski

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

Printed in Canada  
Library of Congress Control Number: 2017941702  
ISBN: 978-1-935342-18-2

Portrait Photography by Anthony Scarlatti

Edited by Chuck Wechsler and Taylor J. Pardue  
Designed by Ryan Coleman and Kay Jackson

MOUNTAIN GOAT





# THE SPORTING LIFE

*The natural world is a reflection of our own inner beauty.*

*Engaging in the sporting life brings us  
into intimate contact with this realization.*

*Here, we may step away from the  
day-to-day routine of linear time and commune  
with the timeless wonders of nature.*

*In consciously pulling a vintage lure from the tackle box  
and trolling the cool, clear waters of the Georgian Bay,  
we may experience a simple, yet profound peace.*

*Our days in the wild, whether on horseback, in the quail fields,  
cypress swamps, or any place where birds, fish,  
and other forms of wildlife flourish, are cherished paths  
of discovery into the Self.*

- Joseph Sulkowski

BLUE SPRINGS PLANTATION  
ALBANY, GEORGIA







# CONTENTS

THE SPORTING LIFE. 8

EXALT THE LIGHT – THE NEW “OLD MASTER.” 11

SPORTING ART’S MASTER OF POETIC REALISM. 14

JOSEPH SULKOWSKI AND THE OLD MASTER TRADITION. 18

A LIVING MENTOR AND HIS LONG-LOST TECHNIQUES. 24

IN THE STUDIO – CONVEYING LIGHT & COLOR. 27

HORSES AND DOGS – UNDERSTANDING ANATOMY & CHARACTER. 32

HUNTING AND FISHING – RELIVING THE SPORTING TRADITION. 44

- *A River Runs Through Him.* 46

- *A Still Life Tells A Good Story.* 48

- *Falconry: The Ancient Sport of Kings.* 53

WILDLIFE – CAPTURING THE ESSENCE OF THE NATURAL WORLD. 55

## THE COLOR PLATES

HORSES	56	WILDLIFE	222
GUNDOGS	90	GALLERIES & EXHIBITIONS	240
HUNTING & FISHING	182	AWARDS & MEMBERSHIPS	240

A SALUTE TO  
SPORTING CLASSICS



*“Some of the fishing tackle  
and lures I use in my paintings  
are objects I’ve lived with  
for a long time.”*

avid fly and game fishermen who traveled to Canada for northern pike, muskies, and smallmouth bass.

“Some of the fishing tackles and lures I use in my paintings are objects I’ve lived with for a long, long time. There are a lot of memories associated with them,” says Joseph.

Already among the best artists in their schoolrooms growing up, Joseph and his brother began exhibiting their portraits, landscapes, and still lifes as sophomores in high school art shows.

In 1969 Joseph began formal studies at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, America’s oldest art institute. But there he found no mentors for his natural bent toward Realism during an era when his contemporaries were more likely to be the artistic offspring of Jackson Pollock, Georgia O’Keefe, or Pittsburgh’s own Andy Warhol.

While the matte surfaces and primary colors of Mondrian’s geometrical abstracts and Roy Lichtenstein’s pop art failed to resonate within him, the magic of Rembrandt’s brushstrokes and virtuoso etchings became his model.

“I have always been drawn to art that has essence, integrity of concept, and is masterful in its execution,” Joseph says.

“I am not exaggerating when I say that my earliest mentors in terms of style and technique

were Caravaggio, Michelangelo, Titian, and Velázquez, as well as 19th century artists such as Whistler and Rosa Bonheur.”

“I keenly studied the figurative works of Michelangelo, Ruben’s techniques with oil, using lead white underpainting and glazes on top, the luminosity of Rembrandt, and the almost magical, expressive abilities of Diego Velasquez. I looked to them and other amazing artists of those periods for answers to my questions about creating similar effects of light, space, and atmosphere derived from their impeccable draftsmanship.”

Early on, for his paintings of hunting and sport, Joseph studied Rubens’ monumental, brilliantly composed and executed hunting scenes, such as *Wolf and Fox Hunt* on display at

#### VINTAGE PLUGS

*Well-worn objects that have acquired a vintage feel have character and an inherent emotional context about them. Their simple shapes, crafted for efficiency, have their own unique beauty in form and texture. Carefully arranged, they tell a revealing story of timeless adventure.*







ATTRIBUTES OF  
THE EQUINE ARTIST



THE  
DOORKEEPER

*My son's old hound, Anne, was the model and inspiration for this painting. I saw her as the mythic crone who acts as doorkeeper to consciousness guarding the threshold to transcendence. Each of us has an opportunity to shed the binding, self-imposed chains of existence and stand before the door to eternity and freedom of the spirit. Sphinx-like, she alone knows who is ready to pass.*

New York City's MET museum, and animal painter Bonheur's giant masterpiece, *The Horse Fair*.

