

## A Word About What Makes Good Wildlife Art from an SAA Juror

This statement is on the SAA join page of our website:

The following is a list of criteria that our jury considers when viewing an applicant's work:

- \* Is this an example of 'fine art'?
- \* Is the piece well-drawn? Or skilfully carved, sculpted, or assembled?
- \* Does the work have a creative and effective composition or abstract design?
- \* Does the artist display a mastery of the medium?
- \* If 2-D, is there a demonstrated mastery in the depiction of light? Use of color and value?
- \* If 3-D, is there a clear mastery of form? Control of surface texture? Patina? And is the piece effective from all angles?

The SAA likes to see artistic ability to place your subjects in a proper environment, rather than simply creating portraits. Most competent artists can create a good portrait from a photograph, but that doesn't provide us with the information as to whether that artist actually KNOWS that animal and understands both anatomy and behavioural characteristics, and the proper environment. These are important to our SAA mission of education regarding the species our members depict in their artwork. Is there something about the artwork that is special or unique and not just an average depiction of an animal? Please NOTE – our jurors see an overabundance of "portraits" so expect these to be judged more critically. If in doubt, please email our Executive Director prior to submitting as he is willing to give you an opinion beforehand.

In addition to these guidelines, I'd like to offer a few more important goals for good animal art.

1. **Correct anatomy** is probably the most important and most obvious quality in an entry. Our jury will notice immediately if the artist has failed to correctly depict the basic anatomy of the subject species; this lack of understanding contributes to the highest percentage of rejections. It is also one of the hardest skills for some, as it can require years of study.
2. **Consistency of lighting** within the painting; too many artists combine a photo of the animal in one type of light, and neglect to carry that over to the background.
3. **Composition:** try to avoid common mistakes, like placing the subject right in the middle of the piece or having background elements interfere with the subject. Try to tell a story, provide some movement, tension, a new idea, a dynamic element perhaps. And keep in mind, simple pet portraits will not impress the jury very much.
4. **Reference use:** too many artists send in obvious direct copies of photographs, often including every single element, like damaged feathers or flash photo highlights, or distortions from the camera. You MUST rise above your reference and make corrections. Don't be a slave to a photo; that's one reason why we are artists!
5. **Values** of lights and darks: a simple rule of thumb is, keep the lightest lights and darkest darks on your subject, making sure the background is paler, to create the impression of distance.
6. **For sculptors**, anatomy is truly king. You can be impressionistic, but the animal's form still has to ring true. It's harder to do a three-dimensional animal correctly, but you have that responsibility, to know that animal from every angle; bad anatomy is the number one problem with sculptors applying.
7. **Different Mediums:** Although it is tempting to show the jury your talents in multiple mediums, it would be best to only show one, and pick the best and most consistent examples of that style.