"Velázquez provided the ultimate expressive model of his kings and noblemen on horseback, and Titian painted definitive mythological scenes with animals and the goddess of hunting, such as Diana with Actaeon and Diana with Callisto," he explains.

Joseph also looked to works from the foremost Flemish animal painter, Paulus Potter (1625–1654), to Queen Victoria's own favorite dog painter, Sir Edwin Landseer (1802–1873), who is still his personal favorite among the non-living dog artists.

"What I also discovered in these works was that the absolutely most crucial part of a technically and emotionally successful painting is the lighting," Joseph says. "Light is a non-linear phenomenon, the revealer of form, and

therefore the most important tool for the artist. This goes to the very heart of my work, and explains my fascination with the Old Masters."

Today, Joseph uses the visual tension between dark and light areas, called *chiaroscuro*, as inspiration in composing a work before he even puts brush to canvas.

Joseph's subtle dance on canvas of contrasting light and shadow pulls viewers into the painting, inviting them to explore the myriad colors and the evocative, mysterious places that the photorealist would define with obsessive detail. Instead, he looks to the Old Masters, whose "transparent shadows are multi-dimensional, intricate, and full of depth, yet transparent, expressing the inherent luminosity of their specially mixed paints," says Joseph. "They created visual effects using darkness against heavy, light-filled impastos that are difficult to equal."



# A LIVING MENTOR and His Long-Lost Techniques.

**I**N 1974 SULKOWSKI LEFT HIS HOME state for what would become five years at New York's Art Students League, where he found a living mentor in Frank Mason—then the foremost authority in America on the classical principles of drawing, human anatomy, and figure painting. Equally important, Mason had devoted his career to dissecting, mastering, and transmitting to his students the actual, long-lost paint formulas and techniques developed and used by Rembrandt, van Dyck, and especially Rubens.

From Mason, Joseph learned how to work his materials from scratch, how to grind his

own pigments from powdered plants and minerals, and mix them following archaic recipes. He now employs the finest, hand-prepared linseed oils, amber varnishes, or Venice or larch turpentine. As an example, he uses a marble muller to mix nearly colorless extracted walnut oil with freshly ground white paint. The result is the rich texture and buttery shine we recognize in the Old Masters that is mostly absent in modern acrylics.

“As has been said, you begin with drawing,” wrote Cennino Cennini, a 15th century Gothic Tuscan artist, in his instructional book, *Libro dell'Arte*. And Joseph is a superb draftsman.

What, in essence, is draftsmanship? It is the bringing together of all the physical acts of art to put down a line, whether on sketching paper or on the lead-primed Belgian linen canvas that Joseph preps himself. Each brutally critical stroke of the pencil, brush, or etching needle counts in the creation of shape, perspective, depth of perception, and especially in the depiction of a part of human or animal anatomy in motion. Where and how the artist places that line determine form, color, and texture; it communicates to the viewer whether the wind is whispering through the trees or is siesta still.



EQUINE ANATOMY STUDY



HORSE SKULL



STUDIO SKETCH

“Brushwork is also very important,” Joseph notes. “With any number of the different strokes available to the artist, whether dragging or stabbing with a loaded brush or pulling and releasing a stroke across the warp and weave, I strive to create contrast in the surface quality of the painting.”

In addition to color, each stroke imparts substance, and even a third dimension to the canvas, if that's the effect the artist is seeking. His application of multiple layers of the thinnest glazes also creates different surface textures, which capture or reflect light.

Joseph's preferred medium remains oil on canvas or prepared panel—the traditional supports of the Old Masters who, he emphasizes, were also exceptional craftsmen.

“I regard the craft of painting as much an art as the art of painting itself,” he says. “Their works on canvas and board that have come down to us undamaged have remained fresh and retained their longevity due to their careful and masterful preparation of all their materials. Leonardo, Rembrandt, and Velasquez have all proven that well-crafted supports, paints, oils, and varnishes also contributed to their expressive intentions when combined with their brilliant techniques.”

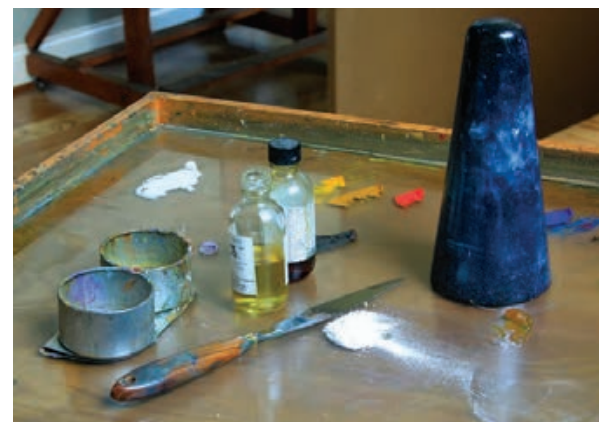
*For the painter in the classical tradition, art and science are twin sisters. The study of human anatomy and then comparative anatomy reveals nature's complex structures. This knowledge enables the artist to convincingly express his creative intentions.*



DETAILS OF  
LEADERS OF THE PACK  
*These closeups show the quality of my technique as an artist in the Old Master tradition. Textures are built up with heavy impastos of stiffly ground paint against watercolor—like transparencies of shadow and atmospheric halftones.*







LABRADOR  
RETRIEVERS

“Attempting to capture the source of the light within the painting itself makes each moment before the easel an exciting challenge,” he says.

Varnishes are also poured out of their original bottles into a neatly ordered row of different palette cups. Various containers hold a variety of sizes and shapes of traditional, hog-hair bristle brushes for painting, and sable and badger-hair brushes reserved specifically for layering color glazes.

Different subjects call for the emphasis of different colors. “With that in mind, I pull out the lower registers—the bass notes, if you will,” he says. “For example, when a black Labrador is my subject, I mix a wide range of color values from the lower scale of my palette to accommodate the effects of rich and luminous blacks, cobalts, silvers, and rich reflected light.”

His golden retrievers call more for the middle colors and values of his palette, where the golds, ambers, and Naples yellow reside.



GOLDEN LIGHT

*The golden retriever is beloved as a family pet, and his athleticism and intelligence make him a highly capable working dog.*



## A RIVER RUNS THROUGH HIM.

**F**OR JOSEPH, ONE OF THE BEST EXCUSES to soak in pristine places is fishing, whether from the lush banks of Tennessee's mountain streams or framed by the soaring, light-soaked cliffs that rise above north-central Colorado's Fryingpan River. He moves easily from fishing scenes that celebrate stimulating action in wild places, such as *A Prized Catch* (page 213), to the peaceful fly fisherman working a secluded trout pool.

In *Fishing the Fryingpan*, Joseph captures the

timeless tranquility of the angler and his dog. He describes the moment that "a threshold has been crossed, where the outside world has been left behind, and the fisherman has entered that place of stillness that allows him to connect with the stillness within himself."

He also paints in the Caribbean, where the single white gaff-rigged sails of Caymanian catboats cut across pastel-colored waters and cruise under infinite blue skies.

### FISHING THE FRYINGPAN

*The Fryingpan River, is known for its gold medal trout waters. Anglers flock here to fly fish for trophy rainbows, brook and brown trout. This scene was painted in the summer, when swarms of green drake mayflies are hatching. Here, in the majesty of the great red rock of Colorado where the river carves its way through the mountains, I'm reminded of writer Norman Mclean's words, "Poets talk about 'spots of time', but it is really the fishermen who experience eternity compressed into a moment."*



FISHING IN THE ROCKIES





## A STILL LIFE TELLS A GOOD STORY.

**ALTHOUGH LEONARDO DA VINCI IS**

often credited as the world's first painter of non-religious still-lives with his watercolor studies of fruit, most people think of the hyper-realistic "portraits" of everyday secular items that reached its apotheosis among Flemish and Dutch artists in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Artists such as Antwerp's Frans Snyders (1579–1657) and Amsterdam's Jan Weenix (1640–1719) are particularly noted for their complex gamepieces. Joachim Bueckelaer (1533–1575) and Snyders also painted fish markets, including indoor still lifes of fish on a tabletop. The explosion of interest in natural science and the patronage of an expanding Protestant mercantile middle class explain the popularity of this genre during its time and far beyond.

Joseph's more impressionistic still lifes harken to this glorious past. In *Dad's Waders*, he conveys warm nostalgia through his selection of classic objects that together translate the sportsman's tale into art. In *A Fine Catch*, he establishes different planes of vision—the worn, green metal tackle box is offset by the upright, eggplant-colored bottle and the diagonal lines of the fly rod and net; the fisherman's hat hanging on the crimson wall fixes the depth of field; the light bouncing off the white cloth onto the silver trout belly, the edge of the silver platter, and the tarnished reel, all together convey a day of good sport.

*"I always enjoy painting scenes that reflect our relationship with the natural world."*

How does one wring emotion from inanimate objects such as a dead fish or bird on a table?

"The stories of those objects are what excite me to paint, so which ones you select to include is important," says Joseph.

"First, I want something with a vintage feel to it—something that's been around and has character. Then I begin to look at the shapes and how they work together. You not only have to tell a story with these building blocks, they also have to visually complement one another."

Incorporating the "natural element" of a fish or bird into the scene, says Joseph, allows the two worlds of Man and Nature to meet. "I always enjoy painting scenes that reflect our relationship with the natural world."

### DAD'S WADERS

*This painting is a tribute to my father's passion for trout fishing. When I think of him and the joy he felt by the trout stream, I remember a quote by Tony Blake: "Some go to church and think about fishing, others go fishing and think about God."*







A FINE CATCH!

#### WINCHESTER QUAIL HUNT

*A great painting begins in the abstract. Shapes, forms, rhythms, and patterns of light and shadow must all work together before a single object or figure comes into focus.*





# GUNDOGS

*"I like to show the joy and  
affection in our loyal and  
loving companions."*

Joseph H. Sulkowski





#### BLACK LABS

*The Labrador retriever is America's most popular canine breed. He's a very loyal and loving companion, as well as an outstanding working dog. I wanted to show the joy and affection in the Lab's expression, which makes the breed so endearing. Although black is the most common color, yellow and chocolate Labs have become quite popular in recent years.*

REEF



READY TO GO  
*These English setters belonged to Danny Canale, a good friend who lives in Nashville. He's passionate about bird hunting and his dogs, who go everywhere with him on days afield.*



SETTERS IN THE  
 HIGHLAND MIST  
*I love the language of light and atmosphere along with fluid brushwork in bringing my passion for the sporting life into vivid focus for the viewer. Leonardo da Vinci said that "we artists are the gods' heirs," meaning that Nature holds the essence of creation that inspires us to make our art.*







A PAIR OF CHAMPIONS

ON POINT



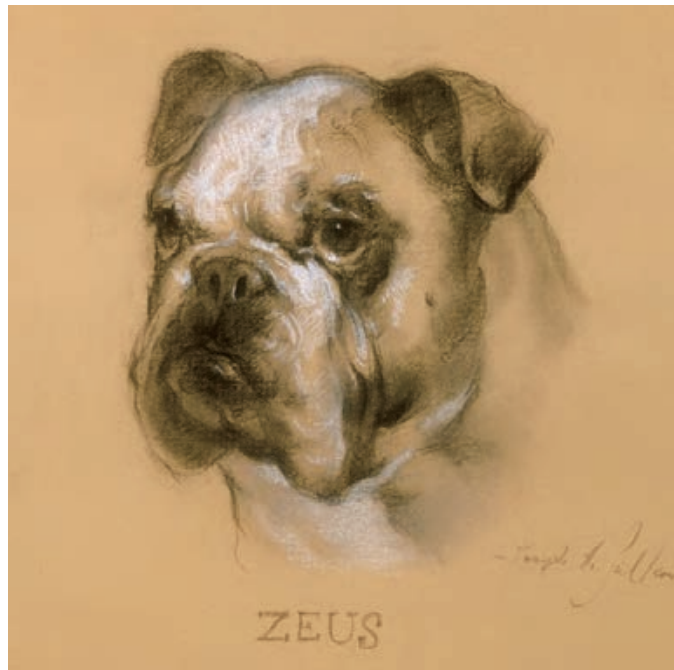


BASSETT HOUNDS ON A QUIET AFTERNOON

LILY AND SAMMY







ACE AND ZEUS

#### SHADOW BOXER

*I have always liked the look of boxers. The breed was developed in Germany, and over time the original bullenbaiser was crossed with other breeds, including the mastiff, bulldog, and possibly the great dane. I wanted to create a minimalist background for this portrait painted in a bold chiaroscuro technique.*







PROTEGÉS OF  
THE HUNT  
*Each spring I  
enjoy traveling to  
Cornersville,  
Tennessee, where I  
visit the kennels of  
Hillsboro Hounds to  
see the new puppies.  
Foxhounds live a full  
life that is both  
strenuous and hard-  
driving. They cover  
thousands of acres,  
many in full run, over  
their average lifespan  
of only seven years. For  
a short time the  
puppies are innocent  
and unblemished, full  
of promise to one day  
take their place in  
the pack.*

FOXHOUND PUP